

# biblical theology



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### CURRENT ISSUE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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#### From the Editor

Meredith G. Kline's theology is sometimes controversial in our church. Whatever one may think of the framework view of the creation narrative and several other specific areas of concern, there are treasures of uniquely rich biblical exegesis as well as a reliable and accurate account of the covenantal structure of Scripture in his writings. So in his article "Calvin's Kline," Pastor David Inks demonstrates Kline's theological lineage in connection with the great Reformer.

In keeping with this theme, Pastor Wayne Forkner reviews Professor Greg Beale's important contribution to the discipline of biblical theology, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, which builds on the tradition of Geerhardus Vos. Because theology's aim is to benefit the church, especially in its preaching ministry, Professor Dennis Johnson writes the first part of a series review of Hughes Oliphant Old's magisterial *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, covering three of the seven volumes.

On a completely different subject is American historian Richard Gamble's review of a book that compares and contrasts two different evangelical perspectives on the relationship between faith and politics, *Left, Right & Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics*. Tangentially related to this theme is my review of Eric Mataxas's new biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in which he explores in detail the great theologian's navigation of the German nationalism of the Nazis.

My essay "The Value of Daydreaming" has nothing directly to do with the theme of biblical theology, but reflects on the diminishing environment of personal solitude and meditation. I believe that if church officers do not pay attention to this problem, then few in the next generation will read anything of substance, such as theology.

Don't miss the updated index on OPC.ORG. Thanks to the tireless efforts of John Muether the indexes have been updated through 2011. Also don't miss the extraordinary resource on OPC.ORG—all of the *Presbyterian Guardian* from 1935 to 1979 <<http://opc.org/guardian.html>>. A free, downloadable PDF version of *A Cumulative Index to the Presbyterian Guardian, 1935–1979* (offsite link), compiled by James T. Dennison, Jr., has been made available at the website of Northwest Theological Seminary (offsite link).

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-18.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-18.pdf)

- Kline, Meredith M. “Memorial Remarks at the Funeral of Meredith G. Kline” 16 (2007): 40–43.
- Reynolds, Gregory Edward. “Meredith George Kline: Artist-Exegete” 16 (2007): 6–9.
- Reynolds, Gregory Edward. “Changing Pace: The Need for Rest in a Frenetic World” 18 (2009): 14–17.

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*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high quality editorials, articles, and book reviews we endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Thoughts

## The Value of Daydreaming

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Gregory E. Reynolds

“There never used to be so much noise here on the island,” observed longtime Little Diamond Island resident Hal Hackett back in the nineties. “People seem to always be fixing something instead of relaxing and enjoying this place.” His lovely craftsman summer cottage looked down upon the harbor in Portland, Maine. He had invited us to stop for a glass of lemonade as we passed by on the path to our cottage. He reminisced about changing attitudes on the island since his childhood. The sense of community was strained; people were more concerned to define their property lines. Peace and quiet were becoming rare. The frenetic energies of modern life were intruding on this place which was designed for daydreaming. This was two decades ago, before the Internet was a household presence.

This year my family vacationed at a lake in Vermont. Each morning as I wandered into the kitchen to get my coffee, I observed my grown children each sitting at the dining table with their coffee, laptops, and their work—each connected to their offices. In the era of the soccer mom, I have frequently worried about children bearing the weight of heavy schedules. When do they get to daydream? Then, of course, there’s immersion in all those screens, beguiling them to think virtual reality is preferable to real life, and in some way displacing the imagination, which feeds our daydreams.

But I, as a pastor, have a problem, too. I’m finding that two out of three scheduled pastoral visits get cancelled and rescheduled. Sometimes this leads to an unexpected night off. But I feel compelled to work—yes, I know, there’s probably a twelve-step program out there somewhere for me. I can only imagine the tortured confessions of fellow workaholics, to which I do not intend to subject myself. That in itself helps me resist the temptation to inquire about such groups. Besides, it would just be another thing to schedule.

Some wit recently suggested that we will soon be abandoning our searches for “hot spots” in public spaces, in favor of “cool spots,”—places free of electronic intrusion—locations designed to concentrate the mind, like a positive version of Johnson’s famous appointment with the gallows. But best of all, even laying the book or journal aside, is daydreaming, which, by the way, can also be done at night. I find after hours the best for disconnecting.

Is it any wonder that the only piece of bad news in outgoing NEA chair Dana Gioia’s 2009 final report on reading, “Reading on the Rise,”<sup>1</sup> is that the reading of poetry has continued to decline. Even a favorite editorial writer recently lumped poets in with the

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<sup>1</sup> Dana Gioia, “Reading on the Rise,” <http://www.nea.gov/research/readingonrise.pdf>.



dilettante, second-generation, trust fund rich. Poetry is the literature *par excellence* of daydreamers. Walter Mitty's early twentieth-century daydreaming<sup>2</sup> was thought to be a disease we moderns should consider vaccinating out of existence. But, unlike polio, it is *not*, I would argue, a disease, but a cure for our modern dis-ease.

My concern is for fellow Christians and church officers who claim a single book to be the main course of their soul's nourishment. King David, a few years before the advent of electronic communication, was no less a very busy man. But he made it his business to step out of the fray frequently, perhaps a habit formed in his shepherding days, to daydream. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:1–2).

Some might aver that daydreaming is not the same as meditation. But I would counter by asserting that, while the two activities are not synonymous, daydreaming is an essential ingredient in true meditation. It is true that the dictionary definition of daydreaming is: "a series of pleasant thoughts that distract one's attention from the present."<sup>3</sup> But "meditation" in Psalm 1 is a kind of musing, and musing requires undistracted consideration of God's communication to us. Since these are ultimately life-giving pleasant thoughts, perhaps we can alter the definition of daydreaming something like this: "a series of pleasant thoughts, cultivated by removing oneself from distractions, in order to focus one's attention on our relationship with the Lord." Even the dictionary definition can be understood eschatologically by the Christian. And while not all meditation on God's Word is pleasant, for example its revealing our sin, it leads to ultimate pleasantness in communion with our God and our neighbor.

Of course, there is another dimension to daydreaming that I have not yet accounted for. That is serendipity. Again the dictionary is helpful:

the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way: a fortunate stroke of serendipity | a series of small serendipities. . . . coined by Horace Walpole, suggested by *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the title of a fairy tale in which the heroes "were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of."<sup>4</sup>

When the soil is good, a surprise flower will often appear, unplanted, blown in by the wind. Among thesaurus synonyms for serendipity are good fortune and providence. I believe that God created our minds for meditation with the serendipitous ability to connect ideas in a mysterious way that defies formulation. One example is found in our application of the Word we are meditating upon to our daily lives and relationships.

In the absence of times and places conducive to daydreaming, I fear the famine of good and great thoughts. We chase the muses away, amusing ourselves to death. Without such thoughts, ministers of the Word will necessarily be superficial, perfectly suited to feed the superficial minds our culture is cultivating. Without cultivating deep relationships with God, ourselves, and others, we succumb to the perpetual connectivity

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<sup>2</sup> James Thurber, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," *The New Yorker*, March 18, 1939, 19–20. This was made into a movie in 1947.

<sup>3</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

of modern life that immerses us in mediated social realities that snuff our mental solitude and spiritual development. A deficit in mind renewal exposes the Christian to the default position or world conformity (Rom. 12:1–2), the pressures of which are increasing apace.

And it should not escape the reader's notice that David wrote Psalm 1 and many other poems, called psalms. More than a third of the Bible is written in poetic form. So every minister, elder, and deacon loves poetry whether he appreciates it or not. Plato worried that writing would rob the mind of its furnishings, since the mnemonic orientation of oral tradition would be undermined. Print, hard drives, and the cloud only exacerbate this tendency. The Bible is structured to encourage remembering God's Word. In the oral culture in which it was written believers had no choice. We, on the other hand, must choose to furnish our minds with material upon which to meditate. Daydreaming without something worth dreaming about will only cultivate empty souls, "like the chaff that the wind drives away."

A well-lived life can only grow out of a well-cultivated interior. Emerson recognized this when he observed, "The saint and poet seek privacy to ends most public and universal."<sup>5</sup> David put it this way: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" (Ps. 1:3). So, unscheduled—daydreaming—time may represent the most important spaces on our calendars. The serendipity of solitude is imperative.

## Recommended Readings

William Deresiewicz, "The End of Solitude," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 30, 2009. Reprinted in Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2011), 307–17.

Alexander Pope, "Ode on Solitude."

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<sup>5</sup> William Deresiewicz, "The End of Solitude," in Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2011), 316.

# Servant Truth

## Calvin's Kline

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by David W. Inks

### Introduction

I was a Dillard dodger while attending Westminster Theological Seminary in the late 1970s. By the time I migrated to Westminster Seminary California in the fall of 1982 to complete my fourth and final year of seminary I had avoided the dreaded Old Testament Introduction (OTI) with Professor Raymond Dillard and thus, all the rest of the OT curriculum. Looking back on it, as I see it, my cowardly tactics were strangely rewarded. The year was laden with OT studies, and my only OT professors shared the same last name—Kline. That was a “glory-cloud” experience and a truly rewarding conclusion to my seminary trek. The covenant-kingdom map from the senior Kline (Meredith G.) is now a dog-eared fixture in my frontal lobe. Son Meredith M. Kline’s locating Ecclesiastes on that grid, with his own artistic brush, proved to be an “a-ha” moment prolonged into several weeks.

Having since had the privilege of leading several small reading groups through Calvin’s *Institutes*, I have come to realize that, despite Dr. Kline’s creativity, he was unoriginal in his understanding of the law-grace antithesis. It has become clear to me, contrary to the Barthian school, that Calvin operated out of that very antithesis which later became codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It has also become clear that Kline’s contention that the Mosaic covenant contained a works principle in its covenantal administration was not innovative but true to Calvin’s sentiments. This article will attempt to demonstrate that Calvin operated out of a law-grace antithesis and that he also preceded Kline in locating this antithesis in the Mosaic covenant. Consequently, it’s Calvin’s visage that is genuinely reflected in Kline; his paradigm preceded and shaped Kline’s formulations. So besides being chic, that’s why I have dubbed this little piece, “Calvin’s Kline.”

