



Reformation  
500

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# *Ordained Servant Online*

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**October 2017**

### *From the Editor*

Many wonder if the Reformation continues to be relevant. While we do not believe that the church began in 1517 or that there was no true gospel faith or church in the millennium and a half prior, we do believe that the gospel truth rediscovered in the Reformation must continue to be central to the church's confession and life. We also affirm the need for the church to be continually to be reformed according to the Word of God.

Dan Borvan's exploration of Luther's doctrine of assurance is a superb reminder of the relationship between sound doctrine and a healthy Christian life. John Muether continues his survey of the rich theology that grew in Reformation soil with *The Second Helvetic Confession*. Danny Olinger offers the ninth chapter of his biography, *Geerhardus Vos*, in which he describes the development and completion of one of Vos's best books, *The Pauline Eschatology*. Truly Vos was the father of Reformed biblical theology.

Edward Manger review four recent books to bring us up to date in Reformation historiography. So, don't miss his excellent reflections in "Current Trends in the History of the English Reformation."

On the media front, T. David Gordon reviews Tony Reinke's important new book, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. Reinke is a media ecologist in the McLuhan-Postman tradition, exposing the spiritual, psychological, and social perils of smart phone addiction.

Dale Van Dyke reviews Tim Keller's new book of practical apologetics, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*. This is not like *The Reason for God*, which answers common objections to the Christian faith. Instead, Keller challenges those who think they have answers in popular secular assumptions.

Don't miss seventeenth-century poet Andrew Marvell's profound reflection on the difficulty of praising our Savior for his Satan-defeating suffering in "The Coronet."

Happy Reformation Day!

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.

# ServantHistory

## A Peaceful Conscience by Faith Alone

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by Dan Borvan

John (Johann) Krause, counselor of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz and friend of Martin Luther, committed suicide in December 1527. Krause had been favorable to the Reformation when it had first reached Halle, Germany but later aided the Archbishop in suppressing it. Luther wrote that Krause had been “taken captive by the tricks of the devil” in his belief that Christ was standing in the presence of the Father and accusing him because he had denied the Savior.<sup>1</sup> The devil had deceived Krause by turning the gospel into law and by causing him to focus on the sin he had done and the good that he had left undone, rather than on what Christ had done for him.

Krause was one of many in Luther’s day driven to despair by the condemnation of the law. The law is a ministry of sin, said Luther, and a ministry of wrath and death. The law reveals sin, then “strikes the wrath of God into a man and threatens him with death.” The man’s conscience concludes that God is angry with him due to his sin and, therefore, he shall die. Luther concluded, “This is why many who cannot endure the wrath and judgment of God commit suicide by hanging or drowning.”<sup>2</sup>

Luther himself suffered spiritual distress from the law, which produced fear and dread. He stated:

I know how I sometimes struggle in the hours of darkness. I know how often I suddenly lose sight of the rays of the Gospel and of grace, which have been obscured for me by thick, dark clouds. In other words, I know how slippery the footing is even for those who are mature and seem to be firmly established in matters of faith.

When we lose our focus on the gospel, the law rushes in and “shakes our insides in such a way that it makes us forget justification, grace, Christ, and the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Christians today suffer from troubled consciences and a lack of assurance, even members of Presbyterian and Reformed churches. These struggles are often the result of a lapse into a covenant of works mindset. We are hard-wired for law; it is written on our hearts (Rom. 2:14–15). It is our default setting. The gospel is external to us. It must be preached into us (Rom. 10:14). If we do not receive a regular reminder of the gospel, we easily can revert to thinking that keeping the law is the only path to God’s approval. Most do not slip so far as to lose sight of justification by faith alone, but many fall into the misguided understanding of God’s love and favor as directly commensurate to our obedience. The inevitable failure to maintain perfect obedience can produce anxiety and even a lack of assurance of salvation.

My purpose in this brief article is to address Martin Luther’s teaching that only the gospel, specifically justification by faith alone, can calm a troubled soul. A peaceful conscience and assurance of salvation are by faith alone, not by works.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86), 26:195.

<sup>2</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:150.

<sup>3</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:150.

Due to the immensity of Luther's body of work (The German edition of *Luther's Works* numbers 127 volumes), I restrict the focus to Luther's lectures on Galatians and some selections from his Table Talk.<sup>4</sup> Luther's lectures on Galatians are perhaps his clearest expression of the relationship between the law and the gospel. He first lectured on Galatians in 1519, when his Protestant theology was still in development. A more mature Luther delivered another set of lectures on Galatians in 1531, which were published in 1535. Around the time when he gave the lectures, Luther said, "The Epistle to the Galatians is my dear epistle. I have put my confidence in it. It is my Katy von Bora [Luther's wife]."<sup>5</sup>

### **THE CHRISTIAN'S TROUBLED CONSCIENCE**

The story of Luther anguishing over his sin during his time in the Augustinian monastery is well known. Relief for his tormented soul arrived in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Receiving and resting in the righteousness of Christ finally brought Luther peace. Luther's spiritual struggles did not disappear after his conversion, however. He fought to mortify the innate inclination toward self-righteousness and to preserve his understanding of a gracious God. In his comments on Galatians 2:20, Luther said:

It is very hard for me, even in the great light of the Gospel and after my extensive experience and practice in this study, to define Christ as Paul does here. That is how much this teaching and noxious idea of Christ as the lawgiver has penetrated into my bones like oil.

This teaching shaped him from his boyhood, such that "even at the mention of the name of Christ I would be terrified and grow pale, because I was persuaded that He was a judge."<sup>6</sup> Luther informed his auditors that he had to make an effort to unlearn the idea of Christ as lawgiver and replace it with the understanding of Christ as justifier and Savior.

