

# Laboring Out of Bounds



Ordained Servant  
February 2016

# *Ordained Servant Online*

## *A Journal for Church Officers*

E-ISSN 1931-7115

### **CURRENT ISSUE: LABORING OUT OF BOUNDS**

**February 2016**

### *From the Editor*

No, “Out of Bounds” is not the same as Outward Bound, although there are similarities as you will see in Allen Tomlinson’s article “Ministers Laboring ‘Out of Bounds.’ ” And yes, I know that the phrase “out of bounds” is not in our Form of Government. Here in the Presbytery of New York and New England we had a number of ministers “labor in churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” (FG 28.1). Our Form of Government adequately addresses the danger of compromising polity and theology (FG 28.2.a).

When I became a Christian in 1971, there were very few NAPARC churches in New England and none in New Hampshire. There were a few Reformed pastors who were working at reforming Congregational churches in Woodstock, Vermont; Limington, Maine; and Merrimack, New Hampshire. In 1980 a Reformed Congregational church was started in Upton, Massachusetts. Today three out of the four have become part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I have had the privilege of watching the church in Merrimack slowly move toward the OPC. It has taken nearly half a century of ministerial labor. The last half of that time was spent by Pastor Tomlinson, who patiently taught the Reformed Faith and Presbyterian church government beginning in 1988. In 1996 I met Allen for the first time and invited him to presbytery. Having already been convinced of our doctrine and practice, he joined the presbytery soon after. In December 2014 the congregation was particularized.

In his review article “Preachers, Take Aim!” Craig Troxel reviews Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*. A shorter review appeared in April 2015, but I thought a review article by the author of a book on the heart would be a nice addition to Pastor Lems’s excellent review. Pastor Troxel’s book is due out in 2017.

Sherif Gendy offers another in a series of review articles on Old Testament works with a new Old Testament theology by Fuller Theological Seminary professor John Goldingay, *OT Theology Volume One: Israel’s Gospel*. Gendy raises a number of serious concerns.

If you are tired of the news media and others muting the differences among the world’s religions in the name of tolerance, you will enjoy John Muether’s review of Stephen Prothero’s *God Is Not One* and want to read the book.

I review one of Packer’s latest: *Puritan Portraits* in which he surveys the ministries and writings of several major Puritans. These portraits form a rebuke so sweetly conveyed as to win every pastor’s heart.

Finally, don't miss our poem this month. John Milton's "On Time" reminds me of missionary Jim Elliot's remarkable statement: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

## CONTENTS

### Servant Training

- Allen Tomlinson, "Ministers Laboring 'Out of Bounds': Spreading the Reformed Faith and Growing the OPC"

### Servant Reading

- Craig Troxel, review article "Preachers, Take Aim!" Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*
- Sherif Gendy, review article Goldingay, *OT Theology Volume One: Israel's Gospel*
- John Muether, review Prothero, *God Is Not One*
- Gregory Reynolds, review Packer, *Puritan Portraits*

### Servant Poetry

- John Milton, "On Time"

### FROM THE ARCHIVES "Missions"

[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-22.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-22.pdf)

- "Baseball and the Supernatural." (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 15 (2006): 28–30.
- "The Spirituality of Mission Work." (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 18 (2009): 20–22.
- "Seven Lessons for Missionaries from the Ministry of John Paton." (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 20 (2011): 20–24.
- "Evangelism and the Local Church." (John S. Shaw) 23 (2014): 87–92.
- "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the City." (John S. Shaw) 23 (2014): 92–97.

---

*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 will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Work

## Ministers Laboring “Out of bounds”: Spreading the Reformed Faith and Growing the OPC

---

by **Allen G. Tomlinson**

This is a plea for our small but energetic denomination not to neglect a great opportunity to spread God’s truth, while at the same time possibly adding congregations to our number. How? By encouraging and aiding our pastors who are searching for pulpit ministries to consider ministering “out of bounds” (“out of ecclesiastical boundaries”). In the last decade the Presbytery of New York and New England has added three, long-established, independent congregational churches to their ranks, as OPC ministers labored “out of bounds” as pastors of these congregations. As the pastors of these flocks, these men were able to preach the gospel and teach the Reformed Faith, including (eventually) the biblical doctrine of connectionism. The result is, in our presbytery of twenty-seven congregations (including mission works), an 11 percent growth in the number of our churches. All of that with no financial outlay on the part of presbytery, since these congregations paid our pastors full salary and benefits, being long-established congregations. This did not leave any of our own pulpits vacant, as we have more ordained men than we do open pulpits. This was accomplished without using OPC financial resources, by loaning out only three of our “human resources,” which we could afford. Surely this is a good use of our ministers.

Our Book of Church Order, particularly in The Form of Government, chapter 28, lays down the rules for OPC ministers laboring in congregations outside our denomination.

### **Chapter XXVIII – Ministers Laboring outside the Church**

1. A minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may under certain circumstances and conditions labor in churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A candidate for ordination who seeks or intends to labor in such a church may under certain circumstances and conditions be ordained by a presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Such labor may be distinctly missionary in its nature and purpose in that it may provide the minister with the opportunity of ministering the gospel to unbelievers and of promoting the cause which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church represents. Such labor may, in certain cases, be that of a pastor or of a teacher, presenting the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the opportunity of providing other churches with a ministry which otherwise they might not enjoy.

2. Although it is impossible to delineate all the practical circumstances and conditions under which it may be proper for a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to engage in such labor, the following general principles based upon the standards of the Church must be adhered to in all cases:

a. Ministers cannot undertake to labor in other churches if such labor requires the performance of functions inconsistent with their ordination vows or with the other provisions of the standards of the Church. They cannot undertake such work if the relationship requires that they preach anything contrary to the system of truth taught in the Holy Scriptures or requires that they refrain from preaching the whole counsel of God. Such work cannot be undertaken if the relationship requires them to conduct worship that is not in accord with the standards of the Church. Ministers cannot participate in the government of such churches if such government is contrary to the principles of presbyterian government set forth in these standards. And such discipline as the relationship may require them to administer must be in accord with the principles of discipline set forth in these standards.

b. Ministers who perform such labor shall remain under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the churches concerned shall be advised of this fact.

c. Though the churches in which such ministers labor are in no respect under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the presbyteries and the general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall always exercise oversight of the work being performed by such ministers, and shall take due care that the work being performed is consistent with the standards of the Church.

d. Ministers may act as pastors of such churches provided none of the foregoing conditions is violated in the assumption of such a responsibility.

e. Presbyteries cannot install ministers as pastors of churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

f. If ministers are installed as pastors under other auspices, the installation must not be such as in any way prejudices the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over them. Such pastoral installation cannot take place if the installation formula prescribed by the church concerned prejudices this jurisdiction.

g. The ultimate objective of all such labor cannot be anything less than the establishment of such churches as churches of Presbyterian and Reformed testimony, provided that the churches concerned are not already such. To make the objective less than this would be inconsistent with the profession and vows made in ordination.