In the following, I wish to document for the interested reader a two-fold interconnected thesis mutually shared by both Calvin and Kline. The thesis is: that the Mosaic covenant suspended its sanctions upon works, not grace, and therein provided the platform for grasping the meaning and benefits of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection as proclaimed in the gospel.

### Meredith G. Kline

I tend to assume that my thesis is accepted as commonplace regarding Dr. Kline’s outlook and without contestation. But *ad fontes* we must go to alleviate any doubts in the



reader. Regarding the works principle in the Mosaic covenant, note the following quotations.

Also contradicting the contention that no divine covenants have ever been governed by the works principle is the irrefutable biblical evidence that the Mosaic economy, while an administration of grace on its fundamental level of concern with the eternal salvation of the individual, was at the same time on its temporary, typological kingdom level informed by the principle of works. Thus, for example, the apostle Paul in Romans 10:4ff and Galatians 3:10ff (cf. Rom 9:32) contrasts the old order of the law with the gospel order of grace and faith, identifying the old covenant as one of bondage, condemnation, and death (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 4:24–26). The old covenant was law, the opposite of grace-faith, and in the postlapsarian world that meant it would turn out to be an administration of condemnation as a consequence of sinful Israel's failure to maintain the necessary meritorious obedience.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Paul affirmed that the Mosaic Covenant did not annul the promise arrangement given earlier to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). The explanation for this is that the old covenant order was composed of two strata and the works principle enunciated in Leviticus 18:5 and elsewhere in the law, applied only to one of these, a secondary stratum.<sup>2</sup>

Leviticus 18:5, in stating that the man who performed the covenant stipulations would live in them, declared that individual Israelites must observe the requirements of the law to enjoy the blessings of the typological kingdom community.<sup>3</sup>

That these sanctions played out only in the temporal and earthly level confines them to the typological. As Kline says:

The works principle of the Law was rather the governing principle in the typological sphere of the national election and the possession of the first level kingdom in Canaan. It is this works principle that explains the otherwise inexplicable termination of the typological kingdom of Israel through judgment curse.<sup>4</sup>

Even individuals who were elect in terms of eternal salvation would be cut off from that temporal, typological realm as the penalty for various serious infractions of the law. . . . What we have found then is that once the typological kingdom was inaugurated under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel's retention of it was governed by a principle of works applied on a national scale.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (S. Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1993), 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Kingdom Prologue*, 197.

The old covenant's works principle begs for fulfillment, and in fulfillment, replacement by a covenant that announces that *the law's curse is removed and the righteousness acquiring life is realized*. Christ is that one who embraces both sanctions, cursing in his death and blessing/resurrection due to his righteousness. The new covenant is "new," partially, in how we achieve the blessing. It is by faith in Christ and his work not by our works. (Under the old covenant's typological administration, blessing was contingent upon obedience/works, though the *ordo salutis* strata was by faith.) As Kline argues, "God honors his original covenant of law in its abiding demand for obedience as the condition of life and with the curse of death for the covenant breakers."<sup>6</sup> That is why the coming of Christ and his work is indeed a new day. He will "offer himself up to the curse of the covenant."<sup>7</sup> And with regard to the blessing sanction he says, "Now if it is the obedience of the one that is the ground of the promise-guarantee given to the many, then clearly the principle of law is more fundamental than that of promise even in a promise covenant."<sup>8</sup>

I trust this sufficiently shows that my thesis accurately represents Kline's views. But does Calvin agree with Kline's paradigm? The Torrances, Federal Vision advocates, and others wish to insist that, for Calvin, the old covenant did not operate with a principle of works as contrary to grace in the new covenant. For them, it's all of grace in both old and new covenants, one preceding and the other following the cross. It's my contention that they wrongly read Calvin as supporting this absence of a works covenant before the coming of Christ. I would wish now to document that Kline is not Calvin's ventriloquist but rather his successor in this profound dynamic of discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

## Calvin's Institutes

When it comes to ferreting out Calvin's theology, the first and best place to go is the *Institutes*. He called them "a key to open a way for all children of God into a good and right understanding of Holy Scripture."<sup>9</sup> Though citations will be limited to the *Institutes* I believe it will, nonetheless, provide us with a clear grasp of Calvin's thought on the topic at hand.

### The Promises of the Law vs. The Promises of the Gospel

Calvin uses the word "promise" regarding the law. What does he mean? "We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised."<sup>10</sup> "Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse."<sup>11</sup> "I reply: even if the promises of the law, in so far as they are conditional, depend upon perfect obedience to the law—which can nowhere be found—they have not been given in vain . . . From it

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<sup>6</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeil, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7.3, 351.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7.3, 352.

all of us are condemned and accursed (Gal. 3:10). And it holds us far away from the blessedness that it promises to its keepers.”<sup>12</sup> “In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder for perfect righteousness, which all of us lack.”<sup>13</sup> We tend to be unaccustomed to hearing the word “promise” employed with regard to the law. In reality it is no different than using the word “covenant” insofar that a sanction is promised depending upon which condition is fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> Obey, and God promises life. Disobey, and God promises death. From this soil it should not surprise us that the covenants of works and grace sprouted in the next century, not in contradiction to Calvin, but in coherence with Calvin. Though rarely noted, Calvin does call this works arrangement a covenant of law.<sup>15</sup> Any attempt to draw out of Calvin a “grace in law, and law in grace” formula on the grounds of his using “promise” with regard to “law” should immediately be identified as a tendentious distortion. Calvin poses gospel promises *in contrast* to law promises. Yet, he is perfectly clear that “what is promised” is the same thing in both cases—eternal life!

From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it. . . . For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law?<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere he says, “The reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised”; and “he causes us to receive the benefit of the promises of the law as if we had fulfilled their condition.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the law precedes the gospel in holding out the same goal but through different means. And yet for Christ, the means are the same, obedience, so that we might attain eternal life through faith because Christ has fulfilled the terms initially set down by the law. This becomes even more obvious below. As for the contrast between law and gospel promises, notice the following citations.

Now, to be sure, the law itself has its own promises. Therefore, in the promises of the gospel there must be something distinct and different unless we would admit that the comparison is inept. But what sort of difference will this be, other than that the gospel promises are free and dependent solely upon God’s mercy, while the promises of the law depend upon the condition of works?<sup>18</sup>

“But the law is not of faith; rather, the man who does these things shall live in them (Gal. 3:11–12).”<sup>19</sup>

Calvin then comments on this Galatian text saying: “The law, he says, is different from faith. Why? Because works are required for law righteousness. Therefore it follows that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2.7.4, 352.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2.7.8, 357.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.14.6, 1280, “the Lord calls his promises ‘covenants.’”

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3.17.3, 805; 3.17.15, 820.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.17.5, 533.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.7.3, 351; 2.7.4, 352.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.11.17, 747.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.11.18, 747.



they are not required for faith righteousness”.<sup>20</sup> The law for Calvin, among other things, made promises of eternal life upon condition of works. And this covenant stood in antithetical relationship to the covenant of grace.<sup>21</sup>

## The Law is Fulfilled in Christ

How does Calvin understand that Christ has fulfilled the law? The answer is simple. The law set forth two sanctions, blessing/life and cursing/death. Christ achieved the first sanction through his righteousness, meriting eternal life.<sup>22</sup> Christ bore the second on the cross. Thus, the law is fulfilled through the work of Christ and our consequent deliverance from the curse and entrance into life is now offered through faith, not works. Since Christ has fulfilled the law there is logically nothing left for us to do but to receive it as a gift through the empty hand of faith. When we say that Christ fulfilled the law in this way we also are necessarily saying that the law as a covenant of works explains to us the meaning of the work of Christ. Apart from this we cannot understand what the work of Christ did. This is the tragedy of denying the law as a covenant of works. This is the tragedy of blindly insisting that for Calvin “grace came before law.” The following are a few of the many passages available to decipher Calvin’s view.

With regard to the Ten Commandments we ought likewise to heed Paul’s warning: “Christ is the end of the law unto salvation to every believer” (Rom. 10:4) . . . he means that righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration. For this reason, Paul justly calls Christ the fulfillment or end of the law.<sup>23</sup>

“Christ became a curse for us,” (Gal. 3:13). It was superfluous, even absurd, for Christ to be burdened with a curse, unless it was to acquire righteousness for others by paying what they owed.<sup>24</sup>

For this reason the apostle defines the redemption in Christ’s blood as “the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). If we are justified through the works of the law, then “Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it; or, what is the same thing, that we obtain through Christ’s grace what God promised in the law for our works: “He who will do these things, will live in them” (Lev. 18:5). This is no less clearly confirmed in the sermon delivered at Antioch, which asserts that by believing in Christ “we are justified from everything from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses”(Acts 13:39). For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.11.18, 747.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.17.15, 820 for the phrase “covenant of grace.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.17.3, 530–31. “By his obedience, however, Christ truly acquired and merited grace for us . . . then he acquired salvation for us by his righteousness, which is tantamount to deserving it.” Such statements should not be attributed to a residual medieval merit scheme but to a coherent law-gospel construct.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2.7.2, 351.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.17.4, 532.

himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law? What he afterward taught the Galatians has the same purpose: “God sent forth his son . . . subject to the law, to redeem those who were under the law”(Gal.4:4–5). What was the purpose of this subjection of Christ to the law but to acquire righteousness for us, undertaking to pay what we could not pay? Hence, that imputation of righteousness without works which Paul discusses (Rom. ch.4). For the righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours.<sup>25</sup>

## Typological Sanctions Conditioned Upon Works

Calvin saw the Old Testament sanctions (blessings and curses) in the land as typological of future spiritual realities.