Luther experienced spiritual distresses throughout his life. In 1533 he disclosed to friends that he was suffering from melancholy (Latin: *tristitia*), which had produced headaches and stomach pains. He explained, "My temptation is this, that I think I don't have a gracious God. This is [because I am still caught up in] the law. It is the greatest grief, and, as Paul says, it produces death."<sup>7</sup> More than fifteen years after producing the Ninety-five Theses, Luther still struggled to trust in the graciousness of God.

Luther believed that a struggle rages within every Christian between "the hearing of faith and the works of the law, because the conscience is always murmuring and thinking that when righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal salvation are promised solely on the basis of hearing with faith, this is too easy a way."<sup>8</sup> The law unites with reason, the enemy of faith, to drag us toward self-righteousness and away from the righteousness of Christ. Our flesh, seeking to be autonomous, cannot accept the free gift of God.

Although Luther taught that the law is the cause of the Christian's troubled conscience, he certainly did not promote antinomianism, despite the accusations of his critics. He affirmed, "We say that the Law is good and useful, but in its proper use."<sup>9</sup> The law restrains sin in the civil realm and reveals sin and the need for a Savior in the

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<sup>4</sup> I quote Luther as often as possible in order to capture his incomparable style.

<sup>5</sup> *Luther's Works*, 54:20.

<sup>6</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:178.

<sup>7</sup> *Luther's Works*, 54:75.

<sup>8</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:215.

<sup>9</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:312-13.

spiritual realm. Luther did not expressly state the law's third use, but he certainly taught that Christians must respond to faith with good works. He said, "When Christ has thus been grasped by faith and I am dead to the Law, justified from sin, and delivered from death, the devil, and hell through Christ—then I do good works, love God, give thanks, and practice love toward my neighbor."<sup>10</sup> The problem is not the law; the problem is losing sight of the gospel and feeling the condemnation of the law, even after we have been redeemed. Christians must not forget, even temporarily, that there is "now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Luther famously taught that the Christian is simultaneously saint and sinner and is divided in this way. He said, "To the extent that he is flesh, he is under the Law; to the extent that he is spirit, he is under the Gospel."<sup>11</sup> Because sin is always present Christians should maintain a fear of God. But fear without faith is the servile and despairing fear of Cain, Saul, and Judas. This faithless fear remains transfixed on the law. Faith in God's Word of grace focuses on Christ, and "fear becomes sweet and is mixed with nectar, so that [the Christian] begins not only to fear God but also to love him."<sup>12</sup>

Despite the internal battle between flesh and spirit, Christians can know that they are in a state of grace. Luther said:

It is extremely profitable to the pious to know that they have the Holy Spirit. I am saying this in order to refute the dangerous doctrine of the sophist and the monks, who taught and believed that no one can know for a certainty whether he is in a state of grace, even if he does good works according to his ability and lives a blameless life.

This corrupt teaching "utterly ruined the doctrine of faith, overthrew faith, disturbed consciences," and much more.<sup>13</sup>

## THE GOSPEL CALMS A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE

### 1. Look to Christ

Christians who face spiritual distress or a troubled conscience can find hope in Christ. He is the object (and source) of our initial faith, through which we are justified, and he is the sustainer of our faith thereafter. The same Savior who justified us now sanctifies us. We look to him, not the law, to calm our distress and ease our conscience. Christians need not feel condemned by the law. When despair sets in, we must turn away from the law and its accusations. Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf and liberated us from the law's curse (Gal. 3:13). Luther said:

Therefore when your conscience is terrified by the Law and is wrestling with the judgment of God, do not consult either reason or the Law, but rely only on grace and the Word of comfort. . . . Ascend into the darkness, where neither the Law nor reason shines, but only the dimness of faith (1 Cor. 13:12), which assures us that we are saved by Christ alone, without any Law.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:161.

<sup>11</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:342.

<sup>12</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:343.

<sup>13</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:377.

<sup>14</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:113.



Christians must trust God's promise to conform them into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) and maintain confidence that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Luther was convinced of Christ's transforming work, particularly with regard to his fears and anxieties. He wrote, "Christ is eternal Peace, Comfort, Righteousness, and Life, to which the terror of the Law, sadness of mind, sin, hell, and death have to yield. Abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me."<sup>15</sup>

Luther advised his auditors to narrow their focus on Christ to specific doctrines as a means of calming their anxious souls. In contrast to those who claim that an emphasis on doctrine inevitably leads to cold, dead orthodoxy, Luther taught that the doctrine of imputation "brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors."<sup>16</sup> It comes as no surprise that Luther also stressed the doctrine of justification for dealing with the struggles of the flesh. He wrote, "Therefore let every faithful person work and strive with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and meditation on the Word."<sup>17</sup> Focus on justification and the righteousness of Christ frees us from the temptation to attempt to pull ourselves out of despair by means of our own righteousness. Luther concluded, "A Christian says, 'I wish to do as much as I can, but Christ is the bishop of souls. To him will I cling, even if I sin.' It is thus that one has assurance."<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Devour the Word

When the conscience is assaulted by the flesh, Christians must turn to Scripture for refuge. The flesh "cannot believe for sure that the promises of God are true."<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, we attack the flesh with the unbreakable truth of the Word. Luther said, "As God creates faith, so He preserves us in it. And just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word."<sup>20</sup>

The Word is the antidote for the accusations of Satan and our doubts about God's favor toward us. "We have nothing to strengthen and sustain us against these great and unbearable cries except the bare Word," said Luther, "which sets Christ forth as the Victor over sin, death, and every evil."<sup>21</sup> We cling to Scripture in the midst of trial and distress because it reveals Christ. "Christ does not become visible to any of our senses. We do not see Him, and in the trial our heart does not feel His presence and help."<sup>22</sup> We are anchored in Scripture, not in our experiences, emotions, or our own reason. As Peter said of his own experience, "We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed" (2 Peter 1:19). Rejecting the Word is a surefire path to despair. Luther said, "Nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word. Therefore anyone who is so cold that he think he knows enough and gradually begins to loathe the Word has lost Christ and the Gospel."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:167.

<sup>16</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:134

<sup>17</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:65.

<sup>18</sup> *Luther's Works*, 54:87.

<sup>19</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:64.

<sup>20</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:64.

<sup>21</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:380.

<sup>22</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:381.

<sup>23</sup> *Luther's Works*, 26:64.

### 3. Mortify Human Reason

In addition to the positive actions of looking to Christ and devouring the Word as means of calming the troubled conscience, Christians must put to death human reason. Luther charged that reason regards Scripture “as heresy and as the word of the devil; for it seems so absurd.” Reason, therefore, “is the greatest and most invincible enemy of God.”<sup>24</sup> Our confidence in God’s Word and the finished work of Christ is attacked by reason. The Christian must respond with faith, for faith “slaughters reason and kills the beast that the whole world and all the creatures cannot kill.”<sup>25</sup>

The mortification of reason is one of the Christian’s two daily sacrifices. According to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, every Christian is a priest. As part of their priestly duties, all Christians must offer the daily sacrifices of the New Testament. Luther wrote, “The evening sacrifice is to kill reason, and the morning sacrifice is to glorify God.”<sup>26</sup> The great comfort for the troubled Christian is a world outside of reason, in which

the issue is not what we ought to do or by what sort of works we may merit grace and forgiveness of sins. No, here we are in a divine theology, where we hear the Gospel that Christ died for us and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE GOSPEL CARRIES US THROUGH DEATH

A primary cause of spiritual distress and anxiety for many Christians is the inevitability of death. Luther’s confidence in the gospel enabled him to approach death without fear. Thinking he was on the brink of death in 1538 due to kidney stones, Luther said, “I’m subject to the will of God. I’ve given myself up to him altogether. He’ll take care of everything. I’m sure that he won’t die because he is himself life and resurrection.”<sup>28</sup> When he finally faced death in 1546, he spoke his last recorded words: “We are beggars. That is true.”<sup>29</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Spiritual distress and a troubled conscience can affect every Christian, from the most immature to one of the heroes of the faith. The source of our anxiety and worry often is God’s law and our lack of conformity to it. When our flesh reminds us of our failure to keep the law perfectly in thought, word, and deed, we must flee to the gospel for relief. By looking to Christ, devouring God’s Word, and mortifying human reason, we can find rest for our weary souls. Martin Luther suffered from an uneasy conscience throughout his life. A steady diet of the gospel, though, sustained him through every spiritual consternation, even to the point of death.

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<sup>24</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:228–29.

<sup>25</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:228.

<sup>26</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:233.

<sup>27</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 26:234.

<sup>28</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 54:294.

<sup>29</sup> *Luther’s Works*, 54:476.



# ServantHistory

## Reformed Confessions: Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

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by John R. Muether

The three decades following the writing of the First Helvetic (Swiss) Confession in 1536<sup>1</sup> saw dramatic developments in the Protestant Reformation. New leadership emerged after Luther and Calvin passed away. The Roman Catholic “counter” Reformation convened the Council of Trent in 1545. Following the fragile 1555 Peace of Augsburg (which largely extended only to Lutherans), Reformed churches sensed the urgency of confessional unity in a thorough exposition of the Reformed faith that extended beyond the national confessions that had been composed. Elector Frederick III asked Swiss pastor Heinrich Bullinger (who had co-authored the First Helvetic), and Bullinger delivered by way of converting a personal testament into the Second Helvetic Confession.

The Second Helvetic presents Reformed teaching as the evangelical faith in conformity with apostolic teaching and practice. Though lengthy in argument, it is moderate in tone. Catholicity comes not from human tradition, but from the Word of God, which is summarized in the Apostles’ Creed. Harmony with the teachings of the ancient church is important; but harmony is not found in “external rites.” Thus, on the one hand, Roman Catholicism fails in its claim to be the true successor of the early church; on the other hand, the confession urges that “we must not judge rashly or prematurely” lest “we exclude, reject, or cut off those whom we cannot eliminate without loss to the Church.”

What is particularly striking about the Second Helvetic Confession is its detailed treatment of the duties of pastoral ministry. Rejecting papal offices of priest and monk, and affirming the “priesthood of believers” in good Reformed fashion, the confession observes that:

The priesthood and the ministry are very different from one another. For the priesthood, as we have just said, is common to all Christians; not so is the ministry. Nor have we abolished the ministry of the Church because we have repudiated the papal priesthood from the Church of Christ.

It goes on to assert that Christ instituted the office with several duties: preaching of the gospel, administration of the sacraments, care of souls, and maintenance of discipline (see excerpt from chapter 18 below). The confession closes with discussions of practical issues in the church, such as public worship, prayer, fasting, the ordering of marriage, burial, and church property.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Muether, “Reformed Confessions: First Helvetic Confession (1536),” *Ordained Servant Online*, [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=616&issue\\_id=123](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=616&issue_id=123).

After it was published in Zurich and adopted by Swiss churches in 1566, it was quickly translated into several languages and enjoyed wide-spread acceptance among the churches, including those in Hungary, Poland, Scotland, and France. Cornelis Venema notes that “it is arguably the most widely disseminated of the Reformed symbols of the sixteenth century.”<sup>2</sup> Although unfamiliar to many Orthodox Presbyterians, the Second Helvetic Confession has remained popular among international Calvinists. According to John Leith it “can justly claim to be the most universal of Reformed creeds.”<sup>3</sup>

## **An Excerpt from Chapter 18—Of the Ministers of the Church, Their Institution and Duties**

**The Duties of Ministers.** The duties of ministers are various; yet for the most part they are restricted to two, in which all the rest are comprehended: to the teaching of the Gospel of Christ, and to the proper administration of the sacraments. For it is the duty of the ministers to gather together an assembly for worship in which to expound God's Word and to apply the whole doctrine to the care and use of the Church, so that what is taught may benefit the hearers and edify the faithful. It falls to ministers, I say, to teach the ignorant, and to exhort; and to urge the idlers and lingerers to make progress in the way of the Lord. Moreover, they are to comfort and to strengthen the fainthearted, and to arm them against the manifold temptations of Satan; to rebuke offenders; to recall the erring into the way; to raise the fallen; to convince the gainsayers; to drive the wolf away from the sheepfold of the Lord; to rebuke wickedness and wicked men wisely and severely; not to wink at nor to pass over great wickedness. And, besides, they are to administer the sacraments, and to commend the right use of them, and to prepare all men by wholesome doctrine to receive them; to preserve the faithful in a holy unity; and to check schisms; to catechize the unlearned, to commend the needs of the poor to the Church, to visit, instruct, and keep in the way of life the sick and those afflicted with various temptations. In addition, they are to attend to public prayers of supplications in times of need, together with common fasting, that is, a holy abstinence; and as diligently as possible to see to everything that pertains to the tranquility, peace and welfare of the churches.

But in order that the minister may perform all these things better and more easily, it is especially required of him that he fear God, be constant in prayer, attend to spiritual reading, and in all things and at all times be watchful, and by a purity of life to let his light to shine before all men.

**Discipline.** And since discipline is an absolute necessity in the Church and excommunication was once used in the time of the early fathers, and there were

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Venema, “Predestination and Election” in Matthew Barrett, ed., *Reformation Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 262n50.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 313

ecclesiastical judgments among the people of God, wherein this discipline was exercised by wise and godly men, it also falls to ministers to regulate this discipline for edification, according to the circumstances of the time, public state, and necessity. At all times and in all places the rule is to be observed that everything is to be done for edification, decently and honorably, without oppression and strife. For the apostle testifies that authority in the Church was given to him by the Lord for building up and not for destroying (2 Cor. 10:8). And the Lord himself forbade the weeds to be plucked up in the Lord's field, because there would be danger lest the wheat also be plucked up with it (Matt. 13:29–30).

**Even Evil Ministers Are to Be Heard.** Moreover, we strongly detest the error of the Donatists who esteem the doctrine and administration of the sacraments to be either effectual or not effectual, according to the good or evil life of the ministers. For we know that the voice of Christ is to be heard, though it be out of the mouths of evil ministers; because the Lord himself said: "Practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do" (Matt. 23:3). We know that the sacraments are sanctified by the institution and the word of Christ, and that they are effectual to the godly, although they be administered by unworthy ministers. Concerning this matter, Augustine, the blessed servant of God, many times argued from the Scriptures against the Donatists.

**The Worker is Worthy of His Reward.** All faithful ministers, as good workmen, are also worthy of their reward, and do not sin when they receive a stipend, and all things that be necessary for themselves and their family. For the apostle shows in 1 Cor. 9 and in 1 Tim. 5, and elsewhere that these things may rightly be given by the Church and received by ministers. The Anabaptists, who condemn and defame ministers who live from their ministry are also refuted by the apostolic teaching.

## **The Sequence of Confessions**

Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli (1523)  
Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)  
First Helvetic Confession (1536)  
French Confession of Faith (1559)  
Scots Confession (1560)  
Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)  
Heidelberg Catechism (1563)  
**Second Helvetic Confession (1566)**  
Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619)  
Westminster Confession & Catechisms (1643)

**John R. Muether** serves as a ruling elder at Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Oviedo, Florida, dean of libraries at Reformed Theological Seminary, and historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

# ServantHistory

## Geerhardus Vos: Pauline Eschatology

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by Danny E. Olinger

In 1912 as Princeton Seminary prepared for the school's centennial celebration, Geerhardus Vos was the fifth-longest-tenured professor behind Benjamin Warfield, John Davis, John De Witt, and William Greene. Although his last name and thick Dutch-German brogue betrayed his Friesian ancestry, Vos's reputation after nineteen years at Princeton was arguably more tied to Presbyterianism than to his Dutch Reformed upbringing.

One last remembrance of the former days had come in 1908 when his lifelong friend from the Netherlands, Herman Bavinck, delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton. Along with Nicholas Steffens and Henry Dosker, Vos prepared the English translation of Bavinck's lectures, "The Philosophy of Revelation." Vos then worked with Benjamin Warfield in preparing Bavinck's manuscript for the printer and otherwise assisted in publication of the lectures as a book in English.<sup>1</sup> Bavinck and his wife, Hanny, stayed with the Vos family during the time of the lectures.<sup>2</sup> After the evening meal, the children would be dismissed and Herman and Geerhardus would talk into the night.<sup>3</sup>

Twenty-two years earlier, in the summer of 1886, the two friends had travelled the Rhine River together in Germany. Contemplating his future, particularly which school he might transfer to from Strasbourg, Vos sought Bavinck's counsel.<sup>4</sup> The last days that Vos had spent in Europe in 1888, he spent with Bavinck. When Bavinck had visited America in 1892, he stayed with Vos and his family in Michigan for three weeks.<sup>5</sup>

Once at Princeton, Vos had written two glowing reviews of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* for the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*. In his 1896 review of volume one of the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vos appreciated Bavinck's embrace of both Scripture and the dogmatic tradition. The Scriptures were the only *principium*, but the dogmatic tradition was indispensable for sound teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, preface to *The Philosophy of Revelation* (New York: Longmans, 1909). The same year Vos also translated Bavinck's "Calvin and Common Grace" for inclusion in fellow Princeton faculty member William P. Armstrong's edited *Calvin and the Reformation* (New York: Revell, 1909), 99–130.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 361.

<sup>3</sup> Vos's daughter, Marianne Radius, recalled Abraham Kuyper staying with the Vos family while delivering the Stone Lectures. Given her strong remembrance of the events surrounding the visit, it is probable that Radius simply misspoke and named Kuyper in place of Bavinck. Interview, Marianne Vos Radius by Charles G. Dennison, February 27, 1992, at the Raybrook Assisted Living Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>4</sup> 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 Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies, Hope College, Holland, MI, June 12 and 13, 1997: 154.

<sup>5</sup> 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), 253.

Vos agreed with Bavinck's judgment that the historical-critical method of interpretation was fatally flawed. Bavinck contended that "science and philosophy have no right to construe the idea of revelation *à priori*, and afterwards to distort the historical and religious phenomena passing under the name of revelation in order to make them harmonize with such *à priori* construction."<sup>6</sup>

Three years later, in 1899, Vos wrote that the second volume of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* was "so excellent that it seems almost impossible to be too generous in its praise."<sup>7</sup> Prior to the review, Vos had written Bavinck and told him, "It is a beautiful work."<sup>8</sup> What had impressed Vos was that Bavinck, the thorough Calvinist, had produced a vindication of the Christian faith that was catholic in spirit.

At the end of the review, Vos took great interest in Bavinck's discussion on the nature and destiny of man.<sup>9</sup> Bavinck argued that the Reformed faith and Roman Catholicism, over against Lutheranism, correctly distinguished the original, creation estate of man from the estate of glory. The Reformed and Rome differed, however, in their understanding of the way that God set the translation to the estate of glory before man. The Reformed believed the translational hope from innocence to glory was put before man in the covenant of works. Rome, doubly influenced by the neo-Platonic ideal of a mystical deification as the true destiny of man and the Pelagian principle of the merit of good works, taught that eternal life before the Fall was to be obtained through man's merit and God's supernatural gift (*donum superadditum*). Vos affirmed Bavinck's conclusion that Adam in uprightness was not to earn eternal life by condign merit (supernatural) as Rome taught. Rather, prior to the Fall, eternal life was to be gained by natural means in covenant as the Reformed taught. The two different conceptions led to two different views of Christianity. The Reformed saw Christianity as a religion of grace that aimed at the renewing of man's nature. Rome saw Christianity as a religion of merit that aimed at the elevation of man's nature. Vos concluded, "Dr. Bavinck ably vindicates the federal character of all true religion."<sup>10</sup>

Bavinck for his part greatly appreciated Vos's positive reviews. Bavinck stated, "Among the announcements and reviews of the first three volumes no word was more pleasant to me than Prof. Vos's of Princeton."<sup>11</sup> Bavinck then approvingly quoted these words from Vos:

What has impressed us most is that, while Dr. Bavinck's standpoint is that of a thorough Calvinist, yet in reading him one is conscious of listening not so much to a defense of

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<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 1, in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* [*Shorter Writings*], ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 479.

<sup>7</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 2, in *Shorter Writings*, 485.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Vos to Herman Bavinck, April 29, 1899, in James T. Dennison Jr., ed., *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 203.

<sup>9</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 2, in *Shorter Writings*, 492. Vos said, "With the Nature of Man and The Destiny of Man the debate returns from these apologetic outposts to the heart of the Christian and Protestant positions." Vos's belief that a proper understanding of man's nature, his creation and Fall into sin, and man's destiny stood central to the Christian and Protestant positions was unwavering on his part. It is the thread that runs through Vos's entire literary corpus from his first major article, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology" in 1891, to the final published book in his lifetime, *The Biblical Theology* in 1948.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> George Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (2010): 28.

Calvinism as to a scientific vindication of the Christian world-view in its most catholic sense and spirit. This is far from saying that the world is not also a vindication of Calvinistic theology. But it is so in the indirect and for that reason all the more telling way of showing how perfectly easy and natural it is to build upon the foundations of the Reformed principles a system of Christian thought which by its very largeness of grasp and freedom from theological one-sidedness becomes the most eloquent witness to the soundness and depth of the principles underlying it. No higher commendation of Calvinism is conceivable than that it lends itself to being made the basis of a structure of truth so universally and comprehensively Christian in all its lines and proportions.<sup>12</sup>

George Harinck remarks that Vos's statement, and Bavinck's approval of the statement, revealed something of the remarkable parallel development that had taken place for each man. Both not only were raised in the Seceder movement in the Netherlands, but also were sons of Seceder pastors who themselves were friends.<sup>13</sup> Both studied at institutions that were critical in method, Bavinck at Leiden and Vos at Berlin and Strasbourg. Both were originally professors at schools that were Bible-believing and pietistic, Bavinck at Kampen in the Netherlands and Vos at the Theological School at Grand Rapids. Both pulled up the academic reputations of the schools, but then moved to institutions, the Free University of Amsterdam and Princeton Seminary, that were Reformed, but broader and more scientific in orientation.

But, Harinck notes, neither Vos at Princeton nor Bavinck at Amsterdam became the dominant theologian of their new institutions as they had been at their old ones. In Harinck's judgment, this was due to Vos's and Bavinck's reservations concerning Kuyper's theological program. Both wondered if Kuyper's program of antithesis was too rigid, too cold-blooded, too theoretical. Harinck believes that Bavinck's hesitation led to Kuyperians distrusting him and that Vos's reluctance led to Princetonians overlooking him.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Theology of Paul**

As perceptive as Harinck's observations are, he does not explore how Vos's growth as a biblical theologian affected his allegiance to Kuyper's program. At Princeton, Vos increasingly began to distance himself from certain aspects of Kuyper's methodology. This was evident in Vos's 1903 *Bible Student* article, "The Theology of Paul."

In the article Vos argued that although Paul's teaching belonged to the history of revelation, it also marked the beginning of the history of theology. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, his use of "first of all" indicated that he utilized "a well-ordered method in imparting the truth."<sup>15</sup> In Romans 6:17 Paul speaks of a "pattern of teaching" delivered to the Roman believers.

Paul's eschatological outlook, or philosophy of history, undergirded his theology. He saw all the streams of human history headed toward their final goal in the perfected

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Ron Gleason writes, "Since Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos later became close friends, it is an intriguing piece of history to observe how God brought the families together at an early stage. The relationship between the Bavinck and Vos families was not tangential but rather quite close. The fathers of both Herman and Geerhardus knew each other well and even attended the same congregation." See, Gleason, *Herman Bavinck*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Harinck, "Herman Bavinck and Geerhardus Vos," 28.

<sup>15</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Theology of Paul," in *Shorter Writings*, 357.

kingdom of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul arranged the historical facts in a coherent, doctrinal system, conscious that his presentation possessed a distinct theological impress. Vos concluded that Paul was a theologian.

In his article “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul,” Richard B. Gaffin Jr. spells out just how much Vos’s declaration that Paul was a theologian departed from Kuyper’s understanding.<sup>16</sup> Gaffin explains that Kuyper’s opposition to speaking of Paul as a theologian was due to the way that Kuyper understood Scripture. Kuyper believed Scripture itself was not theology but underlies it. He declared that one must not speak of the biblical writers as theologians. For Kuyper, revelation was pre-theological, theology was post-biblical. Gaffin writes, “Vos’s description of Paul as a specifically ‘theological’ thinker and his repeated references to the Apostle’s ‘theological system’ are modes of expression which are forbidden to Kuyper *in principle*.”<sup>17</sup>

Vos himself recognized the tension that existed between his views and Kuyper’s views. He would later remark, “In the old country they do not believe much in Biblical theology, but I have taught it for thirty-five years and certainly believe in it.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Review of Kennedy’s *St. Paul’s Conception of the Last Things***

In 1905, two years after his “Theology of Paul” article, Vos reviewed Harry Angus Kennedy’s book *St. Paul’s Conception of the Last Things*. In this review Vos gave notice of the topics he thought were important in Pauline studies but had been almost universally overlooked. Vos praised Kennedy for recognizing that eschatology played a dominant role in the Apostle’s view of salvation. But, he held that Kennedy did not comprehend the totality of eschatology in Paul’s system of thought. Vos wrote:

The question is not so much whether the doctrines of justification and possession of the Spirit and union with Christ carry with themselves an outlook into the future, but rather whether those acts and states to which these doctrines refer are not from the outset

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<sup>16</sup> In 1968 Cornelius Van Til invited Gaffin to contribute to *Jerusalem and Athens*, a book of critical essays celebrating Van Til’s seventy-fifth birthday. Gaffin recalls, “Van Til approached me about contributing to the volume. I told him at that point I was in the midst of writing the dissertation, research and all, and, with everything that I had to do with teaching, I just didn’t have the time to produce anything else. He had become aware that I was dependent upon Vos very much for the dissertation. Anytime that Van Til heard about Vos, he always got very positively excited. If I heard him once, I heard him ten times about his days at Princeton having Vos as a teacher and how much Vos had influenced him. So, with all that, he then suggested that I take something from the dissertation and contribute it. As I thought it would be appropriate as a *Festschrift* article, I decided basically to take the first chapter in *Resurrection and Redemption* and submit it.” Comments to author, October 13, 2016. For the article, Gaffin added an opening paragraph to inform the reader why he was writing on Geerhardus Vos in a book of essays about Van Til. He wrote, “On one of the walls in Dr. Van Til’s office is an enlarged photograph of Geerhardus Vos. This is an indication of an esteem and admiration which is not purely academic in character, but includes a personal element dating from his student days at Princeton Seminary. On more than one occasion, I have heard him express deep appreciation for Vos both as a scholar and as a man. One of his most cherished memories is the solemn privilege he had in August of 1949 of conducting the funeral of his teacher and friend. The following contribution is a reflection, in the hermeneutically charged atmosphere of contemporary theology, upon an important but so far ignored aspect of the work of this man, who may rightly be called the father of Reformed biblical theology and who has so decisively influenced the one to whom this volume is presented.” See, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul,” in E.R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 228.

<sup>17</sup> Gaffin, “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul,” 230.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, “Geerhardus Vos,” *Reformed Journal* 4, no. 10 (November 1954): 12.



eschatological acts and states, or, more strictly speaking, anticipations in this life of what had previously been regarded as reserved for the end. Only by realizing the extent to which this is true can we appreciate the profound eschatological interest that pervades all Paul's teaching. Especially in connection with the pneuma conception this might have been more strongly emphasized. The Spirit is from the beginning to Paul the element of the eschatological, heavenly world.<sup>19</sup>

Vos also took special interest in Kennedy's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:44–46. Kennedy maintained that the natural body of verse 44 "was of necessity" characterized by corruption, dishonor, and weakness." Vos noted that in verses 45 and 46, however, Paul identified this natural body with the body given to the first Adam at creation. Vos declared that the body at creation cannot have been a body of corruption, dishonor, and weakness, since elsewhere in his writing Paul plainly taught that these attributes were the result of sin. Vos concluded that it would have been better for Kennedy to state the problem clearly and leave it unsolved rather than to solve it in such a way that brought Paul into conflict with himself.<sup>20</sup>

### **Princeton Seminary Centennial**

On the Lord's Day of May 5, 1912, Princeton Seminary started its centennial celebration with an 11:00 a.m. worship service at First Presbyterian Church in Princeton. Seminary president Francis Patton preached on the topic, "Princeton Seminary and the Faith."<sup>21</sup> A conference on prayer was held at Miller Chapel at 4:00 p.m. Ethelbert Warfield, president of the Board of Trustees and the older brother of Benjamin Warfield, preached at the 7:45 p.m. evening worship service at First Presbyterian Church.<sup>22</sup>

On both Monday and Tuesday mornings an academic procession started at the faculty room in Nassau Hall and led into Alexander Hall. On Monday the graduating class was awarded their Bachelor of Divinity degrees, and addresses were given from Princeton alumni lauding the seminary's achievements. On Tuesday luminaries from the Presbyterian and Reformed churches around the world took center stage. J. Gresham Machen described the day in a letter to his mother.

Tuesday was the big day, Alexander Hall at the University was filled with a magnificent assemblage. The stage and the central part of the lower floor were brilliant with many-colored gowns, and the rest of the hall was occupied by ordinary folk. The singing of the first hymn, "Ein Feste Burg," was one of the most inspiring things in the whole celebration. I never heard any hymn-singing like that. The speeches were by Dr. Stewart, moderator of the Church of Scotland, Dr. James Wells, moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland, and Dr. MacMillian, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things* in *Princeton Theological Review* 3, no. 3 (1905): 485.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 2, *The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 277.

<sup>22</sup> "Programme of Exercises," in *Centennial Celebration of Princeton Theological Seminary, 1812–1912* (Princeton, 1912), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 276.

In addition to the ceremonies taking place on the campus, the faculty had released a volume of essays, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, in commemoration of the centennial.<sup>24</sup> Vos's contribution, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," would be arguably his most influential article.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit**

Vos stated that the purpose of the article was to investigate the extent to which Paul's eschatological teaching was tied to his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This allowed Vos both to build upon the biblical theological insights of his "Theology of Paul" and to answer the questions that he had raised in his review of Kennedy's *St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things*. In setting forth the grand structure of Paul's teaching, Vos asserted that Paul taught that the future world had projected itself into the present life. Vos said, "Through the appearance of the Messiah, as the great representative figure of the coming aeon, this new age has begun to enter into the actual experience of the believer. He has been translated into a state, which, while falling short of the consummated life of eternity, yet may be truly characterized as semi-eschatological."<sup>26</sup>

Vos turned to Romans 1:3–4 to answer the question of how the Spirit was conferred upon Christ. He concluded that it was a history of redemption question (a contrast between the states of humiliation and exaltation) and not a question of natures (humanity and divinity). That is, the reference was not to two coexisting sides in the constitution of the Savior, but to two successive stages in his life. According to the flesh, Jesus descended from David. According to the Spirit, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

Vos then exegeted the text that he believed Kennedy had not understood fully, 1 Corinthians 15:42–50.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*;<sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;<sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.<sup>45</sup> So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.<sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.<sup>47</sup> The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.<sup>48</sup> As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly.<sup>49</sup> And just as we

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<sup>24</sup> *Biblical and Theological Studies*, faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

<sup>25</sup> Two examples of the article's influence are found in the testimonies of Sinclair Ferguson and Richard Gaffin Jr. In his book *Holy Spirit* Ferguson writes that "the distinctive eschatological significance of the Spirit's ministry is expounded in the landmark essay of G. Vos, "The Eschatological Aspects of the Pauline Concept of the Spirit." Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1996), 273. Gaffin states that reading and working through this "magisterial chapter" from Vos "was a singular eye-opening moment for me into the basic aspects of the theology of Paul, particularly for the way the forensic and renovative benefits of Christ's work are integrated with union with him as the exalted life-giving Spirit." Nick Batzig, "Today's Theologians: Dr. Richard Gaffin," interview with Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Reformation 21*, December 2016, <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2016/12/todays-theologians-dr-richard.php>.

<sup>26</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," in Princeton, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 92.

have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.<sup>50</sup> Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (NAS)

The complexity in understanding the passage was that Paul switched comparisons as he moved from verses 42–44a to verses 44b–46. In verses 42–44a, Paul contrasted the body in the fallen, pre-eschatological state with the body in the eschatological state. The fallen, pre-eschatological, state-of-sin body is the natural body of verses 42–44a that is perishing, dishonorable, and weak. The eschatological, resurrection-state body is the spiritual body of verses 42–44a that is permanent, glorious, and powerful.

The contrast changes at the end of verse 44. Verse 44b with its “if there is . . . there is also” argument, supported by the reference to Genesis 2:7 in verse 45, broadens the scope. Included now in the natural, pre-eschatological was the pre-Fall estate. Paul “enlarged the one term of contrast, that relation to the pre-eschatological period, so as to make it cover no longer the reign of sin, but the order of things established in creation.”<sup>27</sup>

Vos explained why Paul changed the comparison in his argument in verses 42–44a between the body of sin and body of the resurrection to a comparison in verses 44b–46 between the body of creation and the body of the resurrection.

The Apostle was intent upon showing that in the plan of God from the outset provision was made for a higher kind of body than that of our present experience. From the abnormal body of sin no inference can be drawn as to the existence of another kind of body. The abnormal and the eschatological are not so logically correlated that the one can be postulated from the other. But the world of creation and the world of eschatology are thus correlated, the one points forward to the other; on the principle of typology the first Adam prefigures the second Adam, the psychical body, the pneumatic body (cf. Rom. 5:14).<sup>28</sup>

The resurrection is when the spiritual entered, the second man was exalted, and the eschatological era was inaugurated. This is because the Spirit imparted to the risen Christ the life-giving power that is the Spirit’s own.

Vos concluded the article with some observations that he believed were central to the study of Reformed biblical theology. First, Paul’s theological bent led him to believe that in the Christian life all must be from God and for God. The Spirit was the agent for securing this because of the impotence of sinful human nature for good. This was why Paul interpreted the whole Christian life in terms of the Spirit and regarded the moral and religious life of the believer as a fruit of the Spirit in its highest potency.

Second, Paul approached the endowment of Christ with the Spirit from an eschatological-soteriological point of view. The resurrection of Christ was the point where the peculiar identification between Christ and the Spirit began. Paul used this identification exclusively in regard to Christ’s Messianic capacity with reference to believers and not to the original constitution of Christ’s person.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Vos's final observation concerned the antagonism that existed between biblical eschatology and evolutionary philosophy. Evolutionary philosophy stood against the two poles of biblical eschatology, creation and consummation. For those who followed the principles of evolutionary philosophy, the result was a Christianity devoid of the supernatural, where life in the kingdom was severed from the realm of the Spirit. Paul taught that the Spirit, which belonged to the age to come, determined the present life.

### **The Pauline Eschatology**

In 1930, eighteen years after "The Eschatological Aspects of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit" appeared, Vos expanded the article into book form with the self-publication of *The Pauline Eschatology*. In the preface Vos surveyed the role that biblical eschatology had played for the church living after the appearance of Jesus Christ. For the early church the vindication of the faith "depended on the proof that the Messiah, that great Agent and Consummator of God's world-purpose, had appeared upon the scene."<sup>29</sup> The medieval church fixed much of its attention upon this earth, but the eschatological hope still remained in the church's singing as the best of that era's hymnody breathed the air of heaven.

The Reformers focused on the doctrine of justification, how does one obtain righteousness before God? This resulted in the pushing of the eschatological hope into the background for a time, but the two strands of justifying faith and eschatological hope were intertwined. Sinners are justified unto the end of communing with God.

The Reformers had received from Paul something better than either prophet or Psalmist had been able to give with the same clarity. Paul's writings gathered the single items of hope found throughout Scripture—that history is moving toward the goal of fellowship with God—and organized them into a coherent system. "Truly for this, not his smallest gift, he may justly be called the father of Christian eschatology."<sup>30</sup>

### **The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology**

In the opening chapter, "The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology," Vos began with a definition of eschatology.

Eschatology is "doctrine of the last things." It deals with the teaching or belief, that the world-movement, religiously considered, tends towards a definite final goal, beyond which a new order of affairs will be established, frequently with the further implication, that this new order of affairs will not be subject to any further change, but will partake of the static<sup>31</sup> character of the eternal.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), v.

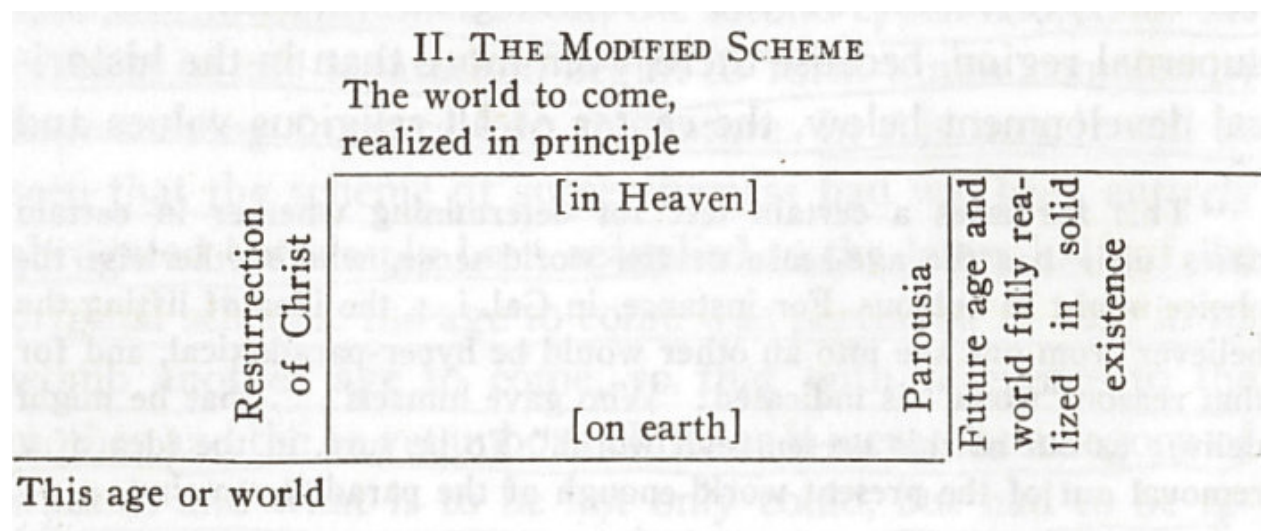
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Gaffin believes that Vos would have been better served in his definition of eschatology in *The Pauline Eschatology* to replace "static" with "immutable." Gaffin argues that "immutable" is truer to Paul and the biblical doctrine of creation as a whole. Comments to author, August 1, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 1. In his *Reformed Dogmatics* written forty years before the *Pauline Eschatology*, Vos asked, "What is contained in the term 'eschatology'?" He answered, "That history, in the course of which we are situated, will have a conclusion. It is not an endless process but a genuine history that ends in a definite goal and so has a boundary and limits. As it had a beginning, it will have an ending. That ending will come as a crisis, and everything that has to do with this crisis belongs to the 'doctrine of the last things.'" See, Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5: *Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Kim Batteau and Allan Janssen (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 251.

From this definition, he maintained there are two characteristic elements of eschatology, the limited duration of the present order of things and the eternal character of the subsequent state. The Apostle Paul understood that the subsequent state, the age to come, had intruded into the present age. Paul also understood that the soteric movement that had Christ at its center occurred within this cosmical setting of the overlap of the ages. The result was a philosophy of history where eschatology no longer formed one item in the sum-total of revealed teaching. Vos's purpose in the book was to show that unfolding Paul's eschatology meant unfolding Paul's theology as a whole.

The eschatological process had been set in motion through Christ's resurrection from the dead. The believer joined to the risen Christ by faith was living in the overlap of the ages, which Vos illustrated with the following diagram.<sup>33</sup>



From the reality of Christ being in heaven, and because the believer's life is hid with Christ in God, Vos declared that the Christian life is semi-eschatological.<sup>34</sup> But he made clear that the heaven in which the Christian by anticipation dwells by faith is not the "cosmical heