



All

Things to

All Men

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From the Editor

Christian liberty is often reduced to the things *adiaphora* (indifferent). And these things are often believed to be free from any spiritual considerations. But, while they do not directly involve the moral absolutes of Scripture, is it true that God's Word offers no wisdom in the use of the things indifferent? Are they indifferent in every respect? That is the question Andy Wilson addresses in "Exercising Wisdom in 'All Things.'" While you may not agree with the conclusion in Wilson's example of exercising biblical wisdom in the use of tattoos, there is much useful food for thought here.

Don't miss the second chapter of Danny Olinger's biography of Vos, "Geerhardus Vos: Education in America and Europe, 1881–1888."

David Booth reviews a very thoughtful book by David VanDrunen in an important new series on the five *solas* of the Reformation with the series motto, "What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters." *God's Glory Alone* covers profound theological and historical territory and offers insightful aspects of living for God's glory today.

Reviewing Os Guinness's new book *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization*, William Edgar writes that "Guinness brings bright, new insights into both the causes and cure for the malaise of our day." Guinness offers trenchant cultural analysis, which is always helpful and interesting, even if his plea is often as much to reform Western civilization as it is the church. Fortunately he puts the church first in our reforming priorities.

John Fesko reviews Christopher Holmes's new work, *The Holy Spirit*. This is the first of a series of new studies in dogmatics. "As series editors, Allen and Swain have lined up a formidable roster of contributors for their New Studies in Dogmatics," writes Fesko, "and this first installment bodes well for the rest of the series."

Stephen Migotsky reviews Joel Beeke's and Terry Slachter's *Encouragement for Today's Pastors: Help from the Puritans*. The Puritans were remarkable pastors as well as formidable theologians. Here they bring pastoral wisdom and encouragement to pastors themselves, which is as relevant today as it was in the seventeenth century.

Finally, our poetry this month is "The Leaves below My Town," a reflection on a famous poem by Dylan Thomas, "Poem in October."

I would like to know if you find the “From the Archives” feature useful. It also appears that no one is using the subject and author indexes on the OS page. Please let me know if you have ever found these indexes helpful.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

ServantLiving

Exercising Wisdom about “All Things”

by Andy Wilson

When I point out the problems inherent in attempting to make the gospel appear culturally relevant, I am frequently met with this response: “But doesn’t the Bible tell us that we need to be ‘all things to all people’?” This is a reference to a statement that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 9:22, a verse that is extremely popular among contemporary Evangelicals. In fact, it is so popular that it could be seen as a sort of “theme verse” for American Evangelicalism. Unfortunately, it is a verse that tends to be misunderstood and misapplied, resulting in cultural accommodation instead of faithful witness.

Over the past few decades, theologian David Wells has been one of the most astute critics of contemporary Evangelicalism’s accommodationist impulses. In one of his books, he makes the following observation about the way in which many Evangelicals relate to our culture’s spirituality of self-realization and self-discovery, a spirituality that has its roots in ancient paganism:

Those who see only the contemporaneity of this spirituality—and who, typically, yearn to be seen as being contemporary—usually make tactical maneuvers to win a hearing for their Christian views; those who see its underlying worldview will not. Inevitably, those enamored by its contemporaneity will find that with each new tactical repositioning they are drawn irresistibly into the vortex of what they think is merely contemporary but what, in actual fact, also has the power to contaminate their faith. What they should be doing is thinking strategically, not tactically. To do so is to begin to see how ancient this spirituality actually is and to understand that beneath many contemporary styles, tastes, and habits there are also encountered rival *worldviews*. When rival worldviews are in play, it is not adaptation that is called for but confrontation: confrontation not of a behavioral kind which is lacking in love but of a cognitive kind which holds forth ‘the truth in love’ (Eph. 4:15). This is one of the great lessons learned from the early Church. Despite the few who wobbled, most of its leaders maintained with an admirable tenacity the alternative view of life which was rooted in the apostolic teaching. They did not allow love to blur truth or to substitute for it but sought to live by both truth and love.¹

Motivated by a desire to reach people with the gospel, Evangelicals (including Reformed Evangelicals) often allow the broader culture to determine the standard of relevance that the gospel needs to meet. As a result, 1 Corinthians 9:22 is taken to mean that we should employ the tastes and style of a particular group of people (typically the young and hip) in order to reach them with the gospel. Instead of telling people that the human soul needs to be

¹ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow’rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 155–6.

conformed to the pattern of sound teaching that is set forth in God's Word, the focus of much ministry today is upon showing how Christianity can be made to conform to the things that the world values. Such a move does far more than contextualize the gospel. It changes it, both in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. It also cultivates an uncritical posture towards the surrounding culture, causing Christians to fail to listen to the messages that are being communicated by specific forms of cultural expression. In this article I will explore this problem by considering how Paul's statement about becoming "all things to all people" in 1 Corinthians 9 needs to be held in tension with an assertion that he makes in the next chapter of the same letter: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up" (1 Cor. 10:23).

"All Things to All People"

The general principle that Paul sets forth in 1 Corinthians 9:22 is that he is not willing to allow matters of spiritual indifference (such as the kind of food that he eats) to be a barrier as he seeks to bring the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In the words of J.V. Fesko:

Paul was willing to adapt external things (e.g., his diet and dress) to the expectations of the people around him so as not to offend them. This way, they could focus on the gospel rather than a perceived offense. By being mindful of Jewish dietary sensitivities in some contexts and Gentile concerns in others, the apostle allowed the gospel to stand out, not what type of food he ate.²

The specific example that Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 9 is that he handled the Jewish ceremonial laws differently when he was around Jews compared to when he was around Gentiles. This does not mean that he was willing to do anything to win a hearing for the gospel. If that were the case, Paul would be contradicting his statements elsewhere that he "renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways," refused "to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word," and was committed to "the open statement of the truth" (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul was no compromiser. He did not use bait-and-switch tactics in his preaching of the gospel. But he was willing to be flexible on matters that were indifferent to the gospel in order to avoid giving unnecessary offense to people.

Paul knew that the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law were no longer in effect because Jesus had fulfilled them. While Paul was no longer obligated to abide by the law's ceremonial regulations, his general practice was to keep the ceremonial law when he was around Jews. He did not do this because he had to, but because he did not want Jews to dismiss him as someone who disregarded God's law. As he explains, "To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law" (1 Cor. 9:20). On the other hand, Paul did not concern himself with keeping the ceremonial law when he was around Gentiles. He says, "To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law" (1 Cor. 9:21). For Paul, becoming "all things to all people" meant not allowing matters of indifference to be a barrier as he attempted to communicate the gospel to people.

We see a good example of how Paul put this principle into practice in Acts 16:3, where Luke says that Paul had Timothy circumcised before taking him with him on his second

² J.V. Fesko, *Galatians*, *Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament* (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege, 2012), 121.

missionary journey. Paul did this even though he knew that circumcision was a matter of indifference at this point in redemptive history. Timothy was raised as a Jew by his devout mother, but because his father was a Greek he had never been circumcised. Paul knew that having an uncircumcised Jew in his party would be a source of offense to the Jews among whom he intended to preach. While it was not necessary for Timothy to be circumcised as far as his salvation was concerned, it did remove a stumbling block that potential Jewish converts might have had with Paul's ministry.