3. The principles of Sections 1 and 2 shall also apply to the relationship of ministers to nonecclesiastical religious organizations.

4. Such ministers shall report at least once each year to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction they are. This report shall concern their ministerial activities, and shall include especial reference to the relationship of these activities to the interest and welfare of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This chapter will act as the outline for this article, to guide our thoughts as far as the usefulness and good stewardship involved in encouraging ordained men or licentiates without an OPC charge to search for opportunities to preach the gospel in congregations outside of our denomination.

## **I. When and Where**

What occasions justify loaning out an OPC pastor to a congregation that is not a member church in the OPC?

1. In a situation which is clearly “missionary in its nature.” Sometimes a congregation has so little understanding of biblical truth that it might call a gospel preacher as pastor, even when the majority of the congregation does not understand the gospel. This happened here at First Church of Merrimack, New Hampshire, where I have been privileged to minister for over twenty-seven years, the last eighteen of those years as an OPC minister under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of New York and New England.

I did not come to Merrimack, nor have I continued to minister here, in a ministry that would fall under this category of “missionary in nature.” However, back in 1967 a minister in the PCA was called to become pastor here, a seasoned minister named Bruce Gordon. Bruce’s presbytery approved the call, and for thirteen very difficult years he maintained his Reformed ministerial integrity while preaching the gospel to a congregation that at first was far from evangelical. By the end of that thirteen years, the church was well on its way to being identified as a “Reformed” church. A large portion of the flock held to Calvinism (salvation by God’s eternal decree and sovereign grace) and many had some growing idea of covenant theology (versus Dispensationalism and the rationalistic liberalism they had been taught in the first half of the twentieth century).

Such work is VERY difficult, requires an incredible amount of patience, and sometimes ends in what appears to be, from a mere earthly point of view, failure. However, the Great Commission is furthered as the gospel goes forth to another group of sinners in need of salvation, whether they are converted or not. We have been good stewards of our gospel resources, even if they appear to bear little fruit.

2. In more established, already evangelical congregations, OPC ministers can provide a strong gospel and Reformed ministry to a congregation that is desiring to grow in their understanding and practice of God’s Word. Even if the congregation remains independent and never unites with the OPC, during the time of the OPC pastor’s ministry there, the Reformed Faith is spread, sinners are converted, believers are built up, and the congregation is a major step closer to being conformed to the New Testament pattern.

This is what has happened during my twenty-seven plus years at Merrimack. Building on Bruce Gordon’s labors, I have continued to preach Christ as the point of the entire Bible, and God in his mercy has converted sinners and built up the saints. Even if First Church had not voted to seek union with the OPC, the labors here would not be wasted. Through my being an OPC minister, our congregation was able to share in the support of presbytery mission works, OPC world missions, and a growing fellowship with fellow Reformed ministers, elders, and members in our area. Since the congregation did vote to seek union with the OPC, our presbytery and denomination gained a new congregation,

already long-established and self-supporting, to join with us in taking the gospel forth and in building one another up in the Reformed Faith.

This “out of bounds” labor, for the purpose of edifying an already established evangelical church in the Reformed Faith, can also be very difficult and frustrating. Patience is the number one quality required. The work cannot be rushed, including working with those who need to come to a genuine gospel faith, and with those believers who must be led to see the important doctrines of God’s Word that comprise the Reformed Faith. Many may resist, at least for a time. Those who can only labor under ideal situations, with every “T” crossed and every “i” dotted just so, should not send out their resumes. Those who are impatient when fellow sinners need to be taught the same truths, over and over again for a period of years, before they seem to be able to understand and embrace those truths as their own, either need to learn patience or find some other avenue in which to serve Christ. Of course, I would argue such impatience will not work if one wants to do the work of a Reformer or a missionary/evangelist. Our Reformers had to be patient men, more patient than I have ever been! What is more, perhaps all gospel ministry, if done biblically, requires such patience, inside or outside the OPC. Such patience can result in very rich fruit for God’s kingdom of grace, as we “do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:1, 16) or “grow weary of doing good” (Gal. 6:9).

## **II. “Out of Bounds” But not without Boundaries**

An OPC minister must never take upon himself a labor that will require him to function contrary to his ordination vows or to work against the standards of our church.

For example, he should never accept a call that will require him to preach other doctrine than the biblical doctrine as summed up in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. His concern must always be the entire Scriptures as God’s infallible Word and accordingly the need to preach “the whole counsel of God.” This does not mean that he is required to begin his preaching in a given congregation with the most difficult parts of our system of biblical doctrine, e.g., the decrees of God. With any group of people being introduced to the serious biblical truth emphasized in the historic Reformed Faith, we should begin at the beginning and, adding doctrine to doctrine, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, bring the flock to ever increasing degrees of doctrinal and practical maturity.

The best place to begin for many congregations is with the doctrine of the Bible or divine revelation. Then moving on to the Fall and the greatness of our sin, we can begin to teach God’s eternal solution. The key is TO MOVE SLOWLY, so as to give people the time needed to spiritually and intellectually assimilate what is often for them a radically new way of understanding the biblical data. However, at no time should the minister of the gospel back off from preaching the gospel itself or teaching any portion of God’s Word that he deems needful at that time.

Neither should an OPC minister agree to direct worship that is not in accordance with (regulated by) the Scriptures, worship that would contradict the standards of our church. Our Directory of Worship is very clear that there are practices that are untrue to the worship of the New Testament church, and also that there are areas where there is some acceptable variance. For example, our Directory for Worship allows for a congregation to have a choir, even if that is not the normal thing for the average OPC congregation. In

taking a charge out of bounds, the minister must be very clear that he cannot participate in, plan, or lead unbiblical worship.

