



Reformation Heritage

Ordained Servant
October 2012

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: REFORMATION HERITAGE: SOUND DOCTRINE

October 2012

From the Editor

Every so often I like to give tribute to a special servant in the church. Each would be the first to give the glory to his Lord. But such portraits serve as examples for those of us who continue to serve in the church. John Galbraith has been a model of service for me and many in my generation. He is a man of considerable gifts who chose to use those gifts in a humble place. There are many in our church just like him in this respect, who could have gone on to greater places in this world, but have learned along the way the sage summation of poet George Herbert, featured in “Servant Poetry” this month, “Perhaps great places and thy praise do not so well agree.” I know you will enjoy Bill Shishko’s “A Tribute: The Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC.”

Mr. Galbraith is stalwart in believing that a well formed Christian life is rooted in sound doctrine, so we celebrate Reformation month with Professor Carl Trueman’s article on the importance of post-Reformation theology, otherwise known as Reformed Orthodoxy. He builds on the idea that, rather than diminishing Calvin’s theology (“Calvin against the Calvinists”), post-Reformation theologians elaborated the riches of it. Here is why this renewed appreciation for Reformed Orthodoxy, spearheaded by Richard Muller, is important for ministers of the gospel, elders, deacons, and the whole church: “The Revised Historiography of Reformed Orthodoxy: A Few Practical Implications.”

In keeping with the theme of our heritage of sound doctrine, Professor John Fesko reviews two recent books on a much discussed Reformation doctrine “Union with Christ.” He reviews Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* and J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*.

While it may appear that my review article on evangelicals and the new media has nothing to do with sound doctrine, I hope you will discover the old adage that some things are not as they appear. Medium and message, form and substance, are inextricably connected. Calvin understood this in terms of reforming doctrine and worship. The forms of things matter. They communicate content of which they are inseparably a part.

Eutychus II, contrary to rumors, has not fallen out of the upper window to his death. With renewed energy he fulminates against “Performance Sports.”

If you are not content with your humble place serving God in this world, a good dose of George Herbert’s “Submission” is a potent and pleasant cure. He was in a high place in Cambridge University as university orator; and in the king’s court, with hopes of

appointment to secretary of state. Those hopes were dashed with King James's death. The Lord called him to the ministry, where he served until his untimely death the humble country parish of Fugglestone St Peter, in Bemerton Church near Salisbury, England. He used his wit well as a poet, reminding us of Alexander Pope's observation, "True wit is nature to advantage dressed, what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." But unlike much of the wit of his age, he used it for the glory of God and the edification of the church. "Submission" is one of the most powerfully beautiful sacred poems in the English language.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

CONTENTS

ServantTribute

- William Shishko, "A Tribute: The Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC"

ServantHistory

- Carl Trueman, "The Revised Historiography of Reformed Orthodoxy: A Few Practical Implications"

ServantReading

- John Fesko, Review article "Union with Christ," Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* and J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*
- Gregory Reynolds, Review article, "Keeping Up with the Times: Evangelicals and the New Media, Part 1"

ServantHumor

- Eutychus II, "Performance Sports"

ServantPoetry

- George Herbert, "Submission"

FROM THE ARCHIVES “DOCTRINE, UNION WITH CHRIST”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-20.pdf

- “Roadblocks Limiting Church Effectiveness – Part 1.” (J. G. Vos) 9:3 (Jul. 2000): 55–61.
- “Calvin’s Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the Institutes.” (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.) 18 (2009): 68–77.
- “A Response to John Fesko’s Review.” (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.) 18 (2009): 104–13.
- “A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article.” (John V. Fesko) 18 (2009): 98–104.
- “The Wired Church.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 16 (2007): 26–34.
- “Princess Adelaide and Presbyterianism: The Death of Context and the Life of the Church.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 15 (2006): 16–18.

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 Tribute

A Tribute: The Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC

William Shishko

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
they shall be fresh and flourishing,
to declare that the Lord is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.
(Psalm 92:13–15, NKJV)

God willing, on March 10, 2013, the Rev. John Galbraith will celebrate his one hundredth birthday. How fitting that this will be a Sunday. On this day in which the church gathers to worship God and celebrate Christ's conquest of death, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's oldest living minister will once again enter into the activity he loves the best: The praise of the Lord who is building his church!

Of all of my prized associations with men and women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, none is prized more than my association with John Galbraith. To me and to so many others, he is Mr. OPC. I am honored to have been asked to write this tribute to Mr. Galbraith—minister, husband, father (and grandfather and great grandfather!), church statesman, man of God, and (as he would point out first) sinner saved by grace.

While John Galbraith is a product of America, his covenant lineage is Presbyterian. His four grandparents and both of his parents were of solid Irish Presbyterian stock. Both his father's and his mother's parents settled in Philadelphia, a Presbyterian center, when they moved to the USA from Ireland. His parents-to-be met at Oak Lane United Presbyterian Church, a congregation that gathered a little south of Jenkintown. The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms were important in that congregation (portions of the Larger Catechism as well as the Shorter Catechism were memorized as part of that church's life).

Following their marriage, John's parents settled in suburban Philadelphia, where they attended the United Presbyterian Church in Wyncote. John was born in 1913. During his youth he learned of the controversy at Princeton Seminary in nearby New Jersey. The name of J. Gresham Machen was familiar to him in his teenage years. The reorganization of Princeton Seminary and the subsequent founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929 occurred during John's junior year of high school.

After his graduation in 1930, John attended a United Presbyterian school, Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio. (At that time, John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth, was a nine-year-old boy in New Concord. He, too, would later attend and graduate from Muskingum College.) While his plan was to be a

lawyer, that aspiration would be changed very quickly. During a spiritual emphasis week in his freshman year at the college, John sensed a call to the Christian ministry. Majoring in English, minoring in Bible, and switching from advanced classes in Latin to advanced classes in Greek, John pursued his studies avidly through his graduation in 1934. During that time he was a member of a college club out of which many pursued the Christian ministry. He also faithfully attended a local United Presbyterian Church.

Given his family's interest in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and his familiarity with J. Gresham Machen, it was inevitable that John Galbraith would attend Westminster Theological Seminary. In the sixth year of the seminary's life, 1934, John entered Westminster. He was not disappointed with his choice, or with the experience of those years. For John the school's greatest strength was its faculty. Cornelius Van Til (whose outspoken zeal and passion particularly influenced John), R. B. Kuiper (whose preaching skills left a lasting influence), and J. Gresham Machen himself were among his professors. While Robert Dick Wilson had died the year before John entered seminary, he was still privileged to have learned from Oswald T. Allis, Ned Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, Allan MacRae, and the newest faculty member, John Murray, who joined the faculty the same year in which John entered Westminster as a student.

John remembers the controversies that swirled around the seminary in his final year, 1936–37. Premillennialism (the eschatological view held by Professor MacRae), the desire for conservative Presbyterians to be more generally evangelical in their expressions of faith (a view also espoused by Professor MacRae), and the toleration of dispensationalism (a view held by none of the professors at Westminster) were all hot topics of discussion in that turbulent period. Throughout the first three of his four seminary years, John attended Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia—a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. But that would change in June 1936.

On the afternoon of June 11, 1936, seminarian John Galbraith gathered with 139 other deeply concerned Presbyterians in the auditorium of the New Century Club, at 124 South Twelfth Street, Philadelphia. Not only did he witness the beginning of what would become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but he was also among those who stood up, indicating his desire to be part of that faithful “true spiritual succession” of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. (His name, together with two other Galbraiths, is listed among the “laity” on page five of the minutes of the First General Assembly of what was then called the Presbyterian Church of America. John is fond of saying that there were more Galbraiths at that founding assembly than any other family group!) He promptly took up membership in Calvary PCA, Germantown, Pennsylvania—what is now Calvary OPC, Glenside.

On May 25, 1937, following his graduation from Westminster Seminary, John was ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. His first call was to the Gethsemane congregation, a body in southwest Philadelphia that had left the Presbyterian Church in the USA to become part of the then Presbyterian Church of America. He served there until 1940, when he was called to Grace OPC in Westfield, New Jersey, a church founded by Donald Graham, a Westminster classmate of John's who had been ordained three days after him in the Presbytery of New Jersey. Two years later he would be called to the OPC

in Kirkwood, Pennsylvania, where he served as pastor until 1948. It was in that period that John would become more fully acquainted with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a whole. In 1940 and 1941 he served as stated clerk of the general assembly of the OPC. From 1941 through 1948 he served on the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) of the OPC. From 1944 to 1945 he served on the Committee to Draw Up Standing Rules for the OPC. God was preparing John Galbraith for a long lifetime of service to the church body of which he was a part from the day of its birth.

In October 1948, John Galbraith was called to serve as general secretary of both the OPC Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension and the OPC Committee on Foreign Missions. He would serve as general secretary of both committees until 1961. In that year he became the first full-time general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions. He would serve in that role through 1978. During those thirty years, he was also an active participant on several of the committees that would help form the distinctive character of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church: the Committee on Secret Societies (1946–50); the Committee on Union with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (1946–49); the Committee on Revisions to the Form of Government (1948–77); and the Committee on Christian Education (1957–96), for which he also served as chairman from 1955–56.

In what could be considered a metaphor for the demanding years of service John Galbraith rendered so selflessly for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, one of his first challenging duties was to visit the family of young OPC missionary Florence Handyside, following her sudden death after a very brief period of service in Korea. John drove to Rochester, New York, in a raging snowstorm, in order to minister comfort to the grieving family. Though he was now in an administrative position, he did not lose the pastor's heart that still marks his ministerial life.

At the top of John's recollections of those middle years of the life of the now seventy-six-year-old Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the "commitment to the OPC cause" that marked all of the standing committees of the OPC. "We all agreed on what we would present (to the church), and we would present it!" It was John's idea to have an annual Thank Offering for the work of the Committees on Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and Christian Education. The OPC was hardly a wealthy church. The Thank Offering to this day is a vehicle by which those committed to the work of the OPC can express their thanks for that work and give to see it continued and expanded.

According to John Galbraith, challenges on the arena of the nations during the middle part of the twentieth century brought challenges, as well, to the OPC. It was during the General Assembly of 1949 that he was on the phone with foreign missionaries Egbert Andrews and Richard Gaffin as Communists led by Mao Tse-tung began their march to conquer China. The decision was made to relocate our missionary labors to the island of Taiwan. Likewise, though missionary Clarence Duff desired to return to Ethiopia toward the end of World War II, at the invitation and urging of the British government the OPC began its labors in Eritrea. As general secretary of both foreign and home missions, John Galbraith learned many times that "the mind of a man proposes, but the Lord disposes" all things.

A highlight of any Orthodox Presbyterian minister's life is to be granted the honor of serving as moderator of the general assembly—a position that, by OPC tradition, is accorded to a man only once. That honor was accorded to John Galbraith at the

Fourteenth General Assembly, which met at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin in May 1947. John Galbraith, Floyd Hamilton (who had served as the first-full time general secretary of Christian education since 1943), and Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary were all nominated to be moderator of the assembly. Professor Murray asked that his name be withdrawn. In what would be a harbinger of things to come in that turbulent assembly, John Galbraith was elected over Hamilton—a man viewed by many of the commissioners as desiring an unwelcome “broad church” character for the OPC.

It was during that assembly (after which many of those who favored a broad evangelical course for the OPC left the church), that John Galbraith made his mark as the ecclesiastical statesman he would become. A heated floor debate had ensued between Minister Clifford Smith and Dr. R. B. Kuiper, who was and continues to be revered by John Galbraith. That deep personal respect (and, no doubt, the sympathies he had with Kuiper’s position) did not prevent moderator Galbraith from gaveling down the heated debaters. As moderator, he did his duty and told them both to apologize for their conduct on the floor. They did. And John Galbraith established his reputation as a man governed by principle rather than by personality—something that has made an inestimable impact on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With his “retirement” as general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions in 1978 it was as if then sixty-five-year-old John Galbraith began a new chapter in his life as an Orthodox Presbyterian minister. While he no longer had the challenging responsibilities of general secretary, the general assembly of the OPC would not let his experience, gifts, and wisdom lie fallow. Among other duties, he would serve on the OPC Committee on Pensions (a committee position to which he was elected beginning in 1964) until 1996 (a remarkable tenure of thirty-two years!), the Committee on OPC Involvement in the Center for Urban Theological Training from 1980–81, the Committee on Methods of Worldwide Outreach from 1982–84, and the Committee on Ministerial Training from 1990–2005. He had previously served on that committee from 1969–75, and also, in 1966, on a Special Committee to Study the Oversight of Ministerial Candidates. To this day the training of men for ministry in the OPC remains one of his great concerns and interests.

John Galbraith’s decades of experience with international matters in the sphere of foreign missions would also be put to ample use in his years of service to various aspects of the OPC’s ecumenical labors. From 1971–2002 he served on the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (for which he served as chairman from 1980–1984); and from 1964 through 1996 (again, another amazing tenure of over thirty years!) he served as the OPC’s missions correspondent to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), and he also served as a delegate to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the years 1963, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984. He was given the honor of serving as second clerk to the RES from 1968–72, first clerk from 1972–76, and moderator of the RES from 1976–80, 1980–84, and 1984–88. During this time he served on the OPC’s Committee on RES Matters (1973–88), a committee he chaired from 1973–74, and 1980–88.

Ecumenicity on the national level also occupied his attention as he served on the Committee to Confer with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) from 1967–73, and as chairman of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) from 1976–77 and 1984–85. From Mr. Galbraith dozens of Reformed and Presbyterian church bodies from around the world learned of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It was fitting

that John Galbraith authored the article “The Ecumenical Vision of the OPC” for the semi-centennial volume of essays in honor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *Pressing Toward the Mark*, published in 1986.

All of this emphasis on John Galbraith’s remarkable years of service to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church should not eclipse his life as a faithful husband and father. He was married to Ada Mae Kievitt on October 17, 1941, when he was serving as the young pastor of Grace OPC, Westfield, New Jersey. He and Ada would be blessed with fifty-two years of marriage and two daughters, Priscilla and Suzanne. His engagement and married life were windows on the Christian (and very Presbyterian!) character of John Galbraith. The car and the wedding rings had to be paid for before their marriage!

Any hard working married minister battles with fulfilling the many-faceted duties of his particular ministerial call, while, at the same time, fulfilling his role as a husband and (when there are children) a father. Given his duties as general secretary of both the OPC Committees on Home Missions and Foreign Missions, John Galbraith was often away from home. Ada, ever the helper suitable to her husband’s needs, not only fulfilled home responsibilities while John was away, but also assisted with office duties connected with her husband’s work. Later she would manage her own real estate business—which enabled her to find many homes for Westminster Seminary students. (When he was home, John would often help Ada by putting “For Sale” signs on the properties for which she was responsible!)

Living in Ardsley, Pennsylvania, some two to three miles from both Calvary OPC in Glenside and nearby Westminster Seminary, afforded John and Ada the opportunity to get to know the students at what was, at that time, *the* seminary from which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church got its ministers. Once a semester John and Ada would open their home on Friday and Saturday nights so that all the Westminster seminarians could come to their home for a “Hoagie Night.” John wanted to get to know each of the students, no doubt with a view of scouting out prospective pastors, home missionaries, or foreign missionaries. John and Ada and their daughters were quite surprised on one of these evenings when one of the seminarians ate two huge hoagies. That student was a young man named Harvie Conn. Harvie would later become an OPC missionary to Korea, and, following that, a professor at Westminster Seminary. Combined with this, traveling missionaries would regularly find lodging at the Galbraith home—a model of Christian hospitality.

John Galbraith’s busy life would never be so harried that it prevented him (and his family) from enjoying the lawful pleasures of this life. Ever a baseball fan (the Philadelphia Phillies, of course), he would hurry home to watch baseball games when he was able. When he would take the girls to the games, he made them promise that they would watch the game and also fill in their scorecards—with the correct scorecard shorthand! And, for a month of summer vacation, Owl’s Head, Maine, became the family get-away. There John and his family enjoyed the relaxation and change of pace that is so necessary for those engaged in demanding Christian service. No doubt the commitment to get a break from the labors of the ministry contributed much to John’s longevity in the work.

As a committed family man, John fulfilled the vows he had taken both to his wife in marriage, and at the time of the baptism of his children. A born teacher, from his children’s earliest years he taught them the things of God. Marian Schoolland’s *Big Book*

of Bible Stories among other books were staples of the Galbraith family's Christian nurture. Thankfulness for the blessings of God marked their home. To this day, John is eminently a man full of appreciation for everything that his Father in heaven gives to him. He also beautifully demonstrated the heart of a servant—the primary mark of a minister. On the Saturday nights he was not away, he would get down on his hands and knees to wash the kitchen floor—giving Ada a break while she did other chores necessary to prepare the home for the upcoming Lord's Day.

John's beloved help-meet departed this life on July 5, 1994. It was painful not to see John walking hand-in-hand with Ada, especially during general assemblies—which they often attended together in Ada's later years. One of the most moving personal moments at an OPC general assembly was when John gave thanks for both his wife of fifty-two years, and for the gift of God that she was to him. Tearfully, he also thanked God for the divine comfort granted him following her death, and for how the much felt absence of his wife nevertheless was working to his sanctification by a specially felt sense of the presence of the Lord with him. John Galbraith, the church statesman, was, and remains to this day, a man who upholds the grace, goodness, love, and faithfulness of our covenant God.