The basic principle being expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:22 is that when we are communicating the gospel to people, we should try to remove all of the potential stumbling blocks that we can without compromising the gospel message itself. For example, if you are talking to someone who has liberal political views, you need to be able to distinguish between issues to which the Bible clearly speaks (e.g., the immorality of abortion) and issues for which there is no clear "Christian" position (e.g., proper levels of taxation). While it is not wrong for us to form an opinion on matters concerning which the Bible does not speak, it is a mistake for us to say that there is only one position that a person can hold on such matters and be a faithful Christian.

"Not All Things Are Helpful"

It is interesting that Paul made the opposite decision about circumcision when he brought Titus with him to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:3). Paul refused to have Titus circumcised because the false brothers mentioned in Galatians 2:4 wanted to replace the freedom of the gospel with slavery to the law. While circumcision itself was a matter of indifference, the circumstances in this situation made it a threat to the gospel. The false brothers were saying that a person cannot be right with God without being circumcised. Were it not for these men, Paul might have been willing to have Titus circumcised. As Calvin explains, it was as if Paul said, "I would have been prepared to circumcise Titus if higher matters had not been involved."³ But because the gospel was at stake in this situation, Paul would not yield.

This relates to 1 Corinthians 10:23, where Paul explains that having the freedom to do something does not mean that it is always the right thing to do: " 'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up." In saying, "all things are lawful," Paul is not promoting antinomianism but is quoting a saying that had become popular among the Corinthian Christians, who were abusing the concept of Christian freedom. While Paul grants that there are matters in life that are not governed by explicit laws from God, he is also careful to point out that this does not mean that Christians should do whatever they want in these areas.

To understand 1 Corinthians 10:23, we need to remember that this verse appears in a context in which Paul says that Christians should always flee from the idolatrous practices of their surrounding culture. In the preceding paragraph he says, "Flee from idolatry. . . . what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:14, 20–21). Paul makes it clear that idolatry is never a matter of indifference. We should never think that we have the freedom to participate in the idolatry of our surrounding culture.

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 51.

At the same time, it is possible in some situations for a Christian to partake of something that has idolatrous associations without participating in the idolatry itself. As Paul explains:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.’ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.” (10:25–27)

In other words, the fact that pagans use something for idolatrous purposes does not mean that it is contaminated and entirely off limits to Christians. Nevertheless, Christians still need to handle such matters in a sensitive manner, taking care not to offend those who are unable to separate a particular practice from its idolatrous associations. Paul writes, “But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his” (10:28–29). Christian freedom is not to be used for selfish purposes but should be exercised in a manner that is edifying to the body of Christ (see also 10:23–24).

To Tattoo, or Not to Tattoo?

In this last section I will apply Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 9 and 10 to the practice of tattooing, which is becoming increasingly popular not only in the broader culture but also among contemporary Evangelicals. I want to clarify from the outset that I am not suggesting that it is a sin to get a tattoo. While there is a prohibition against tattooing in Leviticus 19:28, that prohibition is no longer in effect because it belonged to Israel’s ceremonial law and had to do with specific cultic practices in ancient paganism. Tattooing is a matter of indifference for God’s people today. Some Christians even think that tattooing is a good way to express their Christian identity and demonstrate the contemporary relevance of their faith. In order to assess this we need to think about the reasons why people in our culture get tattoos so that we can be aware of any assumptions and attitudes that may be in conflict with God’s Word.

It seems to me that people in our culture get tattoos because they see it as a way of creating and expressing their identity as individuals. The person getting the tattoo is essentially saying, “This is my body and I can do what I want with it in order to define and demonstrate what makes me uniquely me.” In light of this it is reasonable to ask whether there might be a relationship between the increased popularity of tattooing and the idolatrous individualism that is so pervasive in our culture. David Wells describes this as an attitude that refuses

to live within the parameters and boundaries which are drawn by others, within doctrine which it has not constructed, within a corporately practiced belief since that would do violence to the delicacy and authenticity of its own private sensibility.⁴

In our culture, the plausibility of this individualistic mindset is strengthened by a number of factors, including our consumerist economy, the use of social media to craft the image of ourselves that we present to others, the importance of being able to adapt in our ever-changing world, and our deep suspicion toward traditional forms of external authority. In

⁴ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 155.

short, we are living in a cultural ecosystem that encourages people to think of themselves as autonomous individuals who are free to create their own unique identity.

If we are going to resist the pull of our culture's idolatrous individualism, we need to be mindful of what the Bible tells us about a Christian's body and identity. We need to listen carefully to 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 when it says, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." We need to ponder the instructions of Romans 12:1 to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." These passages, along with 1 Corinthians 10:23, set forth principles that can be applied as we think about tattooing. It is permissible to get a tattoo, but how is it helpful? How is it edifying? How does it glorify God? Are there ways in which it could be harmful? Even if a Christian plans to get a tattoo of a Bible verse or a Christian symbol, what is driving him to get a tattoo in the first place? Why does he feel the need to express his individuality in this way when the Bible says that his badge of identity is the mark that the Lord placed upon him at his baptism (see Rom. 6:3–4)? Is it possible that he is adopting an individualistic mindset and being "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2)?

I realize that some Christians may be able to answer these questions without feeling any constraint against tattooing. That is perfectly fine, because tattooing is a matter of indifference. At the same time, I suspect that some Christians have never thought about tattooing along these lines. Some may have regrets because they realize that their decision to get a tattoo was influenced by unbiblical ways of thinking. If so, they can take comfort in knowing that their identity is found in having their lives "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). My purpose in using this example is not to put people on the defensive or to make people feel bad, but simply to encourage us to give more careful thought to these sorts of issues.

We do not have grounds from 1 Corinthians 9:22 to take any cultural form that strikes our fancy and fill it with Christian content in hopes of demonstrating the gospel's contemporary relevance and transforming power. For one thing, the faddish nature of pop culture makes such efforts a grasping at the wind. As William Inge once said, "He who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower."⁵ (If you have doubts about that assertion, just ask anyone who was into the disco scene back in the 1970s.) In addition, when Christians fail to think through the meaning that is inherent in specific cultural practices, they can come across as poseurs in their attempts to relate to their non-Christian neighbors. This is not what Paul had in mind when he spoke of becoming "all things to all people." It is the exact opposite. My tattooed neighbor is not likely to be offended by the fact that I do not have any tattoos myself. But he may very well be offended if he thinks that I am co-opting his form of self-expression and attempting to "Christianize" it by getting an image of a cross emblazoned on my forearm. I can show him greater respect by getting to know him and trying to understand why *he* gets tattoos. Why is this important to him? What is he trying to express by doing this to his body? What does this practice reveal about his basic beliefs and why he believes them? And as I get to know him, I can look for opportunities to explain that the gospel offers something completely different, not just a "PG-rated" version of the life that he is already living.

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⁵ Cited in Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 63.