This means he must be very careful before he accepts such a call to investigate what the out of bounds congregation expects of a pastor, how it worships before calling him, and whether or not they are willing to make any necessary adjustments for him to accept the call and continue to fulfill his ordination vows. If he is not given something of a “free hand,” it may not be a situation that is within the denominational boundaries for an out of bounds ministry.

The same is true when it comes to polity and discipline. The OPC minister, who is considering a call to a non-OPC congregation, should sit down with the leadership especially and find out how the church functions as far as rule and discipline. If the practice is so unbiblical as to be impossible for the minister to cooperate, even for a temporary period, he needs to explain this. He should be very irenic in his approach, explain that what they are doing is not biblical, and let them know that if they still want him to come, he would need to teach them a better way from God’s Word.

At this point there must be a boundary to the boundaries. I must assume that those who put together and voted for Chapter 28 of the Form of Government must have had this in view, for otherwise the allowance of out of bounds situations would be mere theory without the possibility of being practiced. The statement “if such government is contrary to the principles of presbyterian government as set forth in these standards” (FG 28.2.a) cannot mean that in every aspect of the out of bounds congregation there is no difference in polity between it and the OPC. There are slight differences even with our sister denominations with whom we have the closest ecclesiastical bonds. Congregational and independent churches are those that especially would be open to calling an OPC minister. If we demand a full acceptance of biblical connectionism, by definition an OPC ministry could never be approved for such churches. I have always assumed that the idea behind this expression must be that the out-of-bounds calling body, though perhaps not appreciating—yet—the place of elders and of connectionism, can still be served as long as the form of church government at the out-of-bounds congregation does not demand that the OPC minister violate his adherence to biblical, Presbyterian polity, even if that government stops short of all that we would desire.

For example, when I came to First Church back in 1988, it had deacons who functioned partly as biblical ruling elders and partly as biblical deacons, and a Prudential Committee that took care of some duties that I knew the deacons ought to be doing. I was able to work with the session (of deacons), so that together we proposed (after I had been here five full years) an internal change that resulted in ruling elders working with the pastors as the session, the elimination of the Prudential Committee, and a more biblically defined board of deacons. Then after another twenty-one years (I said it took patience, right?) the congregation was ready to vote to become Presbyterian. This work more often than not requires making changes *one baby step at a time*. Again, patience and perseverance can result in lasting fruit, to God’s glory and to the good of Christ’s Church.

### **III. Accountability**

OPC ministers remain under the jurisdiction of the OPC, in particular, of their presbytery. This *must* be understood and agreed to by the calling body. The out-of-



bounds congregation itself, obviously, is not under that jurisdiction. It is important that both the presbytery and the minister keep this in mind at all times. However, the church must understand that the presbytery has a right to oversee its own ministers' gospel labors, even when a minister is ministering out of bounds. He is to operate within the boundaries of our accepted standards, functioning only in a biblical fashion in all of his work, and his presbytery is to ensure that this is the case. This accountability includes an annual report to the presbytery, which should reaffirm his adherence to his ordination vows and review how this labor is not only for the good of the church at large but in line with the interest of the OPC in particular.

If an out of bounds congregation cannot agree to the OPC minister remaining accountable to his denomination and presbytery, and to his ordination vows and biblical convictions, he must not accept such a call, nor should the presbytery approve such a call, if my reading of Chapter 28 is correct.

#### **IV. The Big Purpose**

Our Form of Government affirms that the "ultimate objective" of such a situation "cannot be anything less than the establishment of such churches as churches of Presbyterian and Reformed testimony" (FG 28.2.g). Otherwise, the minister's profession and vows as an OPC minister would be violated.

Does this mean that if the session or congregation affirms at any point they absolutely will not become Presbyterian that the minister must leave? Some OPC men interpret Form of Government 28.2.g in this way. Others have told me they would not see it necessary for him to leave as long as no restriction is made on what he teaches, in other words, as long as he can continue to teach on all subjects biblically, including polity. I know that at certain points throughout my history here at First Church certain members have told me that our church could never change, but the session never made that affirmation to me nor forbade me to teach on the subject. They never forbade me to teach on any biblical text or to teach in line with any part of the Confession of Faith. As a matter of fact, the church bylaws in effect when I came affirmed that a man could minister here only if he subscribed to the form of doctrine taught in the WCF. The bylaws did not limit this to just some of the WCF, but to the entire document.

It seems to me that the answer to this question would depend on the situation. In some places, it might appear at a given time that there is a totally closed mind and heart to our doctrine. So, even though there is no direct prohibition of teaching that doctrine, the minister should probably begin to seek another place of ministry. In other places, even though there is not an immediate acceptance of the full biblical teaching, as long as the minister is not restricted in his teaching and preaching of the truth, he might want to continue, praying and laboring to see people's minds and hearts transformed by God's Word.

#### **Conclusion**

How does a minister looking for a place to serve find out about independent or congregational churches needing a pastor? When I was a young man, I found out about First Church through the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, of which I

was a member at that time. However, if I had been OPC back in 1988, I could only have found out about an open pulpit in an independent congregation by word of mouth. Today with the Internet this is much easier. Many independent churches will post their need with one or more of the websites available for this need.

What advice would I offer to an OPC licentiate or minister who is desirous of considering an out of bounds opportunity?

1. Be very careful in the interviewing process to make sure you discuss *all* differences with the session and congregation of such a church. Be certain that you express very clearly, up front, restrictions that you have placed yourself under as an OPC minister. Do not proceed until you have talked through these differences and unless they agree with your need to maintain your ordination vows. Isn't it better to not "get married" than to "get married and then divorced," as the normal rule? Do not enter into a relationship that is doomed from the start.

2. Remember that things will be different in an independent church, as far as some of the practices and many of the generally held opinions in the congregation and/or session. This is why an OPC minister would take this route in the first place, to help biblically educate and strengthen a congregation that is open to learning God's Word but its faith and practice fall short at this time. Make sure you can live with the differences, at least in the short term, until the congregation becomes more open to your teaching.

3. Do not forget that *patience* is the key. Do not rush anything. Take your time. Especially take time to lay a solid foundation in teaching before you advocate change in practice. As a very young minister in Iowa, I preached a three-week series on a subject, and then sought to have the congregation take what was for them a fairly radical step. Talk about failure! It did not "fly" at all; it never got off the ground. I asked an experienced minister in that denomination where I went wrong, and he told me that three sermons were nowhere near enough teaching nor enough time for them to reflect and make the teaching their own. Maybe three years! This should not be a problem for the minister of the gospel; we are in this for the "long haul" anyway, correct?