He willed that, for the time during which he gave his covenant to the people of Israel in a veiled form, the grace of future and eternal happiness be signified and figured under earthly benefits, the gravity of spiritual death under physical punishments.<sup>26</sup>

And to urge us in every way, he promises both blessings in the present life and everlasting blessedness to those who obediently keep his commandments. He threatens the transgressors no less with present calamities than with the punishment of eternal death. For that promise “He who does these things shall live in them” (Lev.18:5) and its corresponding threat “The soul that sins shall itself die” (Ezek.18:4–20) without doubt have reference to either never-ending future immortality or death. Wherever God’s benevolence or wrath is mentioned, under the former is contained eternal life, under the latter eternal perdition.<sup>27</sup>

The typological sanctions, which also “contain” in them the eternal sanctions, Calvin sees as administered under the law by way of works not grace. Again, Calvin says, “We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised”.<sup>28</sup> Kline, as seen, emphasizes a works principle on the typological level of the Mosaic covenant’s administration. Calvin presses it further to the eternal. Both make a profound connection between Israel’s situation and the situation of fallen mankind. Israel’s story of law, fall, and judgment is a picture of us all. This story in both arenas is administered by a covenant of works. Calvin does not speak of a “typological covenant of works” *per se*. However, he clearly employs all the content of it and then freely moves from the temporal to the spiritual/eternal operations of the law as a covenant of works.

Why is it important to see this working in the Old Testament? It is important for two reasons. First, this brings our sins, our despair, and consequent condemnation into sharp focus. We have sinned against God as seen in the *standard* of the law as *given* to Israel. And we are cursed as seen in the *sanctions* of the law as *applied* to Israel. Second, this

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2.17.5, 533.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2.11.3, 453.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2.8.4, 370.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.7.3, 351.

provides the foundation for looking to a new covenant in redemptive history and for understanding the work of Christ and its application to us in the gospel. In understanding the nature of fulfillment we understand why the gospel is indeed “good news” in contrast to the law and its exposure of sin and administration of the curse. This antithetical point of discontinuity highlights the redemptive story line to consummate in magnifying God’s grace. Because of this, Israel’s history provides a protracted argument for the depth of human disobedience as despised by God’s wrath. The old covenant drama of the sanctions strained with prophetic anticipation of *a redemption* that would “hush the law’s loud thunder” and *a righteousness* that would inherit life. Those who feel compelled to resist Kline’s insistence of this works principle (and Calvin’s) reinterpret out of view the large planks of Old Testament legal roadway which lead us to Christ’s finished/telos work in his passive and active obedience. They turn a story line of judgment under the law to falling from grace, since they contend there is no covenant of works operative in Moses.

Christian preaching from the Old Testament story line becomes diverted from “fleeing to Christ our redeemer from the curse and righteousness unto life” to warnings about apostasy from grace which, unbeknownst to them, are about the law. Unwittingly, new covenant saints then are placed under the strains of the law and the pulpit defaults to “working on our sanctification” coupled with eccentric threats of cursing for disobedience. Using the same OT text in a proper Christocentric fashion will orbit us back to Christ and his finished work in fulfilling the covenant of works as grounds for the new covenant. Such will rivet us to Christ through refreshing faith in him rather than the smothering fray with the tar baby of personal progress under duress.

Contrary efforts to reduce this law-grace antithesis/contrast to a continuum or combination blur: first, the crucial point of discontinuity between the two administrations, then, what Christ has actually achieved for us in fulfilling the law, and consequently, the sight of and rest of faith by those seeking closure with God. A swinging continuum is not how Calvin conceived of the redemptive historical program regarding law and grace. By retaining the antithesis Calvin magnifies Christ work in dispatching the law as a covenant of works, and clarifies our response as one of faith not of law/works. If you muddle the law, you will muddle the gospel. That is the tragic truth, not only of the past, but of the present assortment of muddling models whether they come from Barth, Federal Vision, or even a Reformed journal.

## **Conclusion**

I trust that this handful of Kline and Calvin citations will satisfy the reader of their essential agreement on three points. First, the covenantal and antithetical relationship between law promises and grace promises. Second, the typological nature of the sanctions of the law as administered in a covenant of works environment. Third, that Christ culminates this redemptive historical story line in fulfilling the law’s demands, both in bearing the curse, and through his righteous obedience in bringing about eternal life. For generations the law bore down on Israel in conviction and condemnation, begging for its covenant of works structure to be fulfilled. This Christ did, fulfilling it both in its typology and in its eternal demands as it weighed down upon guilty sinners.



I have attempted to set before the reader that Kline is in line with Calvin regarding the works principle operative in the Mosaic economy. As a matter of fact, Calvin is even more multifaceted on the issue in stating that the law held out eternal death and eternal life in its sanctions. Kline, on the other hand is more reserved, confining himself to the typological when speaking of the law's sanctions. Kline, despite all his creativity, is unoriginal in seeing lines of discontinuity (antithesis), between the old covenant promises of the law and the new covenant promises of the gospel. His law-grace hermeneutic for redemptive history, the work of Christ, and gospel proclamation agree with Calvin. He images Calvin on this score even as Calvin images the Bible.

Those tempted to think that Kline is inimical to Reformed theology or at odds with the confession need to consider the gallery of Reformed men who stand with him and Calvin. Men like Thomas Boston<sup>29</sup> and Charles Hodge,<sup>30</sup> to name two worthies, also saw these parallel antithetical principles at work during the Mosaic economy. I doubt that they ever sensed any conflict with their ministerial vows. I am certain, contrary to some of our contemporaries, that Calvin would have embraced Kline as one of his successors. Kline stands downstream from Calvin in the same law-gospel hermeneutic.<sup>31</sup> Thus, he was one of his kin, of the same ilk. I realize that one man's sense is another man's nonsense. But as I see it, my esteemed teacher of the glory-cloud was "Calvin's Kline".

**David W. Inks** serves as pastor of Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Washington.

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Fisher with notes by Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Publishing House, no date), 56–58.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 375.

<sup>31</sup> Jeong Koo Jeon, *Calvin and the Federal Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). The first two chapters are replete with documentation/exposition in support of the interpretation of Calvin argued for here.

# ServantReading

## Biblical Theology

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by Wayne K. Forkner

*A New Testament Biblical Theology*, by G.K. Beale. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, xxiv + 1047, \$54.99.

*A New Testament Biblical Theology* (NTBT) is a product of much study and teaching on the New Testament by Dr. G. K. Beale. Begun in 1989, it is a wealth of biblical reflection. Within its pages are twenty-eight chapters distributed among ten parts. This review will attempt to provide an overview, highlighting its strengths and some weaknesses. All of these are offered to help the reader gain a better understanding of biblical theology and encourage informed discussion of important issues in our denomination.

### Structure and Overview

Chapter 1 discusses and defines New Testament (NT) biblical theology, especially as it is used in this book. The approach to biblical theology is in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos and Richard Gaffin, regarding the Bible's "storyline" as the unifying concept. The book holds that, in order to understand New Testament theology, we need to understand the canonical storyline from creation to consummation from which the major theological ideas flow.

The storyline is defined in the first six chapters, comprising Part 1. In chapters 1 and 2 the Old Testament (OT) storyline is defined:

The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his eschatological (all underlines in original text) new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory. (116)

A key to understanding this storyline is the study of the phrase "latter days" found in the Old Testament. Chapter 4 looks at the eschatological themes found in Jewish writings focusing on the phrase "latter days," and Chapter 5 discusses the New Testament's use of this eschatological theme of the "latter days." It is pointed out that the New Testament presents eschatology in a two-stage process. This two-stage process is commonly known as the already-not yet aspect of eschatology. Chapter 6 looks at the methodological

questions that pertain to proposing a central storyline for biblical theology. The section ends with the proposed New Testament storyline:

Jesus's life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfillment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God's glory. (182)

In addition to defining the storyline, Part 1 discloses ten eschatological expectations unfulfilled in the Old Testament that will later be addressed in the bulk of the book. These expectations are parsed for explanatory purposes, but are here presented in paragraph form:

(1) A final unsurpassed and incomparable period of tribulation for God's people by an end-time opponent who deceives and persecutes, in the face of which they will need wisdom not to compromise; afterward they are (2) delivered, (3) resurrected, and their kingdom reestablished; (4) at this future time, God will rule on earth (5) through a coming Davidic king who will defeat all opposition and reign in peace in a new creation over both (6) the nations and (7) restored Israel, (8) with whom God will make a new covenant, and (9) upon whom God will bestow the Spirit, and (10) among whom the temple will be rebuilt. (115)

The bulk of the book (Parts 2–9) shows how the above expectations commence in the coming of Jesus Christ and are consummated in his second coming, thus applying the already-not yet storyline to the eschatological expectation. In each of these parts, the themes are regarded in light of the relevant OT text, various Jewish writings (contemporary to the NT), and in the NT (usually in canonical order).

The concluding chapters look at new creational realities discussed in the book and show first how they relate to the OT saints and then discuss the continuity and discontinuity of the two-stage fulfillment. In the final chapter, the author presents the material's application—showing how these truths bring glory to God and how the new creation's transformative power should affect our Christian living and preaching.

## **Strengths**

This work argues persuasively for the already-not yet redemptive historical understanding of redemption and the establishment of the kingdom which Christ inaugurates. The strongest part of this book is the way it exegetically interacts between the New and Old Testaments, showing how all of Scripture speaks of Christ and his work. Beale shows himself to be a master exegete and theologian. It is in the vast application of biblical theology to the exegesis of New Testament texts that the reader will spend many enjoyable hours.

## **Weaknesses**



My primary criticism of this book is the Old Testament storyline as developed in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 begins by looking at the commission given to Adam. Positively, this chapter does a good job of showing that Adam needed to be obedient to receive escalated eschatological blessings, thus exegetically defending the covenant of works.

The Adamic commission as found in Gen. 1:28 is summarized as follows:

The commission of Gen. 1:26–28 involves the following elements, especially as summarized in 1:28: (1) “God Blessed them”; (2) “be fruitful and multiply”; (3) “fill the earth”; (4) “subdue” the “earth”; (5) “rule over . . . all the earth.” (30)

This commission included God’s specific command of Gen. 2:16–17 not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (33). Adam failed to obtain the eschatological blessings by being disobedient to this commission.