ServantHistory

Geerhardus Vos: Education in America and Europe, 1881–1888

by Danny E. Olinger

Three main options presented themselves to nineteen-year-old Geerhardus Vos for continuing his education after he graduated from the gymnasium in Amsterdam with an honorable *judicium* on July 16, 1881. He could stay in the Netherlands and either enroll in Abraham Kuyper's newly created Free University of Amsterdam or the Theological School at Kampen. If he followed his family to America, he could attend the Theological School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Vos had spent the previous three years living in Amsterdam, so the Free University would have been a familiar option. It also would have been the most intellectually rigorous of the three schools, something that undoubtedly would have appealed to him. The combination of family and church ties probably made the Theological School at Kampen an attractive option as well. Kampen was the official school of his denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands. His father, Jan Vos, and uncle, Hendricus Beuker, were both alumni of Kampen. The Voses' close family friend Herman Bavinck, was about to be appointed to the Kampen faculty. But, in the end, Vos chose what might have been the least attractive option personally, the Theological School in Grand Rapids. At the end of July he left with his parents from Antwerp aboard the Red Star Line steamer *Belgenland* for Philadelphia.¹

One could reasonably surmise that staying near his parents played a leading role in Vos's decision to attend the Theological School in Grand Rapids. What was not guesswork was that his father and Uncle Hendricus would not have been pleased if he had chosen to attend Kuyper's Free University. Jan Vos did not favor Kuyper's juggling of the gospel ministry and politics, much less Kuyper's political activism. Beuker took exception to the Free University's theology department not being tied to the church. When news broke in 1878 about the Free University's creation, Beuker said, "Such a stream or brook needs a Reformed Church as a source to take its rise; and it needs a Reformed Church as well as an ocean to empty itself into."² Both men were further suspicious Kuyper would leave the Seceders ecclesiastically out of any potential Calvinistic revival in the Netherlands.³

The connection between church and school was not an issue with the Theological School in Grand Rapids. In 1867 a young man at First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Jacob Noordewier, wanted to enter the gospel ministry. First Church's pastor, R. Duiker, trained Noordewier personally, but Duiker knew that other young men would be

¹ George Harinck, "Vos as an Introducer of Kuyper in America," in *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 246.

² *Ibid.*, 245.

³ George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 22.

aspiring to the gospel ministry in the Christian Reformed Church and that a school was needed. Classis Michigan agreed, and in 1869 determined that Douwe Vander Werp would train prospective students at the parsonage of the Graafschap, Michigan, Christian Reformed Church. Vander Werp taught the students for six years, first at Graafschap and then at Muskegon, Michigan, before he became ill with throat cancer and resigned in 1875. The Classis then appointed Gerrit Egbert Boer, Duiker's successor as pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, to replace Vander Werp.

At the start of the next year on February 2, 1876, the general assembly consisting of Classis Michigan and Classis Illinois met in Chicago to address the issue of forming a school to train the young men aspiring to the gospel ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.⁴ The general assembly first elected Boer as the president of the assembly. Then they decided against recruiting a minister from the Netherlands to teach at the school. In both 1873 and 1875, an effort had been made to start a school with Jan Bavinck serving as the main teacher. Bavinck, however, did not want to immigrate to America and declined the invitations.⁵ After voting to choose a man from their own body, Boer was nominated and elected to serve as the school's teacher. He accepted and was installed on March 15, 1876.⁶

A graduate of the Theological School in Kampen in 1864, Boer decided to mirror the Kampen curriculum for the new school. He created a six-year course schedule divided between a four-year literary course of study and a two-year theological course of study. The literary courses emphasized the learning of four different languages, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Dutch, plus Rhetoric, Geography, Psychology, Logic, History, and Dutch History. The theology courses included Dogmatics, History of Doctrine, Hermeneutics, Exegesis, Church History, Symbolics, and Practical Theology.⁷ For a meeting place to hold the classes, the synod rented for one dollar a week the second floor of the Williams Street Christian grammar school in Grand Rapids run by the Spring Street Christian Reformed Church.⁸

Geerhardus began his first semester at the school in September 1881. It was quickly apparent that his learning far surpassed that of his fellow students, and in all likelihood that of Boer. Given Vos's exceptional ability, the Curatorium appointed Vos to the position of instructional assistant to Boer in the literary department in March 1882. They also agreed to pay Vos a salary of \$300 for the year. In June, he received his diploma after he passed examinations in Hebrew, biblical history, natural theology, introduction to religion, biblical geography, Hebrew antiquities, and hermeneutics. For his second year, he was promoted to "higher studies in Theology," which meant that he would split his time evenly between being a paid lecturer and sitting in on classes he had not yet taken from Boer.⁹

Taking on the additional burden of preparing course lectures seemed to have little impact upon Vos. The Curatorium took note, and by the end of his second year in May 1883, they offered him a permanent teaching position at the school alongside Boer.

⁴ For a fine summary of the events surrounding Vander Werp's role and also the general assembly at Chicago, see Henry Zwaanstra, "Calvin Seminary, the Christian Reformed Church, and the World," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (2007): 132.

⁵ Harinck, "Vos as an Introducer of Kuyper," 246.

⁶ This is the official start of what we now know as Calvin College. The school would be expanded into a two-year junior college in 1904, and then a four-year liberal arts college in 1920. In 1931 it would be renamed Calvin College.

⁷ Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 26.

⁸ Zwaanstra, "Calvin Seminary," 132.

⁹ James T. Dennison Jr., "The Life of Geerhardus Vos" in *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 205), 18–19.

Spring Street Christian Reformed Church

It was also during the spring of 1883 that Jan Vos, after only two years in America, was elected president (moderator) of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. This was due in part to his position as pastor of the Spring Street Church, the largest of the sixty-five congregations in the denomination. The Spring Street congregation numbered nearly four hundred families and 1,550 in attendance, although it only had a little over three hundred professing members.¹⁰

As pastor of the Spring Street Church, Jan Vos was beloved. Christian Reformed pastor and missionary J. W. Brinks, a son of the congregation during Jan Vos's ministry, recalls his preaching as "especially devout and unctuous. How he could pour out his soul speaking of the love of Christ, exhorting to love and holy living."¹¹ Reformed theologian Henry Kuiper was also a son of the Spring Street Church during this time. He testified that, with Jan Vos preaching, revivals would break out in which the complacent were awakened by the Spirit. Young people who filled the pews up front during the evening services would be weeping under conviction of sin or in joy.¹²

In addition to his election as president of the synod, Jan Vos also would serve as secretary of the synod, secretary of the heathen mission's board, member of the home mission's board, and member of the Curatorium of the Theological School. Jan Vos's rise to prominence in America meant that Geerhardus now had access to the leading Dutch Reformed theologians on two continents. Accepting the offer to teach at the Theological School would only deepen those Dutch bonds, but Geerhardus declined. He set out instead to attend the institution that would allow him to become acquainted with the leading Reformed theologians of the English speaking world, Princeton Seminary.

Princeton Seminary

In applying to Princeton Seminary at the age of twenty-one, Vos presented sterling credentials. As a linguist, he had already mastered seven languages, Dutch, German, French, Latin, English, Greek, and Hebrew. As a student, he had earned a higher degree in a single year at a school with a six-year program. As a teacher, he had experience at the college level. Vos requested that Princeton recognize his advanced standing and allow him to bypass the first year of study and enter the school as a middler. Vos explained in his application that his appeal also was due to financial considerations. Spending two years at the school rather than three years would lessen the burden on his parents who were supporting him.¹³ Princeton granted Vos's request and placed him as a second-year student.