4. Faith is essential. Trust the Holy Spirit to use his Word and the other biblical ordinances to convert and transform and to change minds and hearts. Preach and minister, trusting in the Holy Spirit to accomplish his will, whether that results in this congregation becoming OPC or not. Our chief desire is eternal fruit that glorifies God.

OPC ministers laboring out of bounds can help other churches come to a deeper appreciation and practice of biblical truth, to God's glory. They might also be used to add Reformed congregations to our number. If you are an OPC minister or licentiate and cannot find an OPC pulpit from which to proclaim God's Word, have you considered looking for an independent pulpit open to hearing the Reformed truth?

**Allen G. Tomlinson** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as pastor of First Church of Merrimack (OPC) in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

# ServantReading

## Preacher, Take Aim!

A Review Article

---

by A. Craig Troxel

*The Heart is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text*, by Murray Capill. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014, 258 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Imagine an older minister whimsically telling a newly ordained man, “You will always need more of books on preaching.” This may be your reaction to yet another book on preaching (it is often mine). And then there’s the sub-title on something you’ve never thought about: *application* in preaching. Okay, so you have thought about that and the debate is closed. Those reasons alone may dissuade you from ever cracking open this book or any other new book on preaching. Or perhaps your preference is to “dust off” that older, much-loved volume—surely a proper instinct (after sampling the old, few desire the new, because they say “the old is good”). Much of what Mr. Capill opens for us is rather vintage, even if it is under a new label. So whether your school is redemptive-historical or puritanical, topical or expository, you should give this book a try and see if there is something here that would benefit your preaching—assuming of course that it needs improvement.

Developing a spiritual gift is not possible if we’re not open to growth, or if we’re too quick to dismiss anything alien to our beloved paradigm on preaching. Or both. When I was in my first pastorate an older minister told me that he did not care for expository preaching because it was boring. I knew immediately that what he said could not possibly be true, because I was an expository preacher! (The memory of my thoughts still makes me shudder.) My perspective has since changed; not in my convictions about expositing Scripture, but in my desire to become proficient in this craft sometime before I die. I have also come to appreciate what Geoffrey Thomas once quipped, that so much of what takes place in evangelical pulpits is really nothing more than a glorified Bible study, which gets at the concern of this book. Capill rejoices in the revival of expository preaching, but he would much prefer a revival of *compelling* expositional preaching. Preaching calls for more than undiluted exegesis that is dumped upon kindly congregations who know what longsuffering is on a weekly basis. More is required. Application is required. And Murray Capill deserves a respectful read, given his several pastorates in New Zealand and Australia, and his teaching on pastoral ministry and preaching at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia.

Capill’s basic premise is that “effective expository preaching takes place when biblical faithfulness and insightful application are inextricably bound together” (14).

Nothing revolutionary there. But understanding how the two work together is the challenge. And our deficiencies prove it, whether they stem from flawed views of preaching and application or from deficits in training and gifts. Nevertheless the task remains, taking what Scripture teaches and getting it to “stick” or apply to our listeners. That’s what biblical preaching is, applying gospel truth to the heart (56). And it must be holistic application—applying all of God’s Word to all of a person’s life. There are three stages in this process of preaching application.

The first stage is to appreciate the purpose of God’s Word. Capill makes his case chiefly from 2 Timothy 3:16 and argues that the Word has four main purposes: 1) to teach the truth and rebuke false doctrine; 2) to train in godliness and correct wrong-doing; 3) to test the heart and bring conviction; 4) to encourage and exhort. Each of these purposes are explained at length and then illustrated from Scripture. Some will say that he has been somewhat arbitrary in the categories he uses, but none could fault them for their propriety. Personally, I think he has unnecessarily restricted the vocabulary’s range of meaning and significance in 2 Timothy 3:16 (e.g., “rebuke” pertains to life as much as it does to doctrine).

The second stage is to make sure that the preacher’s “reservoir” remains full. The reservoir is “all that lives within a preacher” (81). As any preacher knows, just as he pours himself into the sermon, so also the sermon comes through him, if not sucking life out of him—as Ian MacPherson wrote, “every real sermon that a man preaches appreciably shortens his days.”<sup>1</sup> In the preacher’s preparation the biblical text has already begun to stir in him, move him, and connect itself to much of what he has previously read, thought, lived, and known—it is expanding him. And he must continue to fill the reservoir through his walk with God, in prayer, through his theological knowledge, and by keenly experiencing and observing the fullness of life. If he does not, then the reservoir will run dry, and it will eventually become evident in his preaching—to the spiritual detriment of those he serves.

The third stage in the process of preaching application is hitting the target, the heart. Since the “end goal of preaching is to draw people to love God with all their heart,” we must know something about the heart, the core that defines who we are (97). Capill explains that the faculties of the human heart are the *mind* (the rational center of our being), the *conscience* (the warning system), the *will* (what determines choices and actions), and the *passions* (what we desire and feel); all which work in conjunction, not independently. The task then is to preach the text so that it finds its mark by impacting the whole heart.

Effective application will aim for a change of heart. This inevitably entails confronting the idols of the heart with skill and grace, as well as with an appreciation for the diversity of those who hear the Word. The diversity Capill has in view is the spiritual condition of each and every soul. Most Reformed pastoral theologies offer similar taxonomies (e.g., Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*). Capill offers as simple a grid as you will ever find, but it is useful. He states that for some people things are going well and for others things are not; some know it and some do not. Whatever grid a sensitive pastor uses, he lovingly thinks of his people as his sermon simmers in his own heart, and he remembers how they are spread across the spectrum of spiritual maturity, mood, and discernment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ian MacPherson, *The Burden of the Lord* (London: Epworth, 1955), 47.

With these things in mind and with the biblical text in hand, the preacher must “state it, ground it, impress it, and apply it” (151). To do this he has several arrows in his quiver to ensure that he hits his mark: He appeals to sound judgment, he anticipates objections, he offers incentives, and he speaks directly and passionately, using illustrations that clarify and words that are vivid.