Now, in developing an Old Testament storyline, Adam is portrayed as a prototype, followed by other Adam-like figures, culminating in the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

As we will see below, after Adam’s failure to fulfill God’s mandate, God raised up other Adam-like figures to whom his kingly and priestly commission was passed on. We will find that some changes in the commission occurred as a result of sin entering into the world. Adam’s descendants, like him, however, fail. Failure would continue until there arose a “last Adam” who finally fulfilled the commission on behalf of humanity. (46)

This passing on of Adam’s commission to a number of Adam-like figures seems to flatten the biblical theological story of the Old Testament and blur the distinctives of the covenants. As stated in Rom. 5:14, there were just two Adams, the first and the last (eschatological). The first Adam is a type of Christ. The entrance of sin made it impossible for any of Adam’s descendants by ordinary generation to be given the Adamic commission. I would argue that the execution of the Adamic commission waited until the second, eschatological Adam arrived.

According to Beale, the basic covenantal structure of the OT is that, after Adam’s sin, God gave the promise of the redeemer who would come in judgment (Gen. 3:15). Then God gave the covenant of common grace to Noah. In the Abrahamic covenant we see explicitly the covenant of grace ratified (Gen. 15). Even in the Mosaic covenant where we see a republication of the covenant of works, (with explicit commands) it is given within and for the furtherance of the postlapsarian covenant of grace.

Not only does this explanation flatten the covenantal structure of the OT, it assumes a repetition of the Adamic commission that is not found in the text. Noah and his sons are blessed and told to be fruitful and multiply, the same command given in Gen. 1:22, “And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ ” There is, however, no command to rule or subdue. Further, there is no mention of any failure on Noah’s part to act on God’s commands. Instead, after Noah exits the ark, God maintains the common grace covenant.

Beale does see a change in the repetition of the Adamic commission to the following Adam figures. First there is an expansion of the commission. “After Adam’s sin, the commission would be expanded to include renewed humanity’s reign over unregenerate human forces arrayed against it” (53). This is nowhere evident in the patriarchal period. There is a sense in which Israel as a nation defeated its enemies, but this was not a worldwide reign as was to be Adam’s. Its reign was limited to the land of promise.

Within that reigning there was to be a witnessing aspect. “Abraham’s descendants were to be a renewed humanity. They were to bear God’s image and ‘fill the earth’ with children who also bore that image, being beacons of light to others living in spiritual darkness” (53). However, Abraham and his descendants were never told to “fill the earth,” weakening the view that the Adamic Commission was in any way passed on. There is one more difference Beale explains:

Another difference in the repetition of the Gen. 1 commission is that whereas 1:28 and Gen. 9:1, 6–7 are expressed only as commands, the restatements beginning with the patriarchs are now stated formally as a promise. Even in these reiterations, however, parts of the commission usually are retained and are explicitly reiterated in an inextricable way to the restated promise. That the aspect of the commission is retained is apparent from the imperatives introducing the commission in Gen. 12:1–3: “Go forth from your country. . . . You shall be a blessing.” Likewise, the Gen. 35:11–12 promise includes the statement with imperatives: “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply.” The implication is that humanity cannot carry out this commission on its own, but God will enable humanity in some way to perform it, which he promises to do. (54)

There are two problems with this. First, in the Genesis 12 passage, we have the promise of God to Abraham, not a commission. While it is true that God calls Abraham to leave his country and go to the land he will show him, this is not a command as those given in the covenant of works. Second, in order to show continuity to the Adamic commission, there are two underlined phrases in the above quote. However, the first “You shall be a blessing,” is not a statement made about Adam. Genesis 1 says that God blessed Adam but does not give the promise that Adam would be a blessing. The second, “be fruitful and multiply,” does have the sense of command similar to that of Genesis. However, this imperative given to Jacob follows the promise that God would multiply Jacob’s descendants (Gen. 28:13–14), and follows a multitude of similar promises to the patriarchs. The time of the patriarchs was replete with promises from God. As Meredith Kline writes:

But the title of the present work [Kingdom Prologue] assumes a later stance at the Abrahamic Covenant, and the kingdom as promised in that covenant was not established even in its preliminary, prototypal form until the mediatorial mission of Moses inaugurating the old covenant, as narrated in Exodus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline; Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 1.

To speak of the Adamic commission as being handed down to a number of Adam-like figures who fail does not do justice to the covenantal structure. Abraham is not presented as failing, for he was called not to do something Adam failed to do, but he was called to faith. In the Abrahamic covenant you have the promise of the “seed” who will bring in the blessings of the covenant (Gal 3:16), and it is he who will do what Adam failed to do.

Though some elements of ruling and subduing are evident in the Mosaic period, and there is republication of the covenant of works, Israel is not given the Adamic commission. The similarities between Adam commission and Israel’s commission are that they are both types of Christ (the eschatological Adam, the true Israel). Christ is the diamond from which all the OT types find their commonality.

Since both Adam and Israel are a types of Christ, and the bulk of this book unpacks the work of Christ typified in the Old Testament, the error of the Old Testament storyline does not adversely affect the bulk of this book.

## **Justification**

Chapter 15 examines the doctrine of justification: “This chapter will discuss the redemptive-historical story of salvation primarily through the lens of the ‘already and not yet’ notion of justification” (469). Here we see an interaction between what is known as the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*. What is the relationship between the two? How do we apply the already-not-yet concept of the history of salvation accomplished to the individual? Now it must be said that Beale holds to the biblical view of justification. Applying the “lens of the ‘already and not yet’” to justification, however, does not bring it into focus, but confuses it.

The chapter begins by giving the definition of justification found in Chapter 11 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and defends the imputation of Christ’s active obedience. Then it attempts to apply the already-not yet scheme to the doctrine. It correctly ties justification to the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and its forensic nature. There is an allusion to Christ’s resurrection as his “vindication.” “Jesus’s own resurrection was an end-time event that ‘vindicated’ or ‘justified’ him from the wrong verdict pronounced on him by the world’s courts” (493). 1Tim 3:16 is furnished as proof of this vindication. In this section it is also said that the unity of believers with Christ brings them the vindication of his resurrection. “All those who believe in Christ are identified with his resurrection that vindicated him to be completely righteous, and this identification vindicates and declares them to be completely righteous.” Here “vindicate” seems to be synonymous with “justify.” For Beale this vindication of believers in Christ is their inaugurated vindication.

The next section of the chapter goes on to speak of the not yet justification that happens at the final resurrection. Three aspects of this not yet justification all seem to be public demonstrations/announcement of their justification, just as Jesus’s resurrection was a public demonstration of his justification. This is not what we typically mean by our doctrine of justification. Justification is what God declares before his judgment seat.

Here is the confessional language as found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

33. What is justification?

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Here we see that justification is an "act" of God's free grace.

32. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them.

We partake of justification in this life.

38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

At the resurrection we are "openly acknowledge and acquitted in the day of judgment." Notice that what will happen at the resurrection is not justification. In discussing this question, G. I. Williamson writes: "But all who have been justified, adopted, and sanctified in Christ will be openly acknowledged and acquitted by him. That is, the Lord himself will declare that they are his, and that they are accepted in his sight, because they have found their righteousness in him alone."<sup>2</sup>

Final resurrection from the dead is a benefit given to all believers. It is their being "openly acknowledged and declared."

The confusion of this proposed not yet justification is also seen in the following paragraph:

On the other hand, there is a sense in which this vindication is not completed, especially in that the world does not recognize God's vindication of his people. Just as happened to Jesus, the ungodly world has judged the saints' faith and obedience to God to be in the wrong, which has been expressed through persecution of God's people. As was the case with Jesus, so with his followers: their final resurrection will vindicate the truth of their faith and confirm that their obedience was a necessary outgrowth of this faith. That is, although they have been declared righteous in God's sight when they believed, the world continued to declare them guilty. Their physical resurrection will be the undeniable proof of the validity of their faith which had already declared them righteous in their past life. (498)

First, notice that this paragraph says that this vindication is a vindication before the world. Justification is what happens before God's judgment seat, not the world. Second,

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<sup>2</sup> G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003), 79.

it says that the sense in which a believer's vindication is not yet complete is "especially in that the world does not recognize God's vindication of his people." Jesus's vindication is not yet complete in this sense as well. Yes, Jesus's resurrection is an undeniable proof of who he is and what he has accomplished, but the unbelieving world continues in their sinful denial. Jesus's resurrection is also the undeniable proof of the justification of believers. Third, notice that this paragraph speaks of believer's resurrection as being undeniable proof of "the validity of their faith."

The confusion of speaking of a not yet justification of believers is compounded by the theological discussion in the church today, which in some ways mirrors the discussion of our forefathers. As the church defends the doctrine of justification before proponents of the New Perspective, it should seek to be as clear as were the Reformed fathers in defending it before the Roman Catholics.

In closing I would like to say that the deep mining of so many biblical texts made the reading of this book a devotional refreshment, giving much to savor and examine. I look forward to continuing my study of this massive work, and recommend that it be read and re-read by any who wish a fuller understanding of God and his revealed will for his people.

**Wayne K. Forkner** *is pastor of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, California.*

# ServantReading

## The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church Series Review (Part One)

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by Dennis E. Johnson

*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Volume 1: *The Biblical Period*, 1998, 383 pages, \$37.00. Volume 2: *The Patristic Age*, 1998, 481 pages, \$45.00. Volume 3: *The Medieval Church*, 1999, 646 pages, \$55.00.