In these latter years of John Galbraith's life, he continues to reside at Rydal Park, in Rydal, Pennsylvania—just a few miles north of 7401 Old York Road, the location of the OPC administrative offices in which John's presence was felt for so many years, and just a few miles south of the current OPC administrative offices. He remains very much interested in everything transpiring in the life of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—and his disciplined, organized mind has lost little of its ability to recall the facts, personalities, and events that have formed the character of the church which he so much loves.

When asked the highlights of his three-quarters of a century as an Orthodox Presbyterian minister, John responded by saying, "They began when I became one!" He has no regrets about that decision. He was glad that he wrote the booklet *Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?* which first appeared in 1940. It was his way of giving a "message for the world" regarding "what we were about." "The course of the OPC was set in the second and third general assemblies," John notes. "Our commitments to the Bible and to Christian liberty" are and remain the hallmarks of the OPC.

And what message does John Galbraith want to communicate to the OPC as he approaches his one hundredth birthday? Ever the preacher, he has three points:

The first is the importance of worship. John notes that the command to honor the Sabbath day (and it *is* a command!) is a critical transition from the first three "Godward" commandments, and the last six "man-ward" commandments. He is deeply concerned about the growing laxity in attendance at a second worship service on the Lord's Day, or—even worse—the tendency to eliminate that service altogether. "The Sabbath gives us a whole day for fellowship with God and with his people. It's a day for us to grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures. Why would any Christian want to neglect that?" he asks. Indeed, in our fast and furious day of modern technology it would seem that we must put *more* emphasis on the Sabbath, not *less*.

His second message for the OPC is the need of separation. By that he does not mean, in the first place, separation *from* things, but rather separation *unto* God. "Separation began in the Garden of Eden," he affirms. Separation unto God in all things brings a distinct type of personal, family, and church life. John fears that we are losing that

emphasis that marked the early OPC.

And, finally, his greatest fear for the OPC (as he made clear with memorable eloquence at the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the OPC) is “inclusivism.” The OPC was never intended to be a “broadly evangelical church.” From the beginning, the OPC has been committed to the Reformed faith and to Presbyterianism as the doctrine and polity given in holy Scripture. “We must test all things by the Scriptures and the standards we have adopted as a church,” he states with passion. In this he sounds very much like the apostle Paul, who wrote: “Test everything; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thess. 5:21).

Of all of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s many blessings, one of the foremost is to have had (and still have) Rev. John Galbraith as Christ’s gift to us. He is, indeed, Mr. OPC. His service continues to make an impact on the church of which he has been a part from the first day of its existence. In fact, no other OPC minister has influenced the course of the OPC more than John Galbraith. He would be the first to deflect this tribute, giving all glory to God. Nevertheless, this tribute is both fitting and necessary. It is presented in the spirit of that one who was used of God for the foundation of the Christian church itself: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). The entire Orthodox Presbyterian Church praises God for his grace in giving us the life and labors of Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC.

Additional Resources

Articles

- “Choose Ye This Day! An Analysis of the Reasons Why Christians Should Separate from the Presbyterian Church in the USA,” http://www.opc.org/cce/choose_ye.html
- “Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” <http://www.opc.org/cce/WhyOPC.html>

Videos

- The Committee on Christian Education Presentation and Interviews on the OPC’s 75th Anniversary, <http://www.opc.org/GA/media/>

William Shishko, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York.*

ServantHistory

The Revised Historiography of Reformed Orthodoxy: A Few Practical Implications

Carl Trueman

The last forty years have seen a major revolution in the way in which scholars regard the intellectual development of orthodox Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Prior to that time, much of the field was dominated by historiographical models which tended to oversimplify the intellectual landscape.¹ Thus, some scholars isolated one or two figures and made their theological formulations normative and all those who differed with them in either content or style to be to some extent deviant and defective. Such was the infamous “Calvin against the Calvinists” hypothesis which pitted the allegedly pristine and monolithic theology of John Calvin over against that of his successors in later decades. We might also add to the mix the woefully inadequate use of the term “scholasticism” and its cognates as meaning “rationalistic,” “over logical” or simply “dull and dry.”²

It is not my intention to rehearse in detail either the flaws with the older approaches nor all of the insights of the approach which more recent scholars have proposed, but it is useful to be aware of key developments.

The most important figure in the revision of studies of seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy is Richard Muller.³ Muller did his doctoral work under David C. Steinmetz at Duke Divinity School. Steinmetz himself was the doctoral student of Heiko A. Oberman, arguably the most significant Reformation scholar of the second half of the twentieth century. Oberman’s work was marked by a multidisciplinary approach to Reformation and, most important, an emphasis on the late medieval intellectual context of Martin Luther.⁴ This was not an innovation with Oberman; where Oberman was significant was that he refused to allow modern theological convictions to operate as qualitative criteria for assessing the theologians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Where earlier scholars, such as Joseph Lortz, had understood Luther as emerging from a medieval

¹ Scholars associated with the older historiography include Ernst Bizer, T. F. Torrance, James B. Torrance, Brian Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, and Alan Clifford. For a collection of essays which exemplify the newer approach, see Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

² A critical survey of the older scholarship can be found in chapters 4 and 5 of Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³ The single most important text in Muller’s extensive scholarly output is *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

⁴ See Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1983); *Luther: Man between God and Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Catholic theological milieu, they had tended to allow their view of such a milieu (in Lortz's case, a highly negative one) to shape their evaluation of later developments. Hence, for example, Lortz regarded Luther and his theology as the poisonous progeny of a degenerate late medieval theology.⁵ Oberman repudiated such an approach, arguing instead for a "social history of ideas" which took ideas seriously but avoided reducing the objects of study to pawns in some modern theological struggle. He also emphasized the need for studying Reformation thought as part of an ongoing Western tradition rather than allowing the rather stark taxonomy of "Medieval" and "Reformation" to create artificial breaks where none existed.

Steinmetz developed Oberman's approach by devoting much of his academic life to the examination of exegesis in the late medieval and early modern periods. In many ways this was as revolutionary as the approach of Oberman.⁶ Popular Protestant mythology regarded late medieval Catholicism as having little time for exegesis; yet Steinmetz (and his students, such as Susan Schreiner and John Thompson) demonstrated that late medieval theologians were also exegetes; and, further, that their exegesis lay in the background of much Reformation exegesis.

What Muller has done is to draw on both of these approaches, applying them not simply to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but extending the analysis to the development of post-Reformation theology up to the late seventeenth century, when the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and others is beginning to transform the intellectual landscape. While his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* is now the standard in the field, his approach has been adopted and developed by numerous other specialists within the field. The result has been a burgeoning number of scholarly articles and monographs and a transformed understanding of how Protestantism developed in the generations after the early Reformers. Methods developed in other disciplines—most notably the history of political thought—have also been appropriated and applied to the issue of Protestant Orthodoxy.

The literature in this field is growing and is often highly technical. For example, where older scholarship used terms like "Aristotelian" as if this referred univocally to some monolithic philosophical approach, the newer scholarship is aware of the fact that Renaissance "Aristotelianism" was a highly variegated phenomenon which defies such generalization.⁷ Further, the newer scholarship takes for granted the distinction between a text and its reception. Thus, there is a distinction between Thomas and later Thomism, to the point where those who reject Thomas based upon the reading of him offered by later Thomists (be they Cajetan or Maritain) are rejecting a straw man. Yet, for all of this complexity, it is still helpful to outline a few key insights of the newer scholarship before addressing the question of its usefulness to contemporary Reformed church life.

⁵ Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). This book was originally published in 1949.

⁶ See his *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1980).

⁷ See Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 34–44. There I draw in the work of Renaissance scholar Charles B. Schmitt: see his *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981).

1. Scholasticism is a method, not a set of philosophical principles.

One of the key insights which Muller had early in his career was that scholasticism was a method, primarily that of the medieval *quaestio*, or “question.” At a more elaborate level, it also referred to the elaborate technical vocabulary which medieval theology had developed. Such an insight was not original with Muller: medievalists had understood this for a long time. What Muller did was use this to critique the kind of sloppy Protestant scholarship that used the term as a pejorative and moved simplistically from explicit form to implied content. Thus, in the older scholarship, to label theologians as “scholastics” was at once to indicate that they were rationalists, logic-choppers, pedants, and dry as dust. While the new approach to Protestant scholasticism does not deny any relationship between form and content, it does deny any necessary connection between scholastic form and particular understandings of human reason.⁸

2. Theology is expressed in ways that reflect the conventions of context and purpose.

This leads to the second point: understanding Reformed Orthodoxy requires understanding the linguistic and pedagogical conventions of the time. This point has been made implicitly by Muller throughout his work and has been given more explicit theoretical expression through the appropriation of the methodological writings of Quentin Skinner.⁹ To provide a common example, in order to understand the reasons why Calvin’s *Institutes* and Turretin’s *Institutes* differ radically in form and sometimes in content, one must first understand what the two men were intending to do in the two works; then one must set each within the literary, linguistic, and pedagogical context of his time. Simply saying that “they look different” or “Calvin seems more pastoral” is inadequate as a basis for assessment, being little more than expressions of aesthetic preference.¹⁰

3. Reformed theology stands in positive relation to late medieval theology and philosophy at a number of points.

Muller’s basic contention, that Reformed theology needs to be understood as an alteration of direction within the wider Western theological tradition stretching back through the Middle Ages to the ancient church, has been confirmed by a variety of specialist monographs.¹¹ The issue of continuity is philosophically and historically

⁸ See Muller, *After Calvin*, 25–46.

⁹ See Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57–89. I have made the case for the usefulness of aspects of Skinner’s approach relative to the history of theology: “Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context,” in Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 253–75; also *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 179–80.

¹⁰ See Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies*, 120–29.

¹¹ E.g., see Willem J. Van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001); Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007). For a general discussion of this, see Willem J. Van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011).

complex; but the basic point, that Reformed theologians build positively upon the metaphysics, doctrine of God, and basic theology of the medieval period is beyond dispute.¹² Within the ranks of those who advocate the new approach, there is some disagreement on the precise nature of this: Antonie Vos and his students in Utrecht have argued strongly that Reformed Orthodoxy is essentially a Protestant form of Scotism, the theological/philosophical approach of Duns Scotus and his followers.¹³ I have argued instead for a stronger Thomist influence, at least on individual figures such as John Owen.¹⁴ Richard Muller advocates seeing Reformed Orthodoxy as metaphysically eclectic and defying simplistic generalization.¹⁵ For the record, I see my own view and that of Muller as being compatible: in my opinion, most Reformed Orthodox of the seventeenth century advocate forms of Scotistically modified Thomism, though there is a spectrum within that.

4. Reformed Orthodoxy retained a strong emphasis on linguistics and exegesis.

The old canard, that the early Reformers were interested in exegesis, not systematic theology, while their successors became increasingly preoccupied with proof texts, logical deduction, and systematic consistency, at the expense of doing justice to the Bible, has been thoroughly debunked. A growing number of studies have demonstrated the increasing sophistication of exegesis, linguistics, and textual studies in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such makes perfect sense: ironically, the old model, where the biblical text was nothing more than a theological quarry, cannot account for the rise of higher criticism towards the end of the seventeenth century. It is, after all, only in the context of vigorous concern for the biblical text that one would become aware of textual difficulties.¹⁶

The Contemporary Theological and Ecclesiastical Significance of the New Scholarship

In addressing the issue of the contemporary relevance of all of this material, the first—and most important—point to make is that, with the possible exception of Antonie Vos and his followers, most of the contributors to the revised understanding of the development of Reformed Orthodoxy see themselves as making a historical contribution,

¹² On the complexity of defining continuity, see Carl R. Trueman, “The Reception of Calvin: Historical Considerations,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011): 19–27.

¹³ E.g., Antonie Vos, “De kern van de klassieke gereformeerde Theologie,” in *Kerk en Theologie* 47 (1996): 106–25; see the essays by Antonie Vos and Andreas J. Beck in Van Asselt and Dekker. See my critique in *John Owen*, 57–58.

¹⁴ I argue this point at length in both *The Claims of Truth* and *John Owen*; also in “The Necessity of the Atonement” in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 204–22.

¹⁵ This is the overall implication of his four volumes of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. It is also evident in his introductory essay (“Diversity in the Reformed Tradition: A Historiographical Introduction”) to Haykin and Jones.

¹⁶ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 2; Trueman, “Preachers and Medieval and Renaissance Commentary,” in Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54–71.

not a systematic one. This means that the results of such revision do not necessarily in themselves have direct theological implications. The questions asked have been along the lines of ‘Why does Reformed Orthodoxy develop this way?’ not primarily ‘Is this development biblical?’

For example, in my own work on John Owen, my primary concern was to demonstrate that the thesis of Alan Clifford, that Owen’s view of atonement was the result of the intrusion of Aristotelian categories into theology, was incorrect.¹⁷ In so doing, I demonstrated that Owen was working with Trinitarian and anti-Pelagian categories drawn from Scripture and mediated through the doctrinal debates of the ancient and medieval church. My point was not that Owen was correct; it was simply that the reasons for him holding his view were not those which Clifford had imputed to him. In a similar fashion, though on a larger scale, Muller’s demonstration that the path from Calvin to the seventeenth century is not susceptible to the old radical break/decline and fall models of an earlier generation does not mean that either Calvin or his successors were necessarily correct. In the context of the new approach, the question of dogmatic truth is separable from the question of historical rationale.

Having said this, there are a number of ways in which the new approach can be of help to the church today. First, it makes clear that Reformed theology is truly catholic theology in that it connects to, and rises out of, the wider Western theological tradition. It draws positively, not simply on Reformation sources or even on patristic writers, but also on medieval thinkers, particularly in the areas of the doctrine of God and the nature of freedom and determinism, the new approach. This considerably broadens the theological sources on which today’s pastor should feel able to draw with integrity; and it also goes some way to answering that perennial question posed to Protestants, “Where was the church between the patristic era and Martin Luther?”

Second, by eschewing simplistic taxonomies and by taking seriously the sophistication of Reformed Orthodoxy, the new approach has been able to tease out important systematic doctrinal connections which have been neglected in the past. Again, to draw on my own research on Owen, the connection between orthodox Trinitarianism and Augustinian anti-Pelagianism is vital for understanding Reformed views of redemption but has often been neglected. Historical study shows how these two doctrinal loci connect.¹⁸ Another example would be Muller’s work on the doctrine of God. By careful examination of texts in context, he has been able to demonstrate that contemporary objections to divine simplicity, such as those made by Alvin Plantinga, are built upon a misreading of the content and intention of the Reformed Orthodox writers. Again, the point is not primarily one of dogmatic truth. Muller demonstrates rather that the contemporary argument misuses historical texts; that does not necessarily mean the arguments are wrong but it is nonetheless a significant criticism. Systematic theology should be done in dialogue with theologians throughout the ages, and those who build their systems in dialogue with incorrect historiography need to take account of those who promote more accurate history, in order to see if it has systematic implications.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ This is the major historical theological argument of *The Claims of Truth*.

¹⁹ See *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 2, 40–41.

Indeed, the new approach can be very helpful in a practical way relative to issues of subscription. For example, one of the areas which is most often cited by students as a point at which they object to the Westminster standards is WCF 2:1, “without . . . passions.” To the layman, this seems to present a God who is some kind of First Cause, deistic and distant. In fact, understanding how the language of passions functions in seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy clarifies this: it is not intended to make God a remote deity; rather it is designed to protect his divinity and his absolute priority over the created realm. The clarification is necessary and important, given the way that language and conceptual connotations have changed over time.²⁰

This points to a third area where the new approach is significant for the contemporary church: it highlights how important the consensus nature of confessions was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The process of producing confessions was complex and not uniform. Some were written by individuals and later adopted by churches (for example, the Belgic Confession); others were in origin committee productions always intended as ecclesiastical documents. What the new approach has done is demonstrate that, with the confessional Reformed world, there was always a certain amount of legitimate diversity on many topics. Thus, matters such as the distinction between infra- and supralapsarianism are not matters on which the confessions take hard and fast positions; and even where they have distinct preferences, historically these were not issues of ecclesiastical division. The obvious application of this is that arguments which attempt to set criteria for office-bearing within the church based on the thought of individual theologians, or based on interpretations of confessional documents through the narrow lens provided by the theology of a single individual, are historically alien to the intentions of confessional orthodoxy.

Fourth, the new approach has demonstrated that Reformed Orthodoxy was grounded in exegesis but engaged in constant dialogue with the history of theology. This is in part evident in its eclectic nature but also has direct application to some contemporary issues. For example, one common complaint about the Westminster standards is that they are based upon proof texts. The concern seems to be that Reformed theology has thus been built on simplistic, decontextualized reading of isolated texts. Many, of course, will be aware that the divines themselves did not want the proof texts included and that they were overruled in this by Parliament. That in itself should give pause for thought about how such texts function. Yet Muller has explored this issue further and demonstrated that the divines were not only competent exegetes themselves and that Reformed Orthodoxy is exegetically grounded but also that proof texts in the seventeenth century were not intended as simple, blunt answers to complex questions. Proof texts operated rather as exegetical markers, directing the reader to the key verse but doing so in the expectation that the reader would check the classical expositions of that verse.²¹

This is also significant for understanding the covenant of works. One criticism is that the only reference to the pre-Fall arrangement with Adam in the garden as a covenant is Hosea 6:7. The Hebrew is ambiguous and could indeed be read as “like a man.” As such,

²⁰ Ibid., 553–59.

²¹ See Muller, “The ‘Whole Counsel of God’: Scripture, Exegesis, and Doctrine in the *English Annotations* and the Westminster Confession,” in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2007), 3–82.

it seems remarkably slender textual ground upon which to build such a crucial doctrine as the covenant of works. In fact, as Muller has shown through his study of the Westminster Annotations, the divines were well aware of this ambiguity. Their use of the language of covenant to refer to Adam in Eden was not built on this text, but upon Romans 5, which they saw as pointing to the conceptual presence of covenant in Eden, even as it was linguistically absent. Such a point would seem significant in assessing John Murray's criticism of the covenant of works.²²

Conclusion

The work of revising our understanding of how Reformed Orthodoxy developed in the post-Reformation period continues apace and, as this article has suggested, is an increasingly complex and interdisciplinary exercise. Yet even now there are some obvious practical implications for the theological life of the church in the present, most notably in the need to understand our history correctly, to do theology today in a manner which understands the tradition within which we stand, and also to apprehend the fact that Reformed theology was always intended at its foundations to be a confessional theology which understood that it is the church, and no single individual, which sets the public norms for profession and for office-bearing.

Carl Trueman *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Ambler, Pennsylvania, and as a professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

²² Muller, "The 'Whole Counsel of God'," 69–81.

ServantReading

Union with Christ

A review article

J. V. Fesko

Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology, by Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011, 164 pages, \$17.99, paper.

Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church, by J. Todd Billings. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011, 180 pages, \$19.99, paper.

Union with Christ is one of the current hot-topics across the academy, in exegetical, theological, and historical studies. Hence it should not surprise readers to find new books on this subject. Two recent entries are those offered by Robert Letham, senior lecturer in systematic and historical theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology, and J. Todd Billings, associate professor of Reformed theology at Western Theological Seminary. Both books treat the doctrine of union with Christ but from slightly different perspectives. Letham offers a systematic survey of union, while Billings builds off of his earlier work on Calvin's doctrine of union and addresses both doctrine and issues related to the ministry of the church.¹ Letham's book has six chapters that treat union and creation, the incarnation, Pentecost, representation, transformation, and the resurrection. Billings's book originally began as a series of lectures and goes beyond introductory matters; he covers union as it relates to adoption, a better understanding of total depravity, communion with God, the gospel and justice, and a critique of incarnational models of ministry. Both books are worthwhile reads but for different reasons.

Positive Qualities

Letham's book offers several positive qualities that commend his work. Readers are given helpful analyses of a number of historical sources, including authors and ideas from the patristic, early modern, and contemporary periods. Such research opens vistas upon the doctrine of union that present day readers might not otherwise explore. And contrary to current trends in the North American Reformed context, Letham rightly holds the compatibility of union with Christ and the *ordo salutis*; he argues that these two ideas are bound together in the Westminster Standards (88–90). And one of the refreshing aspects of Letham's approach is that he encourages readers to construct the doctrine of union upon the whole canon of Scripture, not simply the writings of Paul, as has been the trend among some theologians (91). Letham also offers a helpful contribution that will likely benefit present discussions and debates about union with Christ. He begins his book, not

¹ Cf. J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

with the application of redemption, but with creation, and more specifically the incarnation of Christ. He rightly acknowledges that the basis of the believer's union with Christ lies in the incarnation (21).

Billings offers some unique contributions that make his book worthy of study. His treatment of adoption as a key element of union is stimulating; adoption is one of the more underappreciated doctrines because historically a number of Reformed theologians have considered it as part of justification rather than placing it among the other relative benefits of union with Christ. Billings's emphasis upon praxis is also a welcome contribution as most discussions about union focus upon the ontology of the "what and when" of the alpha-point of union and the relationship between justification and sanctification. As important as these subjects are, and they are vital, ruminating upon union as the basis of the believer's communion with the triune Lord through the means of grace is a much appreciated and needed reminder of the fount of the Christian life (63–94). Billings also offers a potent alternative to the "religious left wing's" call to social action and the "religious right's" view that justice for the poor and marginalized of society is merely an optional add-on for the Christian life (95–96). Since the double benefit of union is both justification and sanctification, it means all Christians should seek to manifest good works to all, not as personal achievement but as the fruit of their union with Christ (107–8). Markedly, Billings does not argue for "social justice," an ill-defined political idea where certain classes of individuals, such as the poor, are singled out as the special recipients of the church's activity. Rather, he contends that justice must be defined Christologically and pursued in union with Christ (115). In other words, as the church preaches, teaches, and administers the sacraments, it always does so with an eye to bringing the cup of cold water to anyone it encounters, not just the poor.

Areas for Further Reflection

Letham's book provides several areas for further consideration. The first deals with his overreliance upon Calvin to set the trajectory for his discussion about union. True, Letham does engage with other theologians and sources such as Polanus, Goodwin, the Westminster Standards, Bavinck, Stedman, and Zanchi, but these figures and documents feature somewhat incidentally compared with the amount of space Calvin receives. Several notable works fail to appear that would add greater depth, texture, and different nuances, such as Zanchi's work on union with Christ, which was a separately published doctrinal locus extracted from his Ephesians commentary.² Zanchi also wrote a personal confession of faith that was intended to replace the Second Helvetic Confession where he discusses soteriology all under the rubric of union with Christ.³ Also absent is Edward Polhill's work, *Christus in Corde: or, the Mystical Union between Christ and Believers* (1680). Equally noteworthy is the nonappearance of Herman Witsius's *Irenical Animadversions* (1696) wherein he entered the infamous so-called Antinomian

² Girolamo Zanchi, *An Excellent and Learned Treatise of the Spiritual Marriage between Christ and the Church* (Cambridge: 1592); idem, *Commentarius in Epistolam Sancti Pauli Ad Ephesos*, 2 vols., ed. A. H. Hartog, *Bibliotheca Reformata*, vol. 5 (Amsterdam: 1888).

³ Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione Christiana Fides – Confession of Christian Religion*, 2 vols., eds. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

controversy that occurred in England and addressed a number of issues directly related to union, justification, and sanctification.⁴

The lack of interaction with principal primary sources is evident at two other places where Letham offers comments based upon the suspect claims of secondary literature. For example, Letham asserts that for Lutherans union with Christ follows as the effect of justification, a common mantra among certain writers but easily disproved by reference to Lutheran theologians such as Luther and Melancthon. In his 1535 commentary on Galatians Luther makes regular appeal to union and argues that Christ is present in faith; in other words, union with Christ and faith are concomitant realities—union does not follow as the effect of justification.⁵ The same may be said of Melancthon in two of his refutations against Andreas Osiander, documents that heretofore have not been referenced by those who claim a great divide between Lutheran and Reformed versions of union.⁶ Secondary literature such as Olli-Pekka Vainio's *Justification and Participation in Christ* has noted that there are at least a dozen different iterations of the so-called "Lutheran" doctrine of justification, and as such, abundant variations as justification relates to union.⁷ Just as there is no monolithic doctrine of union among the Reformed, the same can be said of Lutheran theology. Claims of significant difference between the Reformed and Lutheran doctrines of union should be supported from specific primary source evidence.

Based upon secondary literature alone Letham also claims that under the Princetonians, such as Charles Hodge, union with Christ "suffered eclipse" (122). Yet from Hodge's own testimony taken from an address entitled "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ," he states: "There is no doctrine of the Bible, more clearly, frequently, or variously taught than this."⁸ In a sermon on the unity of the church, Hodge, like his Reformed predecessors, outlines the two benefits of union, justification and sanctification. But Hodge goes beyond this basic affirmation and, much like Letham, writes of communion, security, and glorification as the effects of union with Christ.⁹ In his Romans commentary Hodge affirms that union with Christ is the only source of the believer's holiness.¹⁰ And a cursory reading of Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, and notably his commentary on Ephesians (esp. 5:25–32), effortlessly reveals union did not suffer

⁴ Herman Witsius, *Animadversiones Irenicae* (Utrecht: 1696); idem, *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807).

⁵ E.g., Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, in *Luther's Works*, vols. 26–27, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26.57, 129, 132–33, 167–68, 352.

⁶ Philip Melancthon, "Iudicium de Osiandro 1552, no. 5017" (*Corpus Reformatorum* 7.893–97); idem, "Confutation of Osiander (Sept 1555)," in *Documents from the History of Lutheranism 1517–1750*, ed. Eric Lund (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 208 (*Corpus Reformatorum* 8.582); cf. Lowell C. Green, *How Melancthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 230–31.

⁷ Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula Concord (1580)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1.

⁸ Charles Hodge, "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ," in *History, Essays, Orations and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance*, ed. Philip Schaff and Irenaeus Prime (New York: Harper, 1874), sect. II, 139–44.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1879), 306–7.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Robert Carter, 1880), 139.

eclipse in Hodge's theology.¹¹ In fact, like Letham, Hodge contends that the believer's union with Christ rests upon the incarnation of Christ: "Besides, so far as the mere assumption of human nature is concerned, it is a bond of union between Christ and the whole human race; whereas the apostle is here speaking of a union with Christ peculiar to his people."¹² So, if union suffered eclipse, someone forgot to tell Hodge about it.

A second area of consideration appears in the lack of any discussion of the *pactum salutis*. Seldom, if at all, have present debates considered this doctrine in relation to union, but in the seventeenth century union and the *pactum* featured quite commonly. Despite Letham's criticisms of the doctrine, as a matter of historiography, any treatment that attempts to discuss the history of the Reformed doctrine of union should interact with the different ways that theologians have expressed the doctrine.¹³ In this particular case, Reformed theologians such as Turretin, Witsius, Owen, Gillespie, Rutherford, and others employ the *pactum* as the context in which the incarnation and Christ's union with believers is decreed and unfolded.¹⁴

A third area lies in the disproportionate amount of space Letham spends trying to convince readers of the compatibility between union with Christ and the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification or theosis. He employs some twenty-four pages (91–115) to show the compatibility between union and deification seeking to cross-fertilize the two traditions as a way to advance the discussion in Western theology (91). Letham correctly notes that not all forms of deification entail the ontological mixture of the essence of the believer with the godhead (99). Yes, there are similarities between union with Christ and deification, but to highlight similarities without noting the differences is unhelpful. For example, Letham rightly refers to the double grace of justification and sanctification as constituent elements of a Reformed doctrine of union. But on the other hand, he fails to mention that Eastern Orthodoxy has no doctrine of justification. This is

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2.581, 3.104, 127, 227; idem, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter, 1860), 289–354, esp., e.g., 289, 308, 315, 316.

¹² Hodge, *Ephesians*, 339–40.

¹³ Cf. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 235–36.

¹⁴ See, e.g., John Owen, "Preface" to Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or a Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: 1677), n. p.; idem, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh and London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–53), 12.500–07; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992–97), XII.ii.5, 7, 13; Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, 2 vols., trans. William Crookshank (1822; Escondido, CA: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), II.ii.1–16; Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened, Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1655; New Lenox: Puritan Publications, 2005), §§ 34–37 (pp. 413–74); Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ, as the Foundation to the Covenant of Grace* (London: 1677). For an explicit confessional expressions of the *pactum salutis*, see Martin I. Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990), 103–23, canon. 4. Another instance exists in the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order: The Confession of Faith of the Congregational-Independents (1658)* (London: Evangelical Press, 1971), 8.1; cf. similar statements in the Canons of Dordt (1618–19), "The First Main Point of Doctrine Concerning Divine Predestination," art. 7, in Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.572. Cf. Richard A. Muller, "Towards the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65.

something that Eastern Orthodox theologians have themselves admitted: “Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians.”¹⁵ What a theologian or tradition affirms about salvation is equally as important as what it denies. Any attempt to prove the compatibility of theosis and union must take this substantial difference into account.

In this case, there seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between theosis and union given the absence of the doctrine of justification in common Eastern Orthodox formulations. Remonstrants, Socinians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics all affirmed union with Christ, and more broadly the same can be said about union with God for Judaism, Islam, and Greek philosophers such as Plato.¹⁶ Recall Paul’s famous quotation of Epimenedes (ca. 600 BC) at Mars Hill: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)—note the “in him” language, reflective of the idea of union with God. Whatever similarities there might be among variants of union with Christ or participation in the divine nature in Christian and pagan theologies, they all melt away beneath the withering heat of the biblical necessity of a forensic doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through the imputed active and passive obedience of Christ. Everyone affirms union with God, but the devil, and the truth, is all in the details.

A fourth consideration is that Letham avoids current debates about union with Christ almost entirely. This will undoubtedly disappoint some readers as many are looking for clarity and assistance wading through challenging issues. On the one hand, an author certainly has the right to bypass debate (82). On the other hand, it is therefore best to leave all reference to the debate out of the book. But at one point Letham levels the accusation that one author affirms that believers only have “participation in the energies of Christ” (127); he elsewhere characterizes such a view as only being united to the work of Christ rather than his person (cf. 92). To level such a claim without significant exposition and argumentation only elicits more questions and does not prove beneficial.

In Billings’s work there is one area for further reflection regarding the doctrine of adoption. In a number of places Billings refers to adoption as a metaphor (18, 19, 21, 27n28). There are certainly a host of metaphors used throughout the Scriptures to convey ideas related to the salvation of sinners. Jesus, for example, calls himself a “door” by which people must enter in order to be saved as well as a “shepherd” and his people “sheep” (John 10:9, 11). In his teaching Christ compares himself to a vine and believers as branches (John 15:1–6), and Paul likens union with Christ to donning the “armor” of God (Eph. 6:11–18). Each of these ideas legitimately falls into the category of metaphor, where a figure of speech is applied to something else in a non-literal fashion.¹⁷ Jesus is not literally a door, we are not literally sheep, and to be in union with Christ does not mean we put on Kevlar body armor. But is adoption merely a metaphor? Billings writes: “The God of the Bible has no ‘natural’ or ‘begotten’ children apart from Jesus the Son; all the rest of us need to be adopted” (16). This is a true and accurate statement, but he then goes on to characterize adoption as a metaphor, which if strictly applied means that believers are not literally God’s sons and daughters.

¹⁵ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 160.

¹⁶ Bernard McGinn and Moshe Idel, eds., *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Edinburgh: Continuum, 1996).

¹⁷ F. B. Huey, Jr., and Bruce Corley, *A Student’s Dictionary for Biblical and Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 124, q. v. *metaphor*.

In one sense Billings employs a common assumption; characterizing various aspects of the order of salvation as metaphors is a recent widespread phenomenon. To wit, Billings cites Trevor Burke's work, which is entitled *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (18n6).¹⁸ Numerous exegetes and theologians now refer to justification as a metaphor as well.¹⁹ By way of contrast, historic Reformed theology refers to justification as an "act" of God.²⁰ Part of the contemporary motivation behind calling justification a figure of speech is that the Bible has many different metaphors for salvation and no one image fully expresses the breadth and depth of our redemption. Hence, while one may choose to highlight the forensic metaphor of justification, others may choose instead to employ other metaphors, such as adoption, or union with Christ. We are told that the abundance of metaphors affords greater doctrinal flexibility and facilitates ecumenism because, though Protestants focus upon justification and Roman Catholics transformation, each affirms the same redemptive reality but from different perspectives. What once bitterly divided the Reformation from Rome can be bridged by the proper recognition of the interchangeability of these different metaphors.

To be clear, Billings does not employ the idea of "doctrine as metaphor" anywhere in his book to soften or undermine any aspect of the order of salvation. However, it does appear that he employs the concept uncritically. If adoption is a metaphor, then argumentation to convince readers of the propriety and desirability of such an idea would be helpful, though admittedly such a concern lies beyond the scope of Billings's work. But in my judgment, adoption is not a metaphor but rather one facet of the rich redemption we have in Christ. We share in Christ's identity as God's only begotten Son through union with him; which is a conclusion, I believe, that Billings promotes in his book (e.g. 16–17, 31). If Jesus is metaphorically God's "son," then, yes, we are metaphorically God's "children." But if Jesus is God's Son (cf. Ps. 2:7a), then we truly are God's adopted children, an adoption we receive through union with the only begotten Son. The Shorter Catechism defines adoption in this manner: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of, the sons of God" (question 34). Such an expression, I believe, more accurately expresses and defines the nature of adoption; which is a conclusion, I suspect, that Billings would wholeheartedly embrace.

¹⁸ Trevor Burke's work, which is entitled, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

¹⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer, "Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation: The State of the Union with Christ in St. Paul and Protestant Soteriology," in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, eds. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 254–55; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Response: Traditional Reformed View," in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 124; idem, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 122; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 213; N. T. Wright, *Romans*, NIB, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 491; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 231.

²⁰ Westminster Larger Catechism, qq. 70–71; Shorter Catechism, q. 33; cf. WCF XI.

Conclusion

For anyone interested in the doctrine of union with Christ, both books should be read as they investigate different features of union and do so in an engaging and thought-provoking way. These books will undoubtedly stir healthy discussions and whet appetites for further investigation into this wonderful doctrine. However, one thing I hope to see in future discussions is a broader engagement of union beyond the confines of Calvin's *Institutes*. As helpful as Calvin is, he is but one star in a galaxy of Reformed luminaries that beam light upon our path. Happily, in the historic Reformed tradition no one luminary serves as a lodestar, but rather each star within broader constellations offers assistance in our collective understanding of our one guiding light, Christ revealed in Scripture. To this end, Billings's call for theological retrieval offers great promise. With such a strategy the Reformed church can benefit from the wealth of its tradition and learn from many others who have written beautifully and arguably more deftly and skillfully than Calvin. In the words of G. K. Chesterton: "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who happen to be walking about."²¹ Indeed, the Reformed church can greatly benefit from a theological "democracy," an appeal to the people (that is, a host of theologians), in its study of union with Christ rather than the artificial imposition of the "monarchy" of Calvin, something our tradition has historically eschewed.

John V. Fesko is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as professor of systematic and historical theology and academic dean at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.

²¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (1959; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 48.

ServantReading

Keeping Up with the Times: Evangelicals and the New Media, Part 1

A Review Article

Gregory E. Reynolds

Understanding Evangelical Media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication, edited by Quentin J. Schultze and Robert H. Woods Jr. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008, 345 pages, \$22.00, paper.

The New Media Frontier: Blogging, Vlogging, and Podcasting for Christ, edited by John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton. Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 2008, 254 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Prophetically Incorrect: A Christian Introduction to Media Criticism, by Robert H. Woods and Paul D. Patton. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010, xlii + 182, \$19.99, paper.

Recently I had someone compliment me for an innovation I made on a certain web site. He said, “Thanks for keeping up with the times.” A well-intended thanks displays an important assumption common in our day. I became familiar with this cultural undercurrent as I was coming out of the counter culture in the early seventies as a new Christian. The sentiment ran something like this: “If we don’t offer contemporary music we’ll lose the young people.” This is progress—keeping up with the times. Lacking the pedagogical instinct that the young people might need to learn something or change, people embrace the idea that the latest is the best—critical reflection is anathema. So, before I committed myself to a real haircut, I directed a Christian coffee house for a large Baptist church in New Hampshire. The entrance beads at the doorway, the psychedelic posters, and the black lights were all supposed to draw the hippies in. The oppressive presence of the media that formed the way of life I had repented of moved me to buy my first three piece suit—only kidding. Well, not quite, because this experience awakened me in a simple way to the relationship between medium and message or form and content.

When I began my doctoral research on the relationship between electronic media, the church, and preaching in 1990 the discipline known as media ecology was not on the evangelical radar. There were few evangelical writers, much less Reformed, who were thinking along those lines. Joel Nederhood wrote “The Back to God Hour: Mission Television Report” for the Christian Reformed Church Synod Report (1977).¹ This is an

¹ Joel Nederhood, “The Back to God Hour: Mission Television Report,” Christian Reformed Church Synod

extremely thoughtful reflection on the use of television for Christian broadcasting. He was one of the few who, early on, understood the nature and influence of the visual media, especially television and its effect on Christian ministry. Then Douglas Groothuis's *The Soul in Cyberspace* (1997)² was the only full length book in which the McLuhan-Postman or media ecology perspective was really applied to critique not only the content but the grammar and environment of cyberspace. Os Guinness has been aware of McLuhan's critical perspective since the early 1970s when I studied with him at L'Abri Fellowship.³ In 1989, Ken Myers was another lone voice alerting the church to the dangers of uncritically absorbing the forms of popular culture.⁴ More recently Arthur W. Hunt III, "Neil Postman and the Evangelicals," has identified evangelicals who have perceptively applied media ecology to their respective disciplines in his 2006 article in the journal of the Media Ecology Association.⁵

My purpose in this review article is to survey five books that provide windows into the range of thinking among evangelicals about the new media. As a scholar in the discipline of media ecology and a Reformed pastor I approach modern culture generally applying the antithesis of Van Tilian apologetics to the activities of common culture, especially through the biblical paradigm of idolatry.⁶

The first three books under review exhibit a failure to think outside the box of the media environment itself. Oddly, *Understanding Evangelical Media* apes the classic McLuhan text *Understanding Media*, without exhibiting many of its profoundest insights. The book does serve as a window into the thinking of evangelicals about media, with little substantive thinking about media themselves. Editors Quentin Schultze and Robert Woods's introduction to the volume holds out the false hope that this will not be the case, "communication 'mediates' our views of reality" (19). But they never follow through on this theme, but rather concentrate on the uses and content of media. There are interesting articles on the use of various media, its content and production—everything from music to movies, theatre to theme parks—but not on understanding media, which is the entire idea behind the McLuhan title. In the conclusion Schultze does sound a critical warning, "Rarely do evangelicals take stock of the role of media in their personal, family, community, and church lives" (285). But even here the focus is not on the nature of media and their effects, but rather on the time spent with media and how that impacts our relationships.

Like *Understanding Evangelical Media*, *The New Media Frontier* displays some media naiveté from the outset, but is more focused and well constructed. The editors inform us, "New media are nothing more than means of communication, which we've been doing for a very long time. All that is new is the form and availability of

² Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

³ Os Guinness, *Fat Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

⁴ Ken Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989).

⁵ Arthur W. Hunt III, "Neil Postman and the Evangelicals," *Explorations in Media Ecology* 5:1 (2006): 61–72.

⁶ See Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), chapter 1 "No Other Gods: Idolatry in the Bible," and chapter 2 "The Apologetics of Fire: Idolatry as a Critical Paradigm," 1–61.

communication” (13). Minimizing the form reminds me of the idea that each medium is *just* a different “delivery system.” A few paragraphs later a bit more insight is provided, “It is far too easy to embrace the intended benefits of a new technology without noticing the unintended consequences” (14). Indeed, but the problem is that the liabilities are not understood by understanding the medium itself. That being said the book truly offers “some direction for how Christians can use the new media with discernment and grace” (16). The book is not lacking in media ecology. With many wise cautions, the book focuses on the use of three types of media: blogging, vlogging (video), and podcasting. The topics covered include theology, academics, ethics, politics, journalism, pastoral ministry, youth ministry, evangelism, and apologetics. For example, after enumerating several benefits of blogging, Tod Bolsinger in “Blog as Microwave Community” (113–23) ends with a direct application of McLuhan, “The *medium* of ‘virtual’ inevitably becomes the *message* of ‘community’,” adding the sage observation, “Building community through new media requires more commitment to community than to new media” (122). This and other chapters display a Reformed influence. The Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism are quoted in two chapters (68, 100).

Along the way there is evidence of serious media ecology. Matthew Lee Anderson’s chapter “Three Cautions among the Cheers” (55–68) explores the dangers of an uncritical embrace of the new media. He goes on to quote Douglas Groothuis (59) and Quentin Schultze (62) in observing the lack of depth in online communication, as well the absence of personal presence. David Wayne’s “Theological Blogging” shows great sensitivity to the importance of the visible church as the community in which genuine theological development takes place, putting the value of blogging in perspective (97–112). He quotes McLuhan in warning us that “the medium of blogging not only transmits a message, it has the potential to shape the message” (107). Jason Baker in “Virtual Classrooms, Real Learning” (177–89) even unpacks McLuhan’s famous tetrad—revealing media patterns—and applies it to online learning in a very thoughtful way. All told, this book is worth reading as another window into evangelical thinking on the new media.

Equally thoughtful, but more problematic is *Prophetically Incorrect*. The neo-Kuyperian cultural transformationist agenda is front and center in this “Christian Introduction to Media Criticism.” Here, too, is a useful window into a different part of American Christianity. Not as eclectic as the first two books, mainly because there are only two authors who are clearly united in their perspective. The introduction clearly reveals the agenda (xxxi-xlii). The organizing concept of the approach is to “to analyze media content, as well as media institutions and technologies” (xxxiv). And then this,

We simply cannot escape the words of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus about love, justice, peace, and righteousness. Both called for individual *and* cultural transformation. (xxxv)

Tipping their hat to the Augustinian adage that “all truth is God’s truth” (xi), the authors determine to refer to non-Christian media as “mainstream media” (xxxvii).

We are told—warned?—that our “prophetic” cue will come from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Walter Brueggemann (xxxix). Chapters 3–6 are “taken from Heschel’s monumental two-volume work, *The Prophets*” (xxxix). It is an important

hermeneutical mistake to apply the words of the prophets to Israel under the Mosaic covenant to modern culture. This sets the stage for exploring our “dance with popular media” (xl). Chapter 2 suggests that “Bono, lead singer of rock band U2, has a prophetic voice” (xli).

Woods and Patton divide Christians into two groups with distinct types of responses to media. “Proclaimers” reject the ungodly media environment with a moralistic critique (8–9). “Transformers,” on the other hand, “redeem not just individuals but cultural institutions, including the media. Since all truth is God’s truth, Christians should search for faith-affirming interpretations among all types of popular media content” (9).

The footnotes reveal an interesting paradox. An extended footnote (135n24) acknowledges the proper sources of the academic discipline of “media ecology,” such as the writings of Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innes, and Walter Ong. The authors refer to the Media Ecology Association, of which I have been a member since 1997 at the recommendation of Neil Postman. The footnote then refers to a section in the introduction that makes an excellent and very important point, sounding almost like Postman. The third of six points describing faithful media stewardship is:

Both popular media content and media technologies matter. Media content is an easy target for Christians, and for good reason. Concerns about the coarsening of cultural life through excessive displays of sex and violence are legitimate. But the technologies that deliver the content are also made by human beings, and as such reflect human values, desires, and aspirations. Each communication technology has its own unique DNA, or characteristic predispositions that shape human communication.²⁴ (xxxvi)

But the footnote adds the comment, “It [media ecology] is sometimes referred to as technological determinism.” It is nothing of the sort. Just as a fish is largely unaware of his watery environment, so we are largely unaware of our electronic environment. If the water is polluted, the fish dies. But, unlike fish, we are gifted with the ability of doing something about our man-made environments. This was a bedrock conviction of McLuhan, who insisted, “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening.”⁷

Finally, the authors make another good point: that it is dangerous to think of technology as neutral. In the footnote to this point (11n49) the list (in the earlier footnote) of media ecology luminaries is extended to include Jacque Ellul, Eric Havelock, Lewis Mumford, Daniel Boorstin, and more contemporary media scholars, such as, Joshua Meyrowitz, Thomas de Zengotita, and Nicholas Carr. So how is this marshaled in the service of transformationism? And is there a difference between the media ecology approach to culture and the transformationist school? Certainly with McLuhan there was no idea of transformation. His favorite metaphor for dealing with the electronic environment was marine navigation based on the actions taken by the fishermen in Poe’s “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841), to survive the ocean vortex.⁸

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, “McLuhan Probes,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. Sanderson and Macdonald (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1989), 219; Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 25.

⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1951), 43, 45.

Christians, like the patriarchs, are in pilgrim mode. This is why there is no agenda to transform culture in the new covenant. The fundamental mistake of Woods and Patton is to model their cultural criticism on the prophets of the Mosaic covenant.

If you are only going to read one of the three books reviewed here, *The New Media Frontier* would be my choice. In part 2 next month pilgrim navigators will find two books more suited to their perspective.

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

ServantHumor

Performance Sports

by Eutyclus II

Organized sports are an attempt, through regimentation (uniforms and trophies) and rhetoric (rah-rah boosterism and coach talk), to give an inherently pointless activity some kind of point, to inject purpose into play.¹

Two friends and colleagues of mine each dropped a casual comment that landed like a bombshell. Paraphrased, the comment went something like this: “The most basic distinction in music is the difference between participatory music and performance music.” This is the kind of obvious-yet-bombshell comment that, once the wreckage is cleared, troubles one for the remainder of one’s life (Thanks a lot men!). Like most other obvious-yet-bombshell observations, the comment has a life of its own, once dropped. Its applicability is not limited to music, but extends to other human endeavors also.

Unwittingly and unintentionally, I discovered another arena of the bombshell’s applicability during Lent this spring. I had never observed Lent before (though I have toyed, from time to time, with giving up my mother-in-law for Lent, but I digress . . .), and still have no religious or theological reason for doing so, but I decided on a whim to give something up for forty days or so. Not desiring to belabor the matter of deciding what to give up, I elected to give up performance sports in their entirety—no March Madness, no Masters Tournament (neither of which, I believe, I had missed in over forty years), no SI.com, no ESPN, nada. The only theoretical exception would have been to observe my students performing sports live, and this exception remained only theoretical.

My first (and surprising) observation on the experiment was that it was a good deal easier than I had thought it would be—no increased heart rate or sweating, no sneaking a peek at someone else’s TV or computer, no visiting of a sports bar, etc. My second observation was that I gained about a day of week (I now observe an eight-day week, which gives me a substantial competitive advantage over those of you who observe a seven-day week, though this merely equalizes the fact that I am one-seventh as productive as most people anyway). If one watches one or two basketball games a week, “checks the score” on ESPN or *Sports Illustrated* online a few times daily, etc., before long it adds up to about a workday. So not only did I not experience any *negative* reactions (withdrawal), I experienced an unanticipated *positive* result—more time to do other things with my labor and leisure (in part, I memorized Tennyson’s *Ulysses*, which I later “read” at a poetry recital).

My third observation is the bombshell/gift that keeps on giving (or taking, depending on one’s point-of-view): Why on God’s green earth should *anyone* watch someone *else* play a game? Let me clarify that I raise no question about participatory sports, for which

¹ Louis Menand, “Glory Days,” *The New Yorker*, August 6, 2012, 64.

there have been many excellent rationales from the ancient world to the present: for example, participatory sports teach teamwork, cultivate personal fitness, and teach self-control in the face of defeat or victory. But for all the defenses of participatory sport (ancient and contemporary), has anyone attempted the bootless task of attempting to defend *watching* others participate in sport? How much teamwork does one develop by sitting on a couch in a room by himself watching others play baseball? How much personal health is developed by sitting on said couch? How does watching someone else win or lose cultivate equanimity in the face of defeat or victory?

Okay, perhaps that was too many rhetorical questions in sequence, but you get the point. Are there or were there ever any good arguments for *observing* sports, rather than for *participating* in them? There is, of course, the ubiquitous commercial argument (Nike makes tons of money by advertising in such venues), but that argument works equally well for the hula-hoop, the Ginsu knife, prostitution, or practicing law (not that the latter two are always easily distinguished)—hardly the kind of argument that would satisfy a philosopher. If the only justification of a behavior or product is that it makes money, then almost anything can be justified. Why not just sell cocaine?

What about the entertainment argument? Isn't there a place in life for entertainment? Is it not proper, on some occasions, to take respite from one's duties and labors, to enjoy some moments of reverie? Yes, yes, and yes, but none of these affirmations justifies (by itself) the behavior of watching others perform sporting activities. One is still faced with answering this question: Assuming that leisure is a valid pursuit (and I argue vigorously that it is), and that entertainment is one legitimate category of leisure, why should observing others participate in athletic activity be the chosen form of entertainment? Why not listen to a cellist? Why not read a poem or novel? Why not attend a symphony or community theatre? Why not compose haiku, or play Scrabble, or serve a meal at a soup kitchen or volunteer at the local hospital or become a Scout leader or hunt deer?

Observing others participate in athletic activities may be justifiable in the minimal sense that it is not inherently unlawful or destructive (to others, anyway). But such justification does not give it preferred status to any of the other activities mentioned above, nor does it justify the enormous amount of time so many in our culture give to it. Had I, for instance, given up listening to the cello for Lent, I would not have gained a day a week. Giving up watching sports *did* give me an additional day weekly (and keeps on giving—who needs the Olympics!).

I somewhat fear that I may develop the snide, holier-than-thou perspective of a recent religious convert or a new vegetarian—who out-Pharisees all the Pharisees who ever lived—but I digress. Awareness of the tendency—one hopes—may provide some prophylaxis against the tendency. On my better days, I don't feel superior to those who observe sports; I feel as though I stole a fresh-baked cookie and didn't get caught. I merely munch my newly-gained treasure quietly, without a cause. I leave it to Mayor Bloomberg to make the practice illegal. (How did such a wealthy, privileged person become such a Puritan? Did his mother not breastfeed him?) It is enough for me to exercise my own liberty by making other choices.

The sputtering I hear in the background is not my neighbor attempting to start his lawnmower (an event accompanied with artless cursing); the sputtering I hear is the attempted self-defense of a behavior that the vast majority commits unreflectively. Everyone does it; no one knows why.

ServantPoetry

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Submission

But that thou art my wisdom, Lord,
And both mine eyes are thine,
My mind would be extremely stirr'd
For missing my designe.

Were it not better to bestow
Some place and power on me?
Then should thy praises with me grow,
And share in my degree.

But when I thus dispute and grieve,
I do resume my sight,
And pilfring what I once did give,
Disseize thee of thy right.

How know I, if thou shouldst me raise,
That I should then raise thee?
Perhaps great places and thy praise
Do not so well agree.

Wherefore unto my gift I stand;
I will no more advise:
Onely do thou lend me a hand,
Since thou hast both mine eyes.