¹⁰ Regarding the difference between the number of individuals in attendance and the actual members, James DeJong writes, "That the church reported only 310 confessing members indicates that it was characterized by the religious practice in the more experiential churches of the Netherlands of tolerating adult members who, lacking full assurance or conviction, did not make public profession of their faith, but still might have their children baptized." The practice, known as the *doopledenstelsel* (baptized members' system) required parents to attend a catechism class. It continued in the Christian Reformed Church until the synod disallowed it in 1898. See, James A. DeJong, *Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church 1907–1952* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ Letter, Vos to William H. Roberts, registrar at Princeton, August 17, 1883, in Dennison, *Letters*, 115–116.

When Vos started classes at Princeton on September 20, 1883, the faculty included William H. Green (Old Testament), Archibald A. Hodge (Systematic Theology), Caspar Wistar Hodge Sr. (New Testament), James C. Moffat (Church History), Charles A. Aiken (Ethics and Apologetics), and Frances L. Patton (Apologetics). Little is known of Vos's student days at Princeton except that he gave notice once again of exceptional intelligence and academic ability. His senior paper, "The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes," was awarded the Hebrew fellowship prize, which included a stipend for further graduate study. Princeton's esteemed Old Testament Professor Green was so impressed with the work that he persuaded A.C. Armstrong and Son to publish it as a book.

The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes

In the "Introduction," Green explained why it was crucial that the question of Mosaic authorship be put before a wider audience. The issue was not merely who wrote the first five books of the Bible, but how the Bible was going to be interpreted. Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen, and other leading critics were pursuing a rationalistic interpretation; Vos, standing with historical Christianity, was pursuing a supernaturalistic interpretation. "The question," as Green put it, "is fundamentally that between rationalism and supernatural religion."¹⁴

Vos maintained that what the critics considered their greatest strength, their methodology, actually revealed their greatest weakness. The critical methodology did not allow the Bible to speak for itself. He wrote, "Criticism on the part of our opponents has long since left its independent position, and become subservient to naturalistic tendencies. It manifests a spirit of enmity against the very material upon which it works."¹⁵ The consequence of such an approach was that the critics "begged the question." That is, they argued for a conclusion assumed in their premise, namely, that a direct revelation of God was impossible.

To demonstrate the critics' flawed approach, Vos took as a case study the laws in the books of the Pentateuch. The laws, so said the critics, revealed the fruit of the religious development in Israel, not the product of the direct revelation of God. Redactors after the return from the exile in Babylon were responsible for the placement of the laws in the Pentateuch, not Moses.

Vos answered that the Mosaic laws were given within the context of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The prophet *par excellence*, Moses, left to the house of Israel the best of all blessings, a law adapted to all future conditions and not just one generation.¹⁶ His work assumed a prospective and ideal character, that to which the later prophets not only appealed, but also in whose institutions they lived and moved and had their being. Vos said,

We touch here again the weak spot in the reconstructive scheme. Prophetism, at least incipient prophetism, hangs in the air. It had no seed to spring from, no soil to root in: its origin and growth are involved in a profound mystery. The early prophets, we claim, must have stood on the platform constructed by Moses.¹⁷

¹⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes*, with an introduction by William Henry Green (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1886), v.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

Vos not only laid bare the critical methodology, but also he forecasted the coming conflict in Presbyterianism between historic Christianity and liberalism. Deny the supernatural element and exclude the connections of redemptive history, as the critics had done, and no common ground for debate remains. One side, critical, will construe scriptural claims according to their own theories. The other side, Bible-believing Presbyterian, will construe rationalistic arguments according to the claims of Scripture.¹⁸

Germany: Berlin and Strassburg

The appearance of the *Mosaic Origin* signaled Vos's arrival on the theological scene as a capable defender of historic Christianity. The next question was where he would pursue his doctoral studies after his graduation from Princeton. He chose the University of Berlin. His professors included Eberhard Schrader, known as the "Father of Assyriology," August Dillman¹⁹ in Hebrew, and Eduard Sachau in Arabic and Syriac. Also on the faculty were noted critical theologians Bernard Weiss and Hermann Strack.

At the end of Vos's first year of study at Berlin in April 1886, he received an invitation from Abraham Kuyper to serve as a professor of Old Testament at the Free University of Amsterdam. F.W. J. Dilloo had resigned the previous summer in order to return to pastoral ministry, and Kuyper needed a replacement in the Old Testament department.²⁰

Kuyper's interest in Vos was probably two-fold. There was Vos's academic reputation and brilliant rebuttal of critical thought in his just published *Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes*. But, there was also the fact that as the son of Jan Vos and nephew of Hendricus Beuker, young Geerhardus would signal Kuyper's interest in potentially having the Seceders²¹ join those who with Kuyper were in the process of breaking away from the established Dutch Reformed Church. Kuyper's plan was to have Vos confirmed and in place to start teaching at the Free University by mid-September 1886.

It was an astounding offer considering that Vos at the time was only twenty-four years old with three years of training at Princeton and Berlin. Kuyper sought to meet with Vos personally, but Vos was hesitant to agree to meeting with Kuyper for two reasons. First, he did not want to give the slightest impression that he was doing anything outside of his father's knowledge. Second, he did not believe that he had the physical strength to undertake such a journey.²²

Despite his letter to Kuyper declining the invitation to meet in person, Vos was intrigued about the possibility of teaching at the Free University. As a professor at the Free University, Vos would be positioned to combat German critical theology. The educational level of the students would also be far superior to that of Grand Rapids. He also grasped that the situation in the Netherlands had changed in the five years since his father had departed. Led by Kuyper, a schism in the Dutch Reformed Church by the *Doleantie* (those who sorrow) was occurring just as Vos was considering the Free University offer. The new

¹⁸ Ibid., 215.

¹⁹ Vos noted in *Biblical Theology* that Dillman "was reckoned a conservative scholar." In the context in which Vos made this comment, he pointed out that Dillman had denied the historicity of Abraham. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 66.

²⁰ Harinck, "Geerhardus Vos," 247.

²¹ The members of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland*) were commonly known as "Seceders" in light of their 1834 departure from the Dutch Reformed Church.

²² Letter, Vos to Kuyper, June 7, 1886, in Dennison, *Letters*, 118–19. Vos struggled with poor health most of his adult life. There is no indication of what the ailment was at this time.

church that resulted from this schism answered the ecclesiastical objections of his Uncle Hendricus.²³ On the one hand, those associated with the Free University had the courage to separate from the Dutch Reformed Church. On the other hand, a connection now existed for the Free University with the new church.²⁴ The *Doleantie* had created an excitement surrounding the Free University that even Christian Reformed members could share.

But, not every objection had been answered for Jan Vos. He was still not enamored with Kuyper's program of cultural Calvinism in the Netherlands. Such an emphasis made the Free University vulnerable to the forces of secularism that had pervaded the Dutch Reformed Church. The strong pietism that marked Jan Vos's life and ministry also stood at odds with the scientific language favored at the Free University.²⁵ Apparently, when Geerhardus informed his father that he had received the invitation to teach, his father made his opposition known. Vos explained in a letter to Kuyper why he had to decline Kuyper's offer.