Hughes Oliphant Old's magisterial seven-volume series provides an illuminating, humbling, provocative, and sometimes surprising exercise in time-travel. It takes readers through almost three and a half millennia of the proclamation of God's Word in the worship of God's people. Our tour guide may well be the premier living historian of worship in the Reformed tradition. He pastored Presbyterian (USA) churches in Pennsylvania and Indiana, completed doctoral studies on the patristic roots of Reformed worship at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, and was a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, New Jersey. Recently he has been appointed as John H. Leith Professor of Reformed Theology and Worship and Dean of the Institute for Reformed Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary. He has published on prayer in worship, on baptism, and a widely-used introduction to the elements of worship.<sup>1</sup>

Both reading and reviewing *Reading and Preaching* pose daunting challenges. Excluding bibliographies and indices, the text of the seven volumes totals 4,125 pages. They are not best absorbed by quick skimming or speed reading. Trying to survey such a massive enterprise in a review of reasonable length is like introducing someone to the Pacific Ocean by offering a thimbleful of salt water—or, on the other hand, by pointing to the blue expanse between Asia and California on a satellite photo of the Earth. The editor of *Ordained Servant* has kindly let me write two reviews (volumes 1–3 now, volumes 4–7 to come). Still, my task is intimidating. I shall try to combine the two strategies just mentioned: to offer satellite-altitude observations about the features of the whole “ocean,” along with thimbleful tastes of the flavors to be found in *Reading and Preaching*. I assume that the pastors, elders, and other *Ordained Servant* readers approach book reviews with the question in mind, “Should I invest precious dollars and even more precious hours in this volume or set?” (If you were to pay full retail price—

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<sup>1</sup> *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* (Westminster John Knox, 1985; expanded and revised edition, 2002).



does anyone still pay this?—the set would set you back \$337. Having read only 34% so far, I cannot begin to estimate the investment in hours to absorb what this set has to offer.) I am persuaded, nonetheless, that the costs in funds and time are well worth the investment.

First, a few words about the perspectives of our guide, as they emerge from the first thousand pages or so. Although Dr. Old's ministry has been predominantly in mainline Presbyterian and ecumenical circles, his extensive and deep conversation with past generations of preachers has led him to conservative sensitivities and confessional convictions. It is not surprising, therefore, that recently he has been affiliated with Erskine Seminary, the theological school of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, a NAPARC member denomination. His biblical, Reformed convictions and sense of historical perspective come to expression in his discerning assessment and critique of contemporary church practice and priorities, whether in mainline, evangelical, charismatic, confessional, or other ecclesiastical traditions. Our guide repeatedly notes how the church in earlier times offers correctives to the deficiencies of today's churches. Concerning the preaching of Jan Hus (ca. 1372–1415), for example, Old writes:

His call for church reform foreshadowed the Protestant Reformation by a whole century. His demand for integrity in the Church has ecumenical implications. "Mainline" Protestantism here in America would do well to listen carefully to his warnings, for many of his criticisms apply as much to us. (3.468)<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere Dr. Old speaks from his identity as a Christian who treasures his heritage from the Calvinistic Reformers as he registers respectful but forthright critiques of those who have gone before (for example, Origen's and others' allegorism, or the gospel-devoid moralism of much medieval preaching). Walking with Dr. Old through thousands of years enables readers to experience the value of staying in respectful conversation with the past. As C. S. Lewis observed in his oft-cited preface to a translation of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation of the Word*, writers of other eras had their blind spots, as we today have ours. But their errors are not likely to be those to which we and our contemporaries are prone. Lewis advised that the "only palliative" to the self-reinforcing blindness of our own era is "to keep the clear sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books." Their authors "will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Old leads us into an engagement with the company of preachers who pioneered the way before us, approaching them with thoughtful humility that is simultaneously empathetic and appropriately critical.

In telling the story of the way that the church's pastors and theologians have handled the Word in worship, Old's perspective is catholic—that is, he is positively inclusive and universal in several respects. Obviously the series aims to be chronologically catholic. It spans roughly three and a half millennia from the ministry of Moses at the exodus to the first decade of the twenty-first century. The treatment is theologically and ecumenically

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<sup>2</sup> In this review citations from *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures* are identified simply by volume and page. Thus "3.468" is volume 3, page 468.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," in *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. and ed. A. R. Mosbray of the C. S. M. V. (1944; rev. ed. London: A. R. Mosbray, 1953), 5.

catholic, giving attention to preaching among the Orthodox communions, the Church of Rome, and the various Protestant traditions, both in their confessional expressions and in modernist departures from the church's historic faith revealed in God's Word and articulated in ancient creeds. As much as possible, Old's catholicity strives to be geographical and ethnic as well. Not surprisingly, available resources and the author's ecclesiastical setting converge to produce a certain focus on the western church, on Protestantism, and on the European and American scenes. This less-than-global focus is especially evident in volumes 5 (roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and 6 (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), though the former has chapters on Romanian and Russian Orthodoxy. Yet volume 7 (late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) reopens the lens to a wider angle, profiling preaching taking place today in the churches of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere.

The series title speaks of the *reading*, as well as the preaching, of the Scriptures in worship. Preaching has pride of place in Dr. Old's discussion, but his scope exceeds a history of homiletic practice or theory. In the present time, when the reading of significant and sizable portions of Scripture is in decline in much of the Western church, Old illustrates how our contemporary "lite" exposure to the Word in worship falls short of the liturgical priorities and practices of the church in earlier times and in other places. Old describes and evaluates various approaches that have been employed in the organization of preaching series and selection of biblical texts for individual sermons, ranging from catechetical (topical) sermons, to festal sermons linked to an ecclesiastical calendar, to sermons preached specifically for evangelistic and prophetic purposes, to the practice of expositing and applying texts successively through whole books of the Bible (*lectio continua*, "continuous reading," in contrast to *lectio selecta*, reading and preaching texts chosen for their relevance to specific doctrines or liturgical days or seasons). He finds evidence of *lectio continua* biblical exposition as far back as the practice of the pre-Christian Jewish synagogue, then in the ministries of such fathers as Origen (1.342–45) and John Chrysostom (1.173–89), in that of Bonaventure in the medieval period (3.363–64), and in the pulpit ministry of the major Protestant Reformers and their successors (4.19–27, 46–47, 92–121, etc.). *Lectio continua* was also an organizing principle that guided the composition of some of the lectionaries—annual or seasonal schedules of scriptural texts to be read in worship on particular dates—that have survived from the early centuries of the church's history. Fragments of patristic and medieval lectionaries evidence a thoughtful selection of passages from the Law, the Prophets, the Epistles, and Gospels that are correlated with each other thematically as well as aligned with the liturgical calendar of seasons and feasts, while others direct preachers toward a progressive exposition of biblical books. Dr. Old discusses fifth-century lectionaries used in Jerusalem (2.135–66) and by the Syriac-speaking church (2.277–95); lectionaries developed in Gaul from the fifth to seventh centuries (3.81–95), and lectionaries used in the great centers of Christianity, Byzantium (3.67–72) and Rome (3.143–84). Whichever rationale was followed to determine which Scriptures were to be read weekly (and sometimes daily) in worship, the point to be taken away from this aspect of Old's narrative is that reading and hearing Scripture—substantial portions of Scripture—are intrinsic to the corporate worship and spiritual vitality of the church. Dr. Old's survey of the Syriac lectionaries closes with an observation with implications for today's church: "One cannot help but be impressed by the fact that so much of the Bible is included. The

enthusiasm of the Syriac-speaking church for the public reading of Scripture is evident” (2.295). Likewise, regarding the Byzantine lectionary, our guide comments: “There is an obvious delight here in the reading of Scripture. That the same passage might be read a second or third time in the course of a week seems to bother no one” (3.72). In our planning of the church’s worship, are we providing to God’s people a rich and balanced diet of hearing the Word of God read aloud?

Dr. Old directs our attention to the church’s corporate *worship* as the context for the reading and preaching of Scripture. Elsewhere he presented the argument of Calvin and his heirs that the Scriptures, in which God reveals his will for his people, have supreme authority to direct our worship practices; and he traced the trajectory of biblically-warranted liturgical elements throughout church history.<sup>4</sup> In this series, the focus is on the announcement of God’s Word given in Scripture, through reading and exposition, as definitive of the sacred meeting of the Lord with his redeemed and worshipful people. Beginning with the Book of Exodus, Old comments: “According to the oldest traditions, the reading of Scripture goes back as far as the worshiping assembly of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. . . . Moses reads the book of the covenant before the assembly of the people as an act of solemn worship” (1.22, 24). This biblical perspective on preaching, sounded in the opening pages of Volume One, reappears throughout. Preaching is more than conveying truth, persuading others, and motivating them to repentance and obedience—though it must not be less than these. Both the preacher and his hearers must be aware that they stand in the presence of the living God, humbled by his holiness and searching omniscience but also heartened by his grace in Christ to anticipate his Spirit’s refreshing and renewing power at work in his Word preached.

The focus on preaching in the venue of the church’s worship, however, does not mean that preachers can merely presuppose their hearers’ acceptance of the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection. In view of recent debates in our circles over the legitimacy of preaching in worship that not only edifies saints but also calls unbelievers to repentance and faith in Christ, Old brings a horizon-expanding perspective by citing the practice of preachers who served in the midst of pagan (pre-Christendom) cultures, which have growing similarities to the post-Christendom environment that confronts the contemporary church. One of the few surviving sermons from the early second century is the so-called Second Epistle of Clement, which is actually a sermon preached to the church at Corinth, expounding a prophetic text (Isaiah 54:1), a Gospel text (Matt. 9:13), and other Scriptures (1.278). The sermon “is preached to a Christian congregation and yet it is also a witness to non-Christians.” Its evangelistic approach is not based on a theology of decisional regeneration or baptismal regeneration, but “on justification by faith, on the confidence that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” So the sermon calls all its hearers, whether professing faith or not, to repentance leading to salvation (1.283). In a similar vein, Old hears in John Chrysostom’s sermons on Genesis, preached two and a half centuries later when the Roman Empire was, nominally, friendlier to Christian faith, “a very definite evangelistic thrust.” John preached the typological connections between the patriarchs and Christ to equip his parishioners to offer persuasive arguments “in friendly exchange with the Jews,” in dependence on God’s Spirit to open blind eyes and convince hearts (2.179).