With a book that emphasizes the heart it would be tempting to stereotype his approach as partial to pietism. However, Capill provides a chapter on the importance of “preaching the kingdom,” by which he means preaching about the Christian’s responsibility and calling in society. On this point some will not favor the concerted transformational bent of his comments; but post-millennial brethren will rejoice! Nor will all agree with his comment that we should consider “the whole of life as the setting for true worship” (183). Nevertheless, his larger point should be heard and granted: True piety is *firstly* of the heart, but not *only* of the heart (177). We must not neglect empowering our people’s confidence in their vocation, namely that God has called them to be salt, light, and leaven in the world.

Capill also dedicates chapters to preaching application from the narrative sections of Scripture and applying the indicative and imperative moods of Scriptural teaching (interestingly he lists subjunctives as a separate category). Last of all he speaks of our holistic preparation for this task and gives practical advice.

So what are the strengths and weaknesses of this book?

One general strength of this book lies in its canvassing the overall task of preparing a sermon, from beginning to end. It is always profitable to reflect upon the process of preaching, especially if we can do it living in the mind of someone more experienced. Moreover, when we are forced to view preaching from another preacher’s perspective, it can bring more clarity and depth, and if we’re open to it, more width. The preacher who is dedicated to expositional preaching will find a ready ally and “Barnabas” in Murray Capill. If you have already decided that you disagree with him on application (even though you have not yet read his book!), you may want to risk it anyway, with the possibility that you can learn something to make your preaching more interesting, assuming of course that it needs improvement in that way.

As for content, the book’s leading strength is its explanation of the heart. Too many books assume that we all know what is meant by the heart. Not true. Although he makes no such claim, Capill’s model, more or less, mirrors the Puritans’ understanding of the heart. I observe this to his credit, especially since his burden is to prove his view from Scripture, not from history. In this area the Puritans are at their best and the modern preacher will find more depth if he can replicate (not imitate!) their skill in speaking to the heart. I would diverge slightly from Capill’s model. My studies of the heart have convinced me that Scripture gives us three (not four) faculties of the heart: the mind, the will, and the desires (or what the Puritans called the “affections”). Contrary to Capill I believe “conscience” is a term running parallel to other biblical vocabulary that describe the inner person (e.g., “soul,” “spirit”). It is not a distinct faculty of the heart. John Owen usually leaned toward the threefold grid, but on occasion he did include the conscience like our author. So Mr. Capill is in handsome company and my quibble is inconsequential for his thesis. The principal issue is that he works from a robust Reformed anthropology with consistency and complements it with a clear grasp of God’s grace in Christ. One

senses that it would be a privilege to sit under this man's preaching and hear sermons saturated with a "gospel tone"—to use Robert L. Dabney's language.

I do have a question about how he integrates the faculties of the heart and how they work together. He states that the mind "is at the top" of the heart and is "the entrance point of the soul," and that "the mind comes first" and is the "entrance point to the other faculties of the heart" (103, 105). Whereas the passions reside at the bottom of the heart, representing the deepest and most powerful forces of the heart (103, 119). He sees a pecking order here in preaching. We must appeal to the mind first and then work our way "down" through the conscience and will and last of all affecting the passions. He does not defend this order from Scripture. I think that would be difficult. It would be better to communicate how all the faculties are constantly and mutually influencing one another. But I hesitate to critique him too briskly on this point for two reasons. First of all, Jerry Bridges and Sinclair Ferguson say something similar to Capill and those are two names not to reckon with flippantly. Secondly, it is easy to see his point: preaching that aims for the heart cannot, and must not bypass the mind. On that we can all agree. Besides such an emphasis provides a refreshing antidote to the sooty post-modern air many are breathing these days, wittingly or not.

This book is a welcomed encouragement to every preacher who earnestly desires to be faithful to the text he preaches and in the task of preaching, namely, to target the hearts of the members of his flock. Murray Capill has thought carefully and extensively about this task. He can help us to improve in the unspeakable privilege we have to proclaim the one who has graciously and eternally taken up his lordly residence in our hearts.

**A. Craig Troxel** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as pastor of Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Illinois, who also serves on the Committee on Christian Education.*

# ServantReading

## Old Testament Theology

### A Review Article

---

by Sherif Gendy

*Old Testament Theology Volume One: Israel's Gospel*, by John Goldingay. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015, 940 pages, \$45.00, paper.

This is the first of a three-volume Old Testament theology in which John Goldingay, professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, attempts to formulate the theology of the Old Testament without looking at it through a Christian or even New Testament lens, as he admits. In this volume, Goldingay treats the Old Testament as the story of God's relationship with the world and with Israel. Goldingay's approach is that of a narrative theology, highlighting how the Old Testament gospel comes in the shape of a narrative that tells Israel's story and God's involvement in a particular sequence of events in the world. Goldingay tells the story of Israel's gospel as a series of divine acts. These acts form ten chapters that are preceded by chapter 1, which is the introduction, and followed by postscript.

From the outset, Goldingay lays out his goal to discuss the Old Testament's own theological content and implications. He states that he does not focus on the Old Testament as witness to Christ, pointing to Christ, or as prophesying or predicting Christ. He does not talk in terms of that which is concealed in the old and is revealed in the new. Goldingay does not consider the Old Testament as foreshadowing the New Testament nor does he see it as law succeeded by the gospel. Rather, he examines the biblical order of God's creation and interactions with the world and Israel. Throughout the chapters, Goldingay uses "First Testament" to refer to the Old Testament and "Yhwh" to refer to Israel's God.

Ignoring the activity of Christ in the Old Testament presents a theological pitfall and goes against the essence of the Old Testament's ontological claims about the oneness of God's being. The apostolic confession that *Jesus is one with the God of Israel who sent him* is a theological judgment made necessary by claims about the oneness of God's being inherent in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4). The Father and the Son are one in their being, and the incarnation of Christ reveals his relationship with the Father—a relationship that *did not begin to be true* at the incarnation, rather, it has always been true from eternity. Therefore, if Christ's claim to be the revealer of the Father is true (Matt. 11:27), then Christ *has always been* the revealer of the Father from eternity. Because this ontological reality about the incarnate Jesus holds true for both testaments, it ultimately establishes the ontological preconditions for the Christological witness inherent in the Old Testament. Thus, it is simply mistaken to suggest that reading the Old Testament in its own terms does not allow for a Christological witness.

Following the introduction, Goldingay discusses in chapter 1 God's act of creation in terms of God's adventure and working with "Ms. Insight" who was there at the beginning with God (Prov. 8). Goldingay speaks of God's activities at creation where God thought, spoke, birthed, prevailed, created, built, arranged, shaped, delegated, planted, and relaxed. According to Goldingay, God prevailed in creation by defeating other dynamic forces and bringing order

and structure. Worthy of note here is Goldingay's take on the Hebrew verb **בָּרָא** (*bara*) in Genesis 1:1. He argues that it does not refer to creating out of nothing, or the beginning of things. Rather, its emphasis is on the sovereignty of what God achieves. In doing so, Goldingay reads the creation account against the Babylonian story, *Enuma Elish*, and argues that the narrative of Genesis 1 presupposes the existence of matter, or raw material, for God to use. The creation of man and woman in God's image reflects, according to Goldingay, their commission to master the world as God delegated his authority to them over the rest of the animate world. While Goldingay brings new and insightful nuances to the creation account, he presents some challenges for many well-established biblical notions like creation *ex nihilo*—from nothing. Aside from the Babylonian story, it is difficult to justify exegetically from Genesis 1 the existence of raw material that God used for creation. Creation *ex nihilo* is the precise conclusion to which one arrives through responsible hermeneutics and careful exegesis of Genesis 1.

In chapter 2 Goldingay explores the different aspects of the Fall of man and the consequences of that fall, covering the events from Eden to Babel (Gen. 1–11). One of the results of the fall, according to Goldingay, is the patriarchy that ruled between Adam and Eve, which is indicated in Adam's naming of Eve in Genesis 3:20. Goldingay argues that Genesis 1–2 shows that its society was able to portray egalitarianism. He does not explain, however, how Adam's naming of Eve is an indication of patriarchy or how before the fall egalitarianism was in view.

In discussing Adam and Eve's action in Genesis 3, Goldingay prefers to call it "failure" and "loss" over "sin" or "fall," claiming that the Bible's two Testaments do not speak of this event as "sin." This is not true since Romans 5:12, 15–17 are among some biblical passages that clearly speak of what happened in Genesis 3 as sin. Goldingay also suggests that the creation's groaning in Romans 8 did not necessarily begin after the fall. He argues that the world by its nature is subject to decay and death from the beginning. A close reading of Romans 8, however, reveals that just as the creation has been groaning (v. 2), believers also groan as they wait eagerly for adoption, which is the redemption of their bodies (v. 23). Thus, both the creation and the humans' groaning have to do with the fall and the state of misery, which only consummated redemption will reverse.

Chapters 4–6 focus on God's promise to Israel's ancestors through his commitment to Abraham (chap. 4), his delivering of Israel through Moses in the exodus (chap. 5), and God's speaking at Sinai and disciplining through the wilderness (chap. 6). In discussing Yhwh's covenant promise to Abraham, Goldingay argues that throughout Israel's history Yhwh often takes the risk of serious self-binding where there is no way out of fulfilling the commitment. This is true as far as one considers the true recipient of God's promises who perfectly obeys him. Paul tells us that Christ is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), and as such, all the promises were given to him and fulfilled in him (Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20). Therefore, because Christ's loyalty and perfect obedience are sure, Yhwh's promises are truly self-binding and he ultimately fulfills what he promises. However, to Abraham and his descendants according to the flesh, Yhwh's covenant promises are contingent upon Israel's loyalty or lack thereof. Israel's loyalty, in the form of obedience, is met with covenant blessings (Deut. 28:1–14), and Israel's disloyalty, in the form of disobedience, is met with covenant curses (Deut. 28:15–68).

Yhwh's promise to Abraham has three elements: gaining land, becoming a people, and becoming a blessing. These elements find partial fulfillment and are also imperiled. Goldingay masterfully unfolds the details of how these elements play out in the history of Israel's ancestors. In describing God's act as a king in the exodus, Goldingay speaks of the God who delivers his people, remembers, rescues, and acts forcefully through signs and wonders.



Through the exodus, Yhwh shows his insistence to reclaim his son and reveals himself and his name. Following the exodus, Goldingay speaks of Yhwh's sealing his covenant at Sinai, which involved his requirement of Israel to be committed to the covenant by obeying its stipulations. Yhwh's meeting with Israel in Sinai reveals his splendor, goodness, and grace, which necessitates sacramental cleansing. Moreover, at Sinai Yhwh is setting up models for Israel. There are the models of servanthood where Moses is portrayed as a prophet, priest, teacher, and leader. There are also models of peoplehood where Israel is to be a family, assembly, organization, army, congregation, hierocracy, cult, whole, movement, and settlement.

Chapters 7–9 cover the God who gave the land, accommodated from Joshua to Solomon, and wrestled from Solomon to the exile. Here Goldingay continues to lay out the main events in the wilderness and Israel's experiences with God. He highlights the people's protest and rebellion on the journey and Yhwh's reaction. The pattern set in the wilderness is repeated in the people's subsequent life in the land. Goldingay rightly identifies the correlation between Israel's experience and the church's; the church needs to consider its destiny in light of Israel, being both holy and sinful, thus continually needing repentance and reform. This correlation is only possible and meaningful, however, through the work of Christ, which Goldingay fails to admit.

In discussing Israel's wars as the means of receiving God's gift, Goldingay suggests four models working together as follows: 1) military campaign where Israel came from outside and the process was abrupt; 2) migration where Israel came from outside and the process was gradual; 3) social revolution where Israel came from inside and the process was abrupt; and 4) cultural differentiation where Israel came from inside and the process was gradual. Goldingay's textual justification for these models is not convincing and lacks coherent presentation.

Moving from Joshua to Solomon, Goldingay explains the stories of Israel's life in the land, showing us the tragic dimension to human experience. According to Goldingay, these stories offer a series of studies of men doing what they have to do and portraits of women living in a man's world. These stories give men raw material for reflection on their masculinity and give women pictures of what they need to know about men. Likewise, these stories manifest further variety in the way Yhwh's activity interacts with human experience and decision making. Reducing the theological implications of these stories to such socio-economic interests and concerns misplaces their significance in redemptive history.

Goldingay describes the history from Solomon to the exile as the history of God's disappointments. Since Yhwh alone is the God of Israel and ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations, he expects Israel to give him an exclusive commitment by wholeheartedly relying on him and maintaining proper worship in the temple. Israel's failure, however, provoked Yhwh's reactions of anger, rejection tempered by grace, pity, long-temperedness, and mercy that eventually runs out. Goldingay shows how Yhwh works by using natural and human processes, taking initiatives behind the scenes, sending prophets with bewildering commissions, using chance and the inexplicable, and through supernatural and natural force and violence.

Goldingay refers to the prophets as men with mysterious power whom God sends to take initiatives as humans who embody the divine. For Goldingay, the prophets are seers and sentinels who announce Yhwh's intention although they are unreliable since their words do not always come true. Rather than describing the prophets as unreliable, it is better to speak of historical contingencies intervening between the prophets' predictions and their fulfillments.

These contingencies arise when certain events, which take place after the prophetic words, direct the course of history in ways not anticipated by prophetic announcements.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 10 is about God preserving Israel through the exile and restoration. In the exile Yhwh abandoned his people, and in the restoration he returned to them. Goldingay argues that the biblical texts portray Israel after the return from the exile as a community that is restored, worshipping, listening to Moses's teaching, distinct from the Gentiles, and subservient. In the context of the exile and the restoration, the First Testament presents Ezra as a priest and theologian, Nehemiah as a man who prays and builds walls, Daniel as a wise politician, and Esther as an intrepid woman.

The last chapter is about God sending Jesus. Goldingay speaks of Jesus as a herald of God's reign, prophet and teacher, the man anointed as king, word embodied, divine surrender, and light of the world.

In the postscript, Goldingay discusses the relationship of Old Testament theology to history. He asserts that the Old Testament narratives were written in familiar ancient genres, corresponding to the nature of history writing in that ancient world. Therefore, biblical authors did not confine themselves to factual material in their narrative writing, that is to say, they did not intend to communicate facts or factual history. Using the story of the conquest of Jericho as an illustration, Goldingay refers to the archeological evidence that Jericho was unoccupied in Joshua's day. Thus, the biblical story does not have the form of a factual narrative. He also asserts that Old Testament writers used their inspired creativity as they used their imaginations in composing speeches, conversations, sermons, and prayers that were not in fact uttered by the people to whom they are attributed. Goldingay believes that Genesis 1 and 2 are imaginative parables about the way God created the world.

One is wondering how Goldingay's views on history and biblical narratives could be consistent with his claims of believing in the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament narrative. Old Testament narratives present themselves as factual history and later Old Testament writers, inspired by the same God, understood them and used these narratives in their writings as factual history. In similar ways, Jesus and the apostles treated these narratives as an accurate representation of true history. Biblical writers did not doubt the historicity of such narratives when they built their writings on what God has done in the history of Israel as faithfully recorded in Israel's Scriptures. Redemption is rooted in history and unfolds itself in historical realities.

Although this volume is full of subheadings, there is no conclusion at the end of each chapter, and so it is hard at times to follow Goldingay's main points and identify his arguments. He admits his weakness in finding it hard to write a conclusion. He does so because, according to Goldingay, the Bible story has no conclusion. This assessment is inaccurate since the biblical story does in fact have a conclusion in the finished work of Christ. The redemptive plan of God reaches its goal in the inauguration of God's kingdom through Christ's first advent, continuation of this kingdom through the work of his Spirit in the church, and consummation of the kingdom at Christ's second coming.

**Sherif Gendy** is a licentiate in the Presbytery of the Midwest (OPC), a PhD candidate at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and serves as Arabic Theological Editor for Third Millennium Ministries in Casselberry, Florida.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Richard L. Pratt, "Historical Contingences and Biblical Predictions: An Inaugural Address Presented to the Faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary," [http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/th.pratt.historical\\_contingencies.pdf](http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/th.pratt.historical_contingencies.pdf).

# ServantReading

## God Is Not One *by Stephen R. Prothero*

---

by John R. Muether

*God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter*, by Stephen R. Prothero. New York: HarperOne, 2010, \$26.99.

Boston University professor of religion Stephen Prothero has a beef with the prevailing viewpoint of many colleagues in his field. He is weary of the approach to the study of world religions that pictures all religious pilgrims ascending the same mountain. If Jews and Confucians and Hindus begin at different points in the foothills, they will eventually converge at the top. Best-selling champions of this view include Karen Armstrong, Joseph Campbell, and Bill Moyers.

Prothero presents an alternative perspective in this follow-up to *Religious Illiteracy* (his 2007 exposé of the shocking ignorance of world religions on the part of Americans). Neither book should be mistaken for a conservative Christian analysis of religion. Still, while he describes himself as a “religiously confused” Christian, Prothero provides much clarity in *God is Not One*, especially in the light of recent controversies on the proper conduct of inter-religious dialogue.

According to Prothero, this Enlightenment approach from which he dissents demands a condescending dismissal of the particularity of religious truth claims and practices. He finds this thinking common among his undergraduate students in religion. If the study of world religions demands a measure of winsome disagreement, his students characteristically excel at cordiality, but they fail in discerning genuine differences. While intentions may be conciliatory, the results are catastrophic. Religious tolerance makes the world a safer place, but false assertions of religious unity make it a far more dangerous place, Prothero insists.

He explains that “religion does not exist in the abstract” any more “than you can speak language in general” (9). Particular religions have different goals and aspirations, and he proceeds to analyze them in terms of problem, solution, technique, and exemplar. Christianity, for example, defines the human condition as sin, the solution as salvation through Jesus Christ, the technique (and here he aims to be inclusive) “some combination of faith and good works.” His exemplars range from the saints of Roman Catholicism to ordinary believers of Protestantism. In contrast, Muslims see humanity less in a “fallen” sinful condition than as wanderers from the straight path. The solution is submission to Allah, the technique is the practice of the five pillars, and the exemplar, of course is the great and last prophet, Muhammad.

Prothero goes on to survey eight major world religions, and the book as a whole is an engaging introduction, though not without its weaknesses. Even the ordering of his chapters, from the greatest religion to the smallest, will prove unsettling for the Christian reader, because he begins with Islam. Anticipating Christian objections, he provides this wake-up

call. "To presume that the conversation about the great religions starts with Christianity is to show your parochialism and your age," he counters. "The nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have belonged to Christianity. The twenty-first belongs to Islam" (63). After Christianity, he goes on to cover Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoruba Religion, Judaism, and Daoism.

His treatment of Islam is a helpful primer on its origins and history. He devotes careful attention to both the unity and the diversity in worldwide Islam. In the process he takes aim at the simplistic and sentimental claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Irreconcilable differences separate the Father of Jesus Christ from the God of Muhammad. Christians and Muslims will live more cordially with each other only when they reckon with these differences and not deny them. (Note well, disaffected Wheaton College alumni and friends.)

Less reliable is the author's treatment of Christianity. Reformed Protestantism is given the briefest of treatments, equal to that of Anabaptists and half of the attention devoted to Anglicans. Included among the myriad of Protestant denominations are Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Science.

One bonus feature in the book worth noting is his treatment of a ninth "world religion" in his final chapter, "A Brief Coda on the New Atheism." While acknowledging the existence of "friendly atheists," the focus falls on the angry take-no-prisoners rhetoric of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others. Although they would strongly object to finding themselves in such company, Prothero considers them religious for several reasons. First, its advocates argue "with the conviction of zealots" (318) rhetorically matching "the dogmatism of their fundamentalist foes" (322). More significantly, atheism manifests the functional elements of a religion: it has a creed, an ethical code, a community, and a cultus (yes, they even have their own rituals). His insights are accompanied by a lively rhetoric as in this sample: "Like fundamentalists and cowboys, [new atheists] live in a Manichean world in which forces of light are engaged in a great apocalyptic battle against forces of darkness" (322).

By dissenting from both the mountain climbers that would commend the unity of all religions and the skeptical dismissal of anything religious by new atheists, Prothero promotes the cultivation of humility as an essential outcome of the study of world religions. Humility does not necessarily demand a relativism that erodes the certainty of one's theological convictions. But it may make room for greater civility in a world where religious pluralism is dramatically intensifying. The author makes this appeal in his conclusion:

I too hope for a world in which human beings can get along with their religious rivals. I am convinced, however, that we need to pursue this goal through new means. Rather than beginning with the sort of Godthink that lumps all religions together in one trash can or one treasure chest, we must start with a clear-eyed understanding of the fundamental differences in both belief and practice between Islam and Christianity, Confucianism and Hinduism. (335)

**John R. Muether**, a ruling elder at Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Oviedo, Florida, is library director at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, and historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

# ServantReading

## Puritan Portraits by J. I. Packer

---

by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Puritan Portraits: J. I. Packer on Selected Classic Pastors and Pastoral Classics*, by J. I. Packer. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2012, 188 pages, \$14.99, paper.

James Innes Packer is one of the pioneers of the Puritan studies that restored, or in most cases introduced, them to the evangelical world. A generation before, secular Ivy League historians Perry Miller and Edmund S. Morgan had rejuvenated the Puritans' reputations in academic circles. Miller and Morgan demonstrated how different the real Puritans were from the late Victorian prudery with which they had become perennially confused.

Packer is his usual lucid and interesting self as a thinker and writer. But this extremely readable style only amplifies the deep connection Packer has with his subject. He sets the stage with a chapter explaining the Puritan clergy and their message in general categories: "Puritan Pastors at Work." Their literary legacy is their most important contribution to the church since by it we may learn the nature of their ministries. Packer appreciates and thus elaborates on the profound blend of deep theology and pastoral application.

Part II gives the profiles of seven Puritan pastors, highlighting a major work of each: Henry Scougal, Stephen Charnock, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, John Owen, John Flavel, and Thomas Boston. Actually, Packer explains three of Boston's works. Part III presents "Two Puritan Paragons," in the work of William Perkins and Richard Baxter. He concludes with a very useful epilogue: "The Puritan Pastor's Programme."

Not only is Packer imbued with Puritan divinity but he is a theologian who is painfully aware of the modern situation of the Western church.

And have you not noticed that much of Western Christianity is treading this path to extinction? It seems clearly so to me. What then can stop the rot and turn the tide? One thing only, in my view: a renewed embrace of the Puritan ideal of ministerial service. Without this nothing can stop the drift downhill. (181)

I leave you with a brief sample of my favorite Thomas Boston treatise, *The Crook in the Lot* (1737). During my college years my wife and I attended the auction of the George Woodbury estate in Bedford, New Hampshire, where I had been raised. He had left his Harvard post as a professor to restore his ancestral estate and rebuild the John Goffe Mill. This estate had a mysterious aura for those of us raised in the area. Woodberry had restored the mill to saw lumber and grind grain as it had done centuries before. I remember accompanying my mother to have wheat ground. So even though we were poor students, we felt compelled to attend the auction on a fair summer day.

I had just begun to collect antiquarian books and found a box of leather treasures. The one that caught my eye was Boston's bewildering title *The Crook in the Lot*. It was a 1791 London edition with Eliza B. G. Woodbury's signature, dated 1811. I didn't dare bid when the box came on the block. It would have been little use as it went for a price way beyond my meager budget.

But several years later I found the very same book in a bookstore for a price I could manage. So I discovered that the crook has nothing to do with theft, but with the wacky path life in a fallen world takes us down. The book is made up of three sermons on how to deal with "losses and crosses" (104–13). Ecclesiastes 7:13 inspired the book's title: "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" (KJV). Packer sums up Boston's pastoral conclusion:

A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them; and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense; for it is the . . . Word alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and consequently, designs becoming the divine perfections. (110)

So what of today, queries Packer? He wisely observes that Boston's biblical teaching will cause serious cognitive dissonance for the modern Christian because the world around us teaches that "trouble-free living is virtually a human right" (112). How necessary, then, is the wisdom of this little book in the present.

This is a masterful selection, given the volume of material available. It is laid out in bite-sized portions, not for fast-food consumption, but for slow, thoughtful chewing. For the busy pastor Packer's summaries will remind us of the gist of works we have already read and stimulate us to read them over or read some for the first time.

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

# ServantPoetry

---

John Milton (1608-1674)

## On Time

Fly envious Time, till thou run out thy race,  
Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours,  
Whose speed is but the heavy Plummets pace;  
And glut thy self with what thy womb devours,  
Which is no more then what is false and vain,  
And meerly mortal dross;  
So little is our loss,  
So little is thy gain.  
For when as each thing bad thou hast entomb'd,  
And last of all, thy greedy self consum'd,  
Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss  
With an individual kiss;  
And Joy shall overtake us as a flood,  
When every thing that is sincerely good  
And perfectly divine,  
With Truth, and Peace, and Love shall ever shine  
About the supreme Throne  
Of him, t'whose happy-making sight alone,  
When once our heav'nly-guided soul shall clime,  
Then all this Earthy grosnes quit,  
Attir'd with Stars, we shall for ever sit,  
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time.