The correspondence with my parents made it necessary for me to make a choice which had become doubly difficult after acquaintance with the Free University. Had not such tender motives as the relation between parents and child mixed up in our consideration and made that choice totally inevitable, that would not have been done. The impulse of undivided sympathy with the glorious principle that your institution represents and seeks to propagate drove me, as it were, within her walls. It would have been an honor and a delight to me to be permitted to serve the Free University with my frail energies. The circumstances, as they have formed themselves under God's rule, apparently do not allow that. My parents cannot view the case in the same light in which I learned to look at it as of late. In case I, against their advice and wishes, dared to follow the inclination of my heart, I would bring grief to them, from which I have to save them at any cost. Taking this into consideration, I see no other way than to choose the field of activity assigned to me in America.²⁶

But, Kuyper and the Free University were not the only ones seeking out Vos as a teacher. The members of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America on June 17, 1886, were voting on the appointment of the next professor of exegetical and dogmatic theology to its Theological School. Vos was nominated and on the second ballot was elected to the position.²⁷

At the end of July 1886, Herman Bavinck, professor at the Theological School at Kampen, visited Vos at Berlin and even attended lectures with him.²⁸ Although Bavinck

²³ In 1886 the *Doleantie* congregations became the *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*.

²⁴ At the 1888 Christian Reformed Synod of Assen, Hendricus Beuker moved that the church acknowledge the *Doleantie* as a different method of reformation than the Separation of 1834. His interest was in finding a way in which the Seceders and the *Doleantie* could unite in one body. See, Ron Gleason's *Herman Bavinck* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 126. They did so in 1892 with a merger that created the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

²⁵ Charles G. Dennison, "Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in *History for a Pilgrim People*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian, 2002), 78.

²⁶ Letter, Vos to Kuyper, October 7, 1886, in Dennison, *Letters*, 120–21.

²⁷ Harinck, "Vos as Introducer of Kuyper," 259. James T. Dennison Jr. reasonably speculates, "Perhaps in an effort to augment his family and New World affinities, the Curatorium of the Theologische School in Grand Rapids sent Vos a letter calling him as "third docent." Dennison, *Letters*, 22.

²⁸ Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 21. According to Harinck, when Bavinck visited New York City in 1892, "The Hudson River reminded him of the Rhine River in Germany that he traveled with Geerhardus Vos in 1886." Bavinck added there was one difference between the two rivers, the romantic

was eight-years older than Vos, they knew each other so well that some even thought that they were related.²⁹ Such a mistake could be made easily given the shared backgrounds of the Vos and Bavinck families. Both families came from the German county of Bentheim and originally belonged to the Old Reformed Church. Jan Vos and Jan Bavinck, Herman's father, studied with W.A. Kok in Hooegeveen before Jan Bavinck succeeded Kok in 1854 and tutored Vos himself. Both were closely connected to the Theological School at Kampen, Jan Bavinck helped to establish it and Jan Vos graduated in the inaugural class. The first pastorate of both was the Old Reformed congregation in Uelsen. Both would leave Uelsen to pastor Christian Reformed congregations. The only notable difference was that Jan Vos favored immigration to America while Jan Bavinck did not.³⁰

Geerhardus and Herman shared not only the same family training, background, and theology, but also the same temperament.³¹ The two were close friends and correspondents.³² The topic of discussion in their letters was often the theological landscape in the Netherlands and America, but the topic in the summer of 1886 was Vos's future. After a year at the University of Berlin, which was too large and self-confident for Vos's tastes, he was looking to transfer to a new school. Bavinck recommended the Kaiser Wilhelm University of Strassburg. The Dutch Orientalist Christian Shouk Hurgronje, a friend of Bavinck's, had studied there under Theodor Nöldeke, a famed Orientalist.³³

Vos transferred that October to Strassburg with an emphasis upon the Semitic languages. After a year at the school, Vos told Bavinck that he was very pleased with Strassburg and that it would have been better for him if he had chosen it from the beginning.

I'm very pleased with Strassburg. The institutes are excellent and most of the chairs ably occupied. Moreover one has the advantage here when getting a degree in the Philosophy department to be able to take one theological subject. I chose for instance Semitic languages (Arabic, Egyptian, Hebrew) as my major and Philosophy and Church History as minors.³⁴

After talking about his health struggles ("my health allows me to work only a very little"), Vos continued to fill Bavinck in on the content of the lectures he was hearing.

aspect of the Rhine was absent. See, George Harinck, "Calvinism Isn't the Only Truth: Herman Bavinck's Impressions of the USA," in Larry J. Wagenaar and Robert P. Swierenga, eds., *The Sesquicentennial of Dutch Immigration: 150 Years of Ethnic Heritage*, proceedings of the 11th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, June 12 and 13, 1997: 154.

²⁹ Harinck cites G. Keizer, in *De Bazuin*, October 10, 1929, who called Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos relatives in print. *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁰ Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 20–21.

³¹ John Bolt, "From Princeton to Wheaton," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (2007): 71.

³² In Dennison's *Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, Bavinck appears only behind Abraham Kuyper in receiving the most letters from the hand of Vos. The list of Vos letters in this collection in descending order includes Kuyper (19), Bavinck (16), B. B. Warfield (14), J. Gresham Machen (6), Henry Beets (6), Ned Stonehouse (4), Paul Woolley (4), Donald MacKenzie (2), William Elliot Griffis (2), W. H. Roberts (1), J. W. Felix (1), Cornelis van Felderen (1), Sylvester Beach (1), Frank Stevenson (1), F. W. Grosheide (1), Albertus Eekhof (1), Arthur Machen (1), and Edwards Elliot (1).

³³ Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 22.

³⁴ Letter, Vos to Bavinck, June 16, 1887, in Dennison, *Letters*, 126.

With special fondness, I am keeping busy now with Philosophy—and indeed most of the time with theory of knowledge. Windelband teaches logic. I cannot attend that lecture because the hours conflict with the hours of Nöldeke. In his class, he deals with Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Then he lectures one hour a week about "Freedom of the Will." He drove freedom to its grave and with that I enjoyed a great deal of logical satisfaction. Now he braces himself up to save responsibility, and I'm afraid that my logical feeling will now have to pay dearly for the enjoyed pleasure. Without doubt we get a recommendation of Kant's 'intellectual character.'³⁵

Vos spent his last year at Strassburg working on his dissertation. Written in German, the dissertation (*Die Kampfe und Streitigkeiten zwischen den banu umajja und den benu hasim*), focused on the textual criticism of an Arabic manuscript that recorded a dispute between two Islamic sects during the thirteenth century.³⁶

When the degree was bestowed, Vos held the distinction of being the first alumnus of the Theological School at Grand Rapids to earn a doctorate. With typical humility, Vos downplayed the accomplishment. He told Bavinck that personally he would not attach much value to a theological degree earned in Germany. But Vos had also communicated to Bavinck in the past year that his heart was torn in returning to America.