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<sup>4</sup> Old, *Worship*. See also Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

While commending the example of preachers who have prioritized evangelizing the unconverted along with building believers, Dr. Old is not unaware of the risks of trying to speak Christ's gospel in terms that are intelligible to the unpersuaded. He comments,

Origen made it possible for the Church to speak the language of that [third-century Alexandrian] culture. . . . He was the first in a long line of Christian preachers who would make a bridge between the Christian faith and the prevailing culture of the day. After Origen would come a Gregory the Great, a Bossuet, a Schleiermacher, an Adolf von Harnack, and a Harry Emerson Fosdick, each of whom in one way or another built a bridge between the Christian faith and a very different culture. (1.307)

Some names in this cavalcade of church-to-culture bridge-builders could well lead us to suspect that efforts to speak God's truth to the world as well as to the church too easily introduces distortions of that precious, saving truth. Old himself admits: "Each made certain compromises, some acceptable, some regrettable" (1.307). We may differ about where the line falls between "acceptable" and "regrettable" compromises. Yet, despite the risks, preachers must speak gospel truth clearly, without compromising its content. This duty is enjoined by such biblical precedents as Paul's speeches in Dispersion synagogues and the Areopagus (admittedly, not venues of Christian worship) and the way that his epistles—to *Christian congregations*—engage Greco-Roman philosophical concepts and cultural institutions, summoning readers to self-examination, repentance, and faith in Christ. Old reminds us that gospel preachers, ranging from the matchless Chrysostom to the lesser known Maximus of Turin, preached evangelistically in worship, "inviting non-Christians to receive catechetical instruction and baptism" in their sermons (2.342–4).

The mention of Chrysostom above invites comment on Old's evaluation of the interpretive handling of Scripture by the preachers whom he surveys in these first three volumes. Chrysostom, "the greatest preacher the Church ever produced" (2.170), was a master of the typological hermeneutic that the School of Antioch derived from Jesus's and the apostles' redemptive-historical, Christocentric understanding of the Old Testament. Our guide unabashedly affirms,

It was Jesus himself, as summed up in the story of the Emmaus road, who opened to his disciples the Scriptures (Luke 24:32). It was Jesus who established the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures, and it was from Jesus that the apostles learned this interpretation . . . presenting Christ as the fulfillment of the Scriptures. (1.251)

Old finds sound applications of the New Testament's typological interpretation of the Old Testament not only in Chrysostom, but also in Second Clement (1.284); in Melito of Sardis (1.285); and even in an Alexandrian preacher such as Hesychius of Jerusalem (2.131).

The biblical instinct to read the Old Testament Scriptures in relation to Christ also came to expression in allegorical excesses that Old cannot commend. Although capable of sober contextual exegesis, Origen also made strained connections between Old Testament texts and Christ through etymologies, numerology, and symbolism unrelated to Scripture's historical contexts (1.317–18). Origen's inventiveness occasions our

guide's insightful discussion of the similarities and differences between allegory and typology in the proclamation of the whole Bible's Christocentric message (1.333–41). Though briefer than other treatments of biblical typology (as contrasted to allegorism),<sup>5</sup> this discussion early in the series makes distinctions that are helpful to bear in mind as one travels through succeeding centuries of Christian preaching—as, for example, when he finds even in the great Augustine, at times, “the wildest excesses of allegorical interpretation” (2.359–60).

Related to the importance of a sound approach to proclaiming the Bible's Christ-centered focus is Old's concern that preachers must proclaim *the gospel*, the great redemptive achievements of the incarnate Christ in his death and resurrection. As the gospel spread across the ancient and medieval world, drawing people into God's light out of pagan darkness, generations of preachers faced the challenge of instilling holiness of life in newly converted congregants. Although Dr. Old empathizes with their pastoral concern, he cannot excuse sermons so heavily weighted toward moral duty that they were virtually devoid of the gospel of grace. Gregory of Nyssa's sermons on the Beatitudes, for example, so stressed human self-discipline that God's “mercy” to the merciful was reduced to a justly-earned, and thus graceless, reward (2.89–91). Likewise, toward the close of the medieval period, in the nominalist pietism of Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), Christ's passion became a summons to “enter into the sufferings of Christ, that one might thereby achieve salvation.” (3.510) Old concludes soberly, “This sermon is not a proclamation of what Christ has done to free us from our sin, but an exhortation to do the best we can to earn our own salvation. That might make quite a bit of sense to the secular humanist of our day” (3.511).

On the other hand, though Old finds the great Augustine's allegorical inventiveness unpersuasive, he also appreciates that the church father's “simple, straightforward” Easter sermons show that “the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ was central to the preaching of Augustine, and in preaching it, as we have seen, he preached faith” (2.381). Likewise, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas's preaching on the atonement (indebted to Anselm's soteriology) and on Christ's resurrection exposed the gravity of our spiritual need and displayed the centrality of Jesus's redemptive achievement (3.417–30). Preachers are most faithful to their calling (and, I would add, most effective in aiding true sanctification of affections, motives, and actions) when they imitate Paul's resolve to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), delivering to their hearers “as of first importance” the central truths “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

So much more should be said about these first three volumes of *Reading and Preaching*. I have not even mentioned Gregory Nazianzen, “the Christian Demosthenes” (2.61–82); or Ambrose, whose preaching was so formative for Augustine (2.300–25); or Augustine's invaluable homiletical handbook, *On Christian Teaching* (2.386–97); or the

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<sup>5</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching Christ from All the Scripture,” in Samuel T. Logan, Jr., ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1986), 163–191; Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 11–44; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 69–109, Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 94–108.

preaching of missionaries who brought the faith into Europe (3.73–141); or the homiletic distinctives of the medieval monastic orders, the Benedictines (3.185–252), the Cistercians (3.253–92), the Franciscans (3.341–86), and the Dominicans (3.387–440). I have bypassed questions and objections that I jotted here and there on page margins. (Yet, though I recognize the selectivity demanded of the author of so comprehensive an enterprise and the presumption of suggesting that anything significant has been omitted, nevertheless I will humbly register mild disappointment that the discussion of preaching in the New Testament itself [1.111–250] did not include the “word of exhortation” to the Hebrews [Heb. 13:22], the only sermon preached to a new covenant church to be found in the canon.)

At least, I hope that this sampling of Old’s awe-inspiring survey of almost three millennia of Word ministry, from Moses to the eve of the Reformation, helps readers glimpse the contours of this vast ocean and invites them to let the “clean sea breeze of the ages” refresh their approach to the high and holy calling of reading and preaching God’s Word in the assembly of his people.

**Dennis E. Johnson** *is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America serving as a professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, and associate pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Escondido, California.*



# ServantReading

## Faith in Politics

### A review article

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Richard M. Gamble

*Left, Right & Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics*, by Lisa Sharon Harper and D. C. Innes. Boise, ID: Russell Media, 2011, 263 pages, \$22.99.

Co-authors Lisa Sharon Harper and David C. Innes stand on opposite ends of American evangelicalism's political spectrum, but they find enough common ground to debate the implications of Christian faith for current public policy. Their apt subtitle is "evangelical faith in politics," a promise to the reader that this book will not weigh in on the long historic struggle between church and state but rather address the more general problem of Christian action in the public square. Read ironically, the subtitle can also raise the unintended doubt about just how much faith evangelicals attempt to put into politics. Regardless, the book offers a lively rhetorical joust between two modern evangelicals, one from the more Democratic, social-justice, welfare-state side of the family and one from the more Republican, libertarian, minimal-state branch. In pairs of short chapters ranging from health care to abortion to foreign policy, the two authors advocate competing visions for an applied Christianity. In doing so, they follow the trajectory that evangelicals have followed since long before the social gospel of a century ago and that they travel along to this day.

Despite real differences in theology and political ideology, Harper and Innes at the outset acknowledge their family resemblances. They are right to do so. We ought to take this starting point seriously because it provides the key to the book's ultimate significance and why Reformed pastors and elders might want to think twice about heeding the advice of either author. They begin their analysis from a set of shared assumptions that reflect evangelicalism's trademark mix of Christian faith and practical politics. Both authors identify themselves as "values voters." Both believe that the gospel has "implications for politics." Both emphasize Christianity's transformational, even revolutionary, divine mandate. In doing so, both adopt evangelicalism's longstanding habit of gliding effortlessly from the church (and Israel) to the modern nation-state, all the while downplaying or ignoring the role of the institutional church in the right ordering of faith and politics for the believer. And both interpret the American founding in a way that serves more to justify current policy proposals (whether liberal or libertarian) than to account for what was actually going on in the lives and thought of British colonists two and a half centuries ago.

Of critical concern for the readers of *Ordained Servant* ought to be the authors' tendency to generalize the Bible's specific instructions to Israel and the church into prescriptions for society at large. Harper and Innes routinely handle verses in isolation from the context of Israel and the church and outside the framework of redemptive history.

Harper's way of doing this will be familiar to anyone who has read her mentors Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Jim Wallis and knows their proclivity for invoking the ancient prophets to indict modern consumer society. She moves seamlessly, for instance, from Moses's commands in Leviticus regarding the alien to America's need for an open immigration policy, and from the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount to enacting "God's ways" in American law and achieving "shalom." But over on the right, Innes distills public policy from Scripture in much the same way, connecting his own set of verses to his own preferred policies. And because his self-described "conservative" agenda will likely appeal to many in Reformed churches, his handling of key New Testament passages calls for careful attention.

Innes returns often to Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–15. Both of these passages provide fundamental apostolic instruction to the persecuted church. Both passages command faithful believers to pay taxes and to submit to earthly rulers, even (or especially) "evil and unbelieving" ones, as Luther and Calvin emphasized in their commentaries. Christians obey those in authority for the sake of conscience and to silence those who would speak evil against the church. In the context of these directives, Paul and Peter mention as "givens" the tasks God has ordained for earthly government, among them, to punish evildoers and to reward the good. From these indirect and subordinate points about earthly magistrates, Innes extracts God's mandate for good government. But the question at stake in Romans 13 is not whether government is doing what God calls it to do (that's assumed), but rather whether Christians are glorifying God by humbly submitting to their rulers. Likewise, removing three verses from 1 Peter (in the midst of what is a profoundly non-transformational chapter) and turning them into political principles renders the larger teaching of the epistle invisible. Peter wrote to encourage an exiled people, scattered in Asia Minor, who suffered for the faith. The epistle as a whole urges those under political and spiritual oppression to endure their hardship. Peter's words cannot be construed as contributing any justification for a modern American version of minimal government, free-market economics, a strong national defense, and conservative social policy. To do so distorts and misdirects a precious reassurance given to a sojourning church.

Innes's handling of 1 Peter 2 also raises another recurring problem. He obscures the vital distinction between the church and the world by using the pronouns "us" and "we" and "our" in ways that are correct when applied to the body of Christ but absolutely erroneous when it comes to the American polity or any earthly power. A case in point is his political interpretation of verse 15. "After specifying what government is to do," he claims, "Peter states, 'This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.'" But then in the next sentence Innes turns this apostolic command into a civics lesson: "God's will is that you, the private citizen[,] whether on your own or with others, do good." Somehow the Christian has become the citizen and the command to the church has become a principle of public welfare. Further down on the same page (62), Innes takes the specific instruction of Paul to Timothy that the church pray for earthly rulers (so "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life") and turns it into merely good advice for the polity: "God's purpose for civil government is that it provide an umbrella of protection for person and property that frees people to go about their business undisturbed." At a stroke, the precise "we" of Scripture mysteriously becomes the "people" of libertarian public policy. Regrettably, Innes's political theology relies on this dubious method of exegesis from cover to cover.

Harper and Innes also display a troubling disregard for the institutional church, preferring to talk instead about “faith.” Faith is less precise and easier to apply than theology, and this may be the advantage in making an argument for Christian political engagement. To take one example, the early chapter in which the authors establish their “common ground” tells the story of creation, fall, and redemption without once mentioning Israel or the church (speaking only of the kingdom of God). This is an unfortunate omission because a proper political theology can emerge only from a proper ecclesiology. The church is central to the Christian life through the ministry of Word and sacrament. There is no way to sort out the right relationship between faith and politics without first acknowledging the church’s unique and exalted role in the history of redemption. And it shares that calling with no other institution. The church, not America, is God’s holy nation, chosen people, and treasured possession (1 Pet. 2). With this distinction firmly in hand, it would be impossible to misapply apostolic teaching outside the bounds of the church and to turn true kingdom ethics into social ethics. The Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism, moreover, describe the intimate relationship between the triune God and the church in words that could never apply to the nation-state. The visible church is “under God’s special care and government” and “protected and preserved in all ages” (LC 63). The church is “the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (WCF 25.1). It is “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God” (WCF 25.2). Only with the church in its fullness and glory fixed in our view can we hope to think rightly about how to enter into the political sphere with a due sense of proportion, modest expectations, and the transience of earthy accomplishments, and armed with the means to combat any confusion between God’s purposes for the church and the nation.

Politics is an important but temporary and ordinary thing. Like economics and war, and the arts and sciences, politics belongs to the common life that Christians share with Mormons, Muslims, Jews, and atheists. American Christians are at liberty to vote their values, run for public office, campaign for the party of their choice, subscribe to policy journals, serve in the military, and lobby for or against legislation. But they do so, if they choose to do so at all, as citizens of a particular nation at a particular moment in time and under historically conditioned circumstances and institutions. Paul and Peter offered first-century Christians scattered in the Roman Empire no advice on how to do this. The apostles did not address themselves to the government. They had no Word from God for it. By trying to stretch the Bible to apply to all of life, Harper and Innes end up inadvertently showing how little practical advice God’s Word really gives about politics, economics, and foreign policy. Instead, the Bible teaches pastors, elders, deacons, husbands, wives, children, masters, and servants their duties and privileges within God’s household. It calls an exilic, suffering people to conduct themselves in a way that honors Christ and his gospel. On that pilgrimage Christians might live under a government that accords them safety, the rule of law, prosperity, and freedom of worship, and maybe even the opportunity to participate in politics. But they may not be so blessed. And if not, their faith endures.

**Richard M. Gamble**, *an elder at Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is Anna Margaret Ross Alexander Professor of History and Political Science at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.*

# ServantReading

## Bonhoeffer: Whose Hero?

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* by Eric Mataxas. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010, xvi + 591 pages, \$29.99.

Considered from the perspective of pure reading enjoyment this book is a gem. From *Christianity Today* to *Publishers Weekly* and the *Wall Street Journal* the book gets the highest accolades. Written with page-turning agility, it should reign for some time as the definitive biography of this twentieth-century hero. But with liberals, like Alan Wolfe in *The New Republic* (review January 13, 2011), and evangelicals, like Collin Hansen, wanting to claim Bonhoeffer as their own, we should be cautious of how we assess such a hero.

Raised in a seriously sophisticated home and culture, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) had extraordinary advantages of both intellect and piety. His father, Karl, was the son of Stanislaus Kalkreuth, an accomplished painter. Karl was a brilliant, notable physician, becoming the chair of psychiatry and neurology in Berlin in 1912 (13). His mother, Paula, was born of nobility. Her mother, Countess Clara von Hase, took piano lessons from Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann (6). Both parents were highly disciplined, requiring intelligent conversation at the family table. But this strictness was well seasoned with lots of informal sports and regular trips to family cottages in the mountains. Karl had a great sense of humor and tempered his intolerance of narrow-mindedness, dishonesty, and clichés with fairness and kindness (15).

Dietrich and his twin sister, Sabine, were blessed with two governesses, Käthe and Maria van Horn, both schooled in the pietist theologian Count Zinzendorf's community at Herrnhut (11–12). Bonhoeffer's mother oversaw the religious training of her children, but they were not church goers, preferring home piety to the formalism of the state Lutheran church of Germany (12, 19). His father was not a Christian but never interfered with his wife's instruction of their children (14). Mataxas describes German Christianity in the early twentieth century:

The worlds of folklore and religion were so mingled in early twentieth century German culture that even families that didn't go to church were often deeply Christian. . . . German culture was inescapably Christian. This was the result of the legacy of Martin Luther, the Catholic monk who invented Protestantism. (19)

Mataxas never reflects on the possibility that the nominalism fostered by a state-sponsored church, albeit confessional, combined with home grown pietism, was not a formidable

enough opponent to withstand the intense nationalism of the Nazi juggernaut that forced it to compromise its confessional heritage and embrace National Socialism.

Mataxas does a splendid job of weaving Bonhoeffer's story into world, and especially European and American, history. The Bonhoeffers were reserved in their enthusiasm for World War I. Dietrich's two older brothers, Karl-Friederich and Walter, were called up as the war progressed in 1917 (25). Walter was killed in early 1918 (26). Years later after the loss of two more sons to Nazism, Karl remarked, "We are sad, but also proud" (26). Such a heroic attitude was a family trait. Dietrich was never far from personal loss and national tragedy. The Treaty of Versailles would help cultivate the soil of an intense German nationalism that would bring out the worst in some and best in others. The intellectual and artistic genius of a nation would be in ruins before the eyes of one of Germany's noblest sons. Mataxas begins chronicling the rise of Adolf Hitler as early as 1923 (44).

Rare indeed was the theologian, in Bonhoeffer's milieu, that would affirm Christian orthodoxy. Liberalism had been a staple of German academic theology since well back into the nineteenth century. At the age of fourteen in 1920 he announced to his family that he intended to be a theologian (37). At age fifteen he attended his first evangelistic meetings in Berlin, conducted by General Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army. In 1923 Bonhoeffer studied at Tübingen and then the following year at Berlin University (42).

At this point he began to ponder a lifelong question, What is the church? (53–57). During his first trip to Rome he found himself deeply impressed with Catholicism. He had been raised to eschew parochialism, and so the catholicity of the church would lead him to become part of the ecumenical movement. While some of his ecumenical ties would not impress us, the basic thrust of Bonhoeffer's catholic—with a small "c"—sensibilities helped him see the church as a divine institution that was never to be defined by any national identity (53). Bonhoeffer was also impressed by the classical antiquity of the Roman church (54). Historic continuity was vital to maintaining the church's witness in the midst of various cultures. Sadly, the Lutheran church of his day was so compromised that he could not find that continuity there and even wondered if the Reformation had been necessary (55). But Bonhoeffer had no intention of converting. The illegal seminaries that Bonhoeffer created "incorporated the best of both Protestant and Catholic traditions" (61).

As a student in Berlin, Bonhoeffer had much contact with Adolf von Harnack, who was a neighbor and family friend. But, while he esteemed him as a scholar, he did not agree at all with his theological liberalism (59). Among the theological heavy-weights of Berlin University at the time were Karl Holl, Reinhold Seeberg, and Adolf Deissman (60). But no one was to have such an influence on Bonhoeffer as the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth of Göttingen.

For refusing to swear allegiance to Hitler, Barth would be kicked out of Germany in 1934, and would become the principal author of the Barmen Declaration, in which the Confessing Church trumpeted its rejection of the Nazi's attempt to bring their philosophy into the German church. (61)

Bonhoeffer's professor John Baillie reckoned Bonhoeffer "the most convinced disciple of Dr. Barth that had appeared among us up to that time, and withal as stout an opponent of liberalism as had ever come my way." (106)

In 1931 Bonhoeffer first met Barth and visited him frequently thereafter (119–21).

During the 1930s, the Nazi party not only took political power, but began subtly to co-opt the Lutheran state church for its own severely nationalistic purposes. This is an intricate and cautionary tale at many levels. But it was Bonhoeffer's conception of the uniqueness of the church and its gospel message that enabled him to navigate the treacherous waters of Hitler's Germany. It was here that Barth's emphasis on the transcendence of God as "eternally other" helped Bonhoeffer (155), even though the dangers of Barth's theology are well-known—or ought to be—among us.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1927 Bonhoeffer successfully defended his doctoral dissertation in Berlin University. Shortly after this, in 1928, he took his first pastorate in the German congregation in Barcelona, Spain. He threw himself into the work, believing that communicating his theology in the congregation was "as important as the theology itself" (85). A year later in 1929 he returned to Berlin for post-doctoral studies (87).

At this point Mataxas briefly explores the question of Luther and the Jews (91–4). He shows how the Nazis used the worst of Luther's thoughts about the Jews, which occurred later in his life, to deceive the German people. Early in his ministry Luther had been quite charitable toward the Jews. Mataxas seems to lay much of Luther's later bitterness toward the Jews at the feet of his various illnesses.

In the summer of 1929 Bonhoeffer passed his second theological exam, qualifying him to be a university lecturer. Shortly after this, in 1930, he sailed for America to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City (96). He found the cosmopolitan culture to be vibrant in contrast with the fatigued German Weimar culture (99). The seminary, on the other hand, proved less than satisfying. He complained:

There is no theology here. . . . They talk a blue steak without the slightest substantive foundation and with no evidence of any criteria. The students—on the average twenty-five to thirty years old—are completely clueless with respect to what dogmatics is really about. They are unfamiliar with even the most basic questions. They become intoxicated with liberal and humanistic phrases, laugh at the fundamentalists, and yet basically are not even up to their level. (101)

In line with the family tradition, instilled by his father, Bonhoeffer had no patience with the cant of the liberal elite he encountered at Union and Riverside Church. His correspondence reveals a certain heartache over the theological shallowness of the students he studied with. In the churches he lamented the absence of the proclamation of the gospel and biblical preaching. "The sermon has been reduced to parenthetical church remarks about newspaper events" (106).

By contrast Bonhoeffer found the worship in the black churches of Harlem to be encouraging. Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church became a favorite. Mataxas notes, "Powell combined the fire of a revivalist preacher with great intellect and social vision" (108). It is curious, though, that despite the strength of Bonhoeffer's critique of American liberalism, he does not critique the intellectually

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1946); *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962).

powerful liberal theologians under which he was trained with the same kind of trenchant interaction offered by J. Gresham Machen in books like *Christianity and Liberalism*. It would seem that the liberalism of the German theological schools accounts for much of the weakness of the Lutheran church of Bonhoeffer's day. Perhaps he was too intellectually proud at this point in his life to see this.

It is curious that, while mentioning the fundamentalist controversy that Bonhoeffer encountered during his stay at Union in New York (101–3),<sup>2</sup> Mataxas never mentions professor J. Gresham Machen, who was not only prominent in the controversy, but followed a tack oddly similar, at least in broad outline, to Bonhoeffer's own course. Like Machen, Bonhoeffer took a brave stand against the corruption of the Lutheran church; he started his own seminaries (Zingst and Finkenvalde); and was instrumental in seeking to start a faithful church (The Confessing Church).

The year 1931 found Bonhoeffer back in Berlin. Shortly after his return he experienced a profound deepening of his seriousness as a Christian. "I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian" (123). He had prayed little, but now the Sermon on the Mount convinced him that a true servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church. He "became a regular churchgoer for the first time in his life and took Communion as often as possible."

After describing the dramatic change of attitude in Bonhoeffer during the early 1930s, Mataxas queries, "Had he been 'born again'?" (124). But, why do we American evangelicals wish to co-opt Bonhoeffer for our cause? Professor Carl Trueman raised this question in a recent blog, "Bonhoeffer and Anonymous Evangelicals."<sup>3</sup> As in the case of Wilberforce, many evangelicals are enthralled by Christian involvement in the cultural moment, as if such overt, especially public, political, acts are the most dependable signs of authenticity. Early on Mataxas states a theme that lies at the heart of his motivation to write a biography of Bonhoeffer. "Bonhoeffer was no mere academic. For him ideas and beliefs were nothing if they did not relate to the world of reality outside one's mind" (53). Significant people make a difference in the world. Fair enough, there is great value in what Mataxas presents. Mataxas insists, "Bonhoeffer's words reveal that he was never what we might today term a *culture warrior*, nor could he easily be labeled *conservative* or *liberal*" (95). But one still senses something of the cultural transformationist in Mataxas's interest in Bonhoeffer.

As Hitler came to power and began to infiltrate German culture with his diabolical, utopian agenda, Bonhoeffer began more and more to articulate the contrast between the Nazi claim that Hitler could save Germany and the Bible's claim that "salvation comes only from Jesus Christ" (128). The Third Reich began when Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. The Führer Principle posited independent and absolute authority in the "leader" of the German people. Bonhoeffer contrasted this with the old biblical idea of leadership in which the leader sought to serve others and knew the limits of his authority under God (138–45).

From this point on, Bonhoeffer's struggles with the Nazi's and the church are epic. His London pastorate and his brief return to Union in New York could not tempt him to

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<sup>2</sup> Mataxas makes a minor historical mistake when he identifies Fosdick as the pastor of New York's First Presbyterian Church (102). He was in fact a Baptist who was stated supply for that church in 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Trueman, "Bonhoeffer and Anonymous Evangelicals," *Reformation 21* (January 18, 2011), <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2011/01/bonhoeffer-and-anonymous-evang.php>.



abandon his country in its hour of need. Hitler proved a very sly adversary as he sought to win Christians to his vision for the nation. His propaganda was powerful in its determination to convince the churches of the compatibility of Christianity with the aims of the Third Reich (165–75). Secretly, in the beginning, Hitler and the Nazis despised Christianity as a religion of the weak, inhibiting the will to power of the Nietzschean superman (168). Many church leaders, known as the German Christians, were convinced and even willing to adopt the Aryan Paragraph, which would exclude all but the “pure race” from the church. Many more in the middle were afraid to oppose what they knew to be wrong. A minority had the foresight and courage to openly condemn the vicious anti-Semitic racism and tyranny of the Nazis. This would give rise to Bonhoeffer’s leadership in the formation of the Confessing Church in May 1934 (222). The famous Barmen Confession, mainly composed by Karl Barth, distinguished historical Lutheran theology from the corrupt theology of the Nazi-favoring German Christians (222–26).

The various intrigues and heroic deeds that followed, as Hitler eventually lead Germany into World War II, resulted in Bonhoeffer’s untimely execution, just two weeks before the war’s end. I will not recount this part of the story in the interest of space and my unwillingness to ruin the story for the reader. But several important lessons stand out.

Reared in the most rigorous academic milieu of family, culture, and university, and a man of stellar brilliance, Bonhoeffer nonetheless believed that preaching the Word was the most important activity of his life as a minister (he was ordained November 15, 1931 in Berlin). Teaching his students at the illegal seminary in Finkenvalde, he declared:

We must be able to speak about our faith so that hands will be stretched out toward us faster than we can fill them. . . . Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic. . . . Do not defend God’s Word, but testify to it. . . . Trust to the Word. It is a ship loaded to the very limits of its capacity. (272)

During a brief visit to New York in 1939 he went to Riverside Church to hear liberal Harry Emerson Fosdick. In his diary he wrote, “Quite unbearable.”

The whole thing was a respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration. This sort of idolatrous religion stirs up the flesh which is accustomed to being kept in check by the Word of God. (333)

Bonhoeffer would go on to be delighted by the fundamentalist preacher Dr. McComb, pastor of Broadway Presbyterian Church (334).

Equal to his enthusiasm for preaching, which had begun in the early 1930s, was an emphasis on prayer. His last book published in his lifetime was *The Prayerbook of the Bible* (1940), a scholarly exposition of the Psalms as prayers. He believed that we can pray only in Christ and we pray with him when we pray the Psalms (386). This took great courage as well, since the book was quite unpopular with the Nazis. No wonder. At every point the Psalms challenge all attempts to perfect humanity without the Lord and Christ the true king, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’ ” (Ps. 2:1–3).

Bonhoeffer was willing to lay down his life for his Jewish neighbors, even though they were not Christians. One does not need to be a transformationist to act in love on behalf of one's neighbor. His kindness won some of the most hardened prison guards to admire and even love him. Mataxas paints a rich portrait of Bonhoeffer as a man, covering his noble character, wide cultural interests, his strict self-discipline, and even his romantic life. His embrace of creation was based on his belief that Christ's incarnation was a renewal the created order (468–69), "God's humanism, redeemed in Christ." His engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer was never consummated due to his execution.

Wherever one comes out on the question of the justice of Bonhoeffer's involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler, one must admire his principled reasoning. He was, after all, involved with what many Reformers referred to as "lesser magistrates," albeit the majority were in high positions of the military. But Bonhoeffer did not come to decide on his involvement without great wrestling in thought and prayer. In the end he felt that the Bible did not speak directly to this issue, leaving him to exercise wisdom in dependence on the Lord.

Finally, Bonhoeffer's courage in the face of death was not natural but came rather from his regular spiritual discipline while he was in prison, especially, he said, in the reading of Psalms and Revelation, and in singing the hymns of Paul Gerhardt (463). As he faced certain death in the prison at Flossenbürg, he reflected:

Death is not wild and terrible if only we can be still and hold fast to God's Word. . . .  
Death is hell and night and cold, if it is not transformed by our faith. But that is just what is so marvelous, that we can transform death. (531)

The camp doctor described the last minutes of Bonhoeffer's life:

I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God. (532)

I am convinced that Bonhoeffer's sacrifice was motivated by his grasp of the message of the New Testament. His intelligence and bravery make him a true hero, but this does not mean we should try to make him something he wasn't—an evangelical. This is not to say he was not a Christian—just not an American evangelical. There is much we can learn from Bonhoeffer's writings and life. But this should not mean that we are uncritical about his Barthianism or other unique aspects of his theology. This said, I highly recommend this book as a classic piece of edifying entertainment. The scope and intrigue proffered by the subtitle "Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy," is delivered in full. It is like a great international spy thriller, only having a profound impact on the reader.

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

# Servant Poetry

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Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

## Ode on Solitude

Happy the man, whose wish and care  
A few paternal acres bound,  
Content to breathe his native air,  
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
Whose flocks supply him with attire,  
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcernedly find  
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,  
In health of body, peace of mind,  
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,  
Together mixed; sweet recreation;  
And innocence, which most does please,  
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown;  
Thus unlamented let me die;  
Steal from the world, and not a stone  
Tell where I lie.