I am going to America with the feeling that my place is not there. And I leave the Netherlands with the knowledge that even if my work be insignificant, I could do it there with joy and sympathy. More than once I have regretted that last year when they made a proposal in Amsterdam, I did not make a decision. And I still sometimes doubt if I may or even should return, especially if it is wise to go there without having accomplished my goals here.³⁷

Still, Vos set sail on May 19, 1888, for the United States. He would never return to his homeland.³⁸

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³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James Dennison Jr. commented, "If Vos was seeking a 'safe' dissertation topic, he succeeded. The work is not only noncontroversial, but inert." "Life of Geerhardus Vos," in *Letters*, 24–25. A copy of Vos's dissertation is located in the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary.

³⁷ Letter, Vos to Bavinck, June 16, 1887, in Dennison, *Letters*, 125.

³⁸ Harinck believes that Vos disappointed Bavinck with his decision to teach in Grand Rapids. He cites Bavinck's December 18, 1888, address at Kampen, "The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church," translated by John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 246, as a place where Bavinck was commenting about Vos. "Many withdrew completely from life; they literally separated themselves from everything, and, in some cases, what was even worse, set sail for America, abandoning the Fatherland as lost to unbelief." Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 21.

ServantReading

God's Glory Alone by David VanDrunen

by David A. Booth

God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life, by David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 186 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Soli Deo Gloria is, as Professor VanDrunen subtitles this volume, *The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life*. Indeed, “*Soli Deo Gloria* can be understood as the glue that holds the other *solas* in place, or the center that draws the other *solas* into a grand, unified whole” (15). This clear, reliable, and insightful guide is intended to restore the pursuit of *the glory of God alone* to its rightful place in the faith and practice of Christians.

The book is organized into three sections for a total of eight chapters. The first section, “The Glory of God in Reformed Theology,” helpfully begins with an examination of Luther on “A Theology of Glory versus a Theology of the Cross.” VanDrunen’s treatment of Luther warns readers against looking for the supreme manifestation of God’s glory elsewhere than in Jesus Christ and him crucified. This discussion is followed by an examination of how John Calvin corrects the common misunderstanding that glorifying God necessitates the demeaning of human beings. Calvin quite effectively shows that God glorifies himself (in part) through the glorification of his creation. Rather than the exaltation of God requiring that human beings be demeaned, it only requires that our pride be brought low while actually lifting up redeemed humanity to increasingly reflect God’s glory into this world. In the second chapter, VanDrunen focuses on the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. In particular, he focuses on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edward Leigh, Jonathan Edwards, and Herman Bavinck. VanDrunen helpfully dispels the notion that the glory of God is primarily about what we do for God.

There seems to be something imbalanced about focusing the *solus Deo gloria* theme exclusively upon Christians acting for God’s glory. For one thing, it produces the awkward and ironic result that *solus Deo gloria* becomes centered on us: how we are to act and what end we should pursue. . . . When *solus Deo gloria* turns into a program for human cultural renewal, we may well suspect that what was meant to be a theocentric battle cry has been distorted by more than a little anthropocentric static. (26)

The second section of the book, “The Glory of God in Scripture,” begins with a careful examination of the Shekinah glory cloud in the Old Testament which is a strikingly prominent feature of the Exodus narratives. The manifestation of the glory of God in this manner was both a blessing and a problem for a sinful people. As VanDrunen later asks:

Who can read this Old Testament history and not proclaim *solus Deo gloria*?
Page after page shows that all glory belongs to God alone. Especially evident

is that God glorifies himself through his judgment upon the unrighteous. Not so clear, however, is the Reformation's related claim that God glorifies himself in part by glorifying his people, such that *solī Deo gloria* becomes part of the good news of salvation. (64)

This challenge leads naturally to the book's chapters on "The Glory of God Incarnate" and "The Glory of Christ in the Glorification of His People." For it is only in Jesus Christ that the revelation of God's glory becomes good news for us.

Having laid the biblical and theological foundations in the first two sections, VanDrunen concludes with three chapters of application, which I consider to be the three most interesting chapters in the book: "Prayer and Worship in an Age of Distraction," "The Fear of the LORD in an Age of Narcissism," and "Glorifying God in an Age That is Passing." Each of these chapters could helpfully be taught in an adult Sunday school class. Professor VanDrunen ably explains media ecology in a manner that is scholarly, accessible to lay people, and immediately applicable to our lives. Pastors and elders should carefully consider whether or not we are providing sufficiently clear and forceful guidance to our congregations on how to navigate the distractions and temptations of the information age, and Professor VanDrunen is a superb guide along the way. While it is easy to talk about being hooked on perpetual distractedness as though this were a mild inconvenience, Professor VanDrunen clearly demonstrates that, for its many blessings, the information age directly assaults central aspects of our vocation as Christians, such as prayer and sustained meditation upon God's Word. Among other solutions, VanDrunen urges renewing genuine Sabbath observance as an important aspect of recovering prayer in the midst of a culture that seems increasingly designed to displace the important, even the essential, with the tyranny of the urgent. Because few people think of themselves as narcissists, VanDrunen shows pastoral sensitivity by resurrecting an older term:

I will also refer to another term, vainglory (or vanity), that clarifies just how implicated we all are in the kinds of sin that narcissism involves. Christian moral theology has traditionally identified vainglory as one of the seven deadly vices. (132)

I have wrestled as a pastor with how best to deal with this kind of narcissism in the church and have found the research and application that VanDrunen presents to be quite helpful in my own thinking and ministry.

The only very minor drawback to this book is that it is written in a plain, logical style best suited for those who are already interested in the topic. It is easy to imagine that some of those whom pastors would most want to engage with this material will stop reading before they are halfway through this otherwise commendable book. That is a shame because recovering our commitment to *Solī Deo Gloria* would bring great blessings both to individual Christians and to our local churches. Highly recommended for pastors, elders, deacons, and group study.

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ServantReading

Impossible People *by Os Guinness*

by William Edgar

Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016, 237 pages, \$20.00.

Os Guinness has declared ours to be a grand clarifying moment. But where is the clarity? True, a flurry of sermons, books, blogs, and publications are challenging Christians to “change the world” (James Davison Hunter), to “engage the culture” (Russell Moore), to “believe again” (Roger Lundin, quoting W. H. Auden). But which of these is authentic? So many tried and true remedies are put into question. Confident pluralism won’t work. Secularization must be reconsidered. Britons query the Continent. Americans have nominated a narcissist politician. Even Protestants are invited to discover the Benedictine option.

When America and much of the West are becoming more and more confused, and at a time when even the most optimistic person surely observes advancing darkness, what is called for is not retreat, but prophetic courage. *Impossible People* qualifies as one of the best guides to the prophetic stance I know. This latest book from Os Guinness is both anticipated and fresh. Anticipated, because we have gotten used to Guinness’s writings, with their biting critique of our times and their firmly biblical response, and are eager to hear more. Fresh, because Guinness brings bright, new insights into both the causes and cure for the malaise of our day. The book should be read slowly, and inwardly digested. It is dense with historical and biblical allusions. Creatively, he calls us to recognize our “Samuel Moment” and our “Moses Moment.” Samuel called attention to Israel’s responsibility when it was losing ground and making wrong choices. Today’s Samuels must tell the West that it will have to live with its bad choices, but that, even so, it is not too late to turn back to God. Moses, faced with the unfaithfulness of the people asked God, not for judgment, but for the privilege of seeing his full glory. Though no one, including Moses, could withstand the full revelation of his presence, it was right to seek it and cultivate it. And so should we. Without it there is no reason to go on.

Accordingly, *Impossible People* contains an extraordinary dose of cultural analysis, accompanied by a constant plea to nurture the sense of the presence of God. Guinness the pedagogue likes to organize his teaching in threes. The future of the world in the next generations will be determined by answers to three great questions (38): (1) Will Islam modernize peacefully in the end? (2) Which faith or ideology will replace Marxism in China? (3) Will the Western world sever or recover its roots? (The present volume focuses on this third inquiry). Three grand global transformations characterize the present (46–60): (1) From “pyrotechnology” to “biotechnology,” that is, from the long presence of the power of fire, moving beyond muscle power, to contemporary engineering of life

forms; (2) The shift from the industrial age to the information age. This includes the overwhelming effects of globalization; (3) We are bound and torn by time, particularly by the clock. We are liberated and enslaved at once by the internet, and by its constant presence we have become both more aware of and numbed to good and evil.

Modernity distorts us and lessens the impact of our faith in three ways (66–84): (1) It moves away from authority and toward (at times pathological) choice or preference; (2) Our faith (or any faith) becomes privately engaging but publicly irrelevant; (3) The supernatural has given way to the secular. A “trio of trends” has added to the challenge of modernity (84–88): (1) An exaggerated specialization leading to corruption; (2) Overreaction, such as pitting God’s Word against God’s Spirit; (3) Movements of suppression of the supernatural. There are many more such triple trends.

Throughout the volume, these analytical trilogies come at us intensely, requiring the reader to slow down and think about each one. This is all the more true as Guinness marshals an astonishing array of quotes and citations, many of them solid as gold. Perhaps the greatest virtue of the book, though, is its careful balance between diagnosis and cure. More than in many of his writings, Guinness uses Scripture and spiritual reflections not only as antidotes, but as fundamentals for any age. He passionately presents the perennial value of the gospel. He argues that with the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost, the power of sin and evil have more than met their match (81ff.). He cares about the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next, as we are “notes in the grander melody and pages in the larger story” (192). He writes boldly about the benefits and rightness of traditional marriage (72). Jesus is present on nearly every page. Significantly, each chapter ends in a prayer, a magnificent crying out to the Lord. The prayer is followed by a few discussion questions that help access the thoughts in the book.

One of the most intriguing features of the book is its title. As Guinness explains, the term *impossible man* was used by Dante to describe the Benedictine reformer Peter Damian (c. 1007–73). He placed him in the highest circle of the *Paradiso*, right before Francis of Assisi. It was a period of time much like our own, with widespread dishonesty and false shepherds. Damian worked against all those evils, often at considerable cost to himself. But in facing these vices he was, to use George Orwell’s term, *unclubbable*, meaning he would not join the societies of evil in his day. The term *impossible* can be either a compliment or an insult, and in this case, is both. Os Guinness calls the church today to be like Damian. He invites believers to draw upon the great reforming power of God through Jesus Christ. We are in a clarifying moment. But are we clear about that?

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ServantReading

The Holy Spirit *by Christopher R. J. Holmes*

by John V. Fesko

The Holy Spirit, by Christopher R. J. Holmes, New Studies in Dogmatics, series edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 218 pages, \$24.99 paper.

Ever since the nineteenth century, theologians have been producing a steady stream of books on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Scottish theologians James Buchanan (1804–70) and George Smeaton (1814–89) wrote books on the Spirit in 1847 and 1882 respectively. Around the turn of the century, in 1904, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) produced his famous work on the Spirit. Kuyper’s concern was twofold: (1) G. W. F. Hegel’s influential philosophical doctrine of the Trinity, which posited the Spirit as an impersonal force that moved in and shaped history; and (2) Kuyper’s perception that the Reformed tradition had paid insufficient attention to the doctrine. These factors played a role in the American Presbyterian Church’s efforts to revise the Westminster Confession by adding a chapter on the Holy Spirit in 1903. Other theologians continued to write on the subject, such as R. A. Torrey (1856–1928) with his 1910 work on the Spirit. This trend continues unabated in our own day with works by a wide cross-section of theologians, including Gordon Fee, Yves Congar, Michael Welker, Christopher J. H. Wright, David Coffey, Robert Peterson, John Levison, Jürgen Moltmann, Sergius Bulgakov, Anthony Thiselton, Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, Matthew Levering, and now, this most recent contribution from Christopher R. J. Holmes.

Holmes’s book is part of a new series on dogmatics, edited by Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) Professors Michael Allen and Scott Swain. This new series follows in the tradition of G. C. Berkouwer, Reformed theologian and professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, and his multi-volume dogmatics on the chief loci of systematic theology. Notably, Berkouwer had no volume dedicated to the doctrine of the Spirit. In this respect, Holmes’s volume is a welcome contribution to the growing field of pneumatology.

There are a number of strengths to this volume, first of which is its slender size. The chapters are relatively short, which makes it very readable. Second, Holmes does not follow common approaches to the doctrine by engaging first in exegesis and then theological reflection. Rather, he chooses three dialogue partners to explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit: St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth. Some have opined that this is a disadvantageous approach because there is no Reformed theologian. Yet, readers should not be too hasty in drawing this conclusion. Few, I suspect, in contemporary Reformed circles have given much consideration to the catholic roots of the Reformed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In one sense, most of the constituent elements of what one might identify as *Reformed* on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit are in fact *catholic*. In other words, the Protestant Reformation offered few modifications to the catholic understanding of doctrine of the Spirit. Some have argued, for example, that the Westminster Confession’s chapter on Christ the Mediator (WCF 8), has unique and unprecedented pneumatological accents. Yet, in actuality, the Confession’s pneumatology finds precedent in the work of Augustine, Aquinas, and to a certain extent Peter

Lombard (1100–1160). Given the catholic roots of the Confession’s pneumatology, Holmes’s treatment of Augustine and Aquinas is quite appreciated and warranted. Some might welcome treatments of Augustine and Aquinas, but draw the line at Barth. Despite the *orthodoxy* in his neo-orthodox theology, some believe there is too much that is *neo*, or new. Nevertheless, I find it a fruitful exercise to read theologians with whom I might not agree in order to challenge my own convictions and ensure that I have rightly understood the Scriptures. Too often we get locked into the echo chamber of our own theological circles and never ask critical questions.

Another benefit of this book is the manner in which Holmes has presented exegesis. Some might accuse him of offering no exegesis because he only engages the exegesis of Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth, and thus offers an admirable historical-theological treatment of the subject but far from an exegetical one. Once again, we should not be too hasty in drawing this conclusion. Whether a living person, such as Holmes, offers exegesis, or a dead person presents it makes little difference in my mind. My desire is to see someone, alive or dead, engage the biblical text. In this respect, the living do not have a monopoly on the ability to do exegesis. Instead, to borrow the title from John Thompson’s recent book, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, we should consult the exegesis of theologians in the past so we can learn from them. Yes, Holmes’s treatment falls under the discipline of historical theology, but it also captures exegesis. Exegesis and historical theology are not hermetically sealed-off from one another. Yes, Holmes focuses upon a very narrow swath of exegesis, particularly Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth’s exegesis of John’s gospel as it relates to the Spirit, but a narrow focus does not detract from the book’s utility. Rather, it provides a window into how three theologians from different eras of church history have understood the doctrine of the Spirit through the exegesis of John’s gospel, a canonical *locus classicus* for the doctrine.

These strengths make the book an interesting and stimulating read, one worthy to provide grist for the mill in thinking through the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It also provides ample opportunity to reflect upon the gospel of John. To what end does Holmes write? He argues:

The Spirit does not detract from Christ, supersede Christ, or act as his substitute. As we will see, the Spirit is primarily at work in relation to the Word (incarnate, written, and proclaimed), strengthening baptized children of God to remain true to Christ. Indeed, the mission of the Holy Spirit is coextensive with the mission of the Word (the Lord Jesus Christ). (21)

Such a focus is most welcome, especially during a time when many theologians displace Christology with pneumatology, such as in the case of Thomas Weinandy and his Spirit-christology. Moreover, Holmes’s Christ-centered pneumatology, especially through his treatment of Augustine and Aquinas, provides an excellent window to better understand the pneumatology of the Westminster Confession, particularly when the divines write, “The Lord Jesus . . . was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit” (WCF 8.3).

Will readers find weaknesses in Holmes’s book? Undoubtedly, yes. But do those weaknesses prevent one from reading his book with great profit? Not at all. As series editors, Allen and Swain have lined up a formidable roster of contributors for their *New Studies in Dogmatics*, and this first installment bodes well for the rest of the series. Readers will undoubtedly find themselves on new terrain at times, but unfamiliarity is the opportunity for learning, sharpening, and growing.

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ServantReading

Encouragement for Today's Pastors

by Joel R. Beeke and Terry D. Slachter

by Stephen A. Migotsky

Encouragement for Today's Pastors: Help from the Puritans, by Joel R. Beeke and Terry D. Slachter. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2013, 211 pages, \$16.00, paper.

All Christians can become discouraged, and all Christians are to encourage one another. There are manifold examples and instructions of encouragement in the Bible (Acts 14:22, 15:32; Rom. 1:12; Col. 2:2, 4:8; 1 Thess. 2:12, 5:11; Heb. 10:25). This encouragement is often to be personal and face to face. Such encouragement is different from reading a book, but this book is designed to encourage pastors with Puritan wisdom.

You may compare yourself harshly to the best of the Puritans in this book and be discouraged. Reading about their lives and spiritual disciplines can feel like watching the Olympics and remembering your lack of athleticism. You don't perform anything like an Olympian, nor are you likely to perform like the best of the Puritans in this book. Yet, the encouragement in reading about these Puritans is to learn how they endured when they suffered, were discouraged, or saw little results from their work. They learned to focus on several important truths and disciplines in order to endure with hope.

This book includes instruction on Puritan piety, God's sovereignty, Puritan preaching, Puritan prayer, ministerial fellowship, pastoral calling, heaven, and pride. In fact, those are roughly the topics covered in the book in that order. The authors present quotes from the Puritans on these topics and each chapter ends with practical applications. For example, chapter 4, "God Gives the Increase," ends with this application: "Take responsibility only for yourself. Remind yourself daily that you are not the Savior but only His servant" (64).

The goal of the book is to use the Puritan writings and lives as instruction and encouragement for pastors. It is not an overview of the Puritans. For that you should read *Worldly Saints* by Leland Ryken.¹ Ryken's book also has a healthy dose of what the Puritans did wrong in chapter 11, "Learning from Negative Example: Some Puritan Faults" (187–204). Ryken reminds us that one of their faults was they "were strict in lifestyle, and they also liked matters to be well-defined. These virtues, when carried to an extreme, produce a legalistic lifestyle that becomes stifling with too many rules" (191). Thankfully, *Encouragement for Today's Pastors* acknowledges that some Puritans had serious weaknesses.

It should be acknowledged that a few Puritans fell into extremes, giving credence to the unattractive caricature that has attached itself to the movement as a whole. . . . The goal is

¹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

adaptation, not imitation. It is not necessary to imitate the Puritans in order to profit from their faith, their example, and their writings. (13)

So, you don't have to imitate Puritan piety, Puritan preaching, Puritan prayer, but modify it.

The book reminds us that faithful competent pastoral work may not yield results that we can see now. That is a healthy corrective if we or others judge our work harshly. Remember Paul does not care about how he is judged by others and does not even judge himself, but waits for the Lord to come to bring things now hidden to light (1 Cor. 4:1–5). This book disabuses us from judging ministerial work with any worldly, visible standard. That is a worthwhile encouragement if you serve a small congregation or a troubled one. One related truth is that competent, ordinary pastoral work can be a powerful means of grace to congregations. There is dignity in pastoral work. “So lift up your heads, brothers. It is false humility to act as though the ministerial office has no dignity. The work of our office is a high calling” (170). Beeke and Slachter's exposition of that truth is necessary and encouraging.

I have been encouraged significantly by participating in a fellowship of pastors who meet and pray for each other regularly. The Puritans did this, too. This is not the same as a session meeting, or a presbytery meeting. Chapter 10 explains the “mutual edification among ministers” (133).

Twenty-first century pastors should avail themselves of the blessings of interacting with fellow pastors who have fought some of the same battles, experienced many of the same heartaches, faced similar challenges, and are familiar with the conditions that lead to burnout. It only makes sense to join with others for prayer and spiritual conference as often as possible, for this spiritual discipline will enrich your ministry and enable you to find strength in the Lord. (140)

The book's epilogue contains wise counsel for pastors who are tempted to be workaholics and perfectionistic in the work. You may have an invisible master leading you to despair.

This tyrannical enemy is *Pride*, which can be a terrible slave master for pastors. . . . The key of humility unlocks the door and frees us from the giant Pride, and the key of promise frees us from the giant Despair through encouragement. Christ is our ultimate encouragement. Dear pastor, your comfort and courage must be Christ, for in Him we find a glory that makes us press on to know Him better (Phil. 3:7–14). (210, italics theirs)

For additional encouragement and as a complement to this book read Spurgeon's “The Minister's Fainting Fits” (167–79).² For example, Spurgeon encourages pastors to get out of the study and enjoy God's creation, or “he will make his study a prison, . . . while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy” (172). So, pastor, read this book and, finishing it, go for a walk to enjoy God's beautiful and joyful creation.

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² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).

ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

The Leaves below My Town

The leaves below my town have not
Yet lain in October blood, but
Anticipation of this morbid
Celebration colors our every day,
As we watch the green give way
To the colorful deconstruction of
Life as photosynthesis ceases.

Crowds come from far away
To witness the extraordinary coloration
Of death as it descends on mountain
And meadow to presage cold
Capture of all living things as they
Bow in dry brown death to the
Forces that bury them in earth.

I mourn and celebrate this
Season of life as Dylan did,
Yet not without hope beyond
The cathedrals of bright sunlit
Mornings that call me to see
The Daystar that lit within me
A morning beyond this town of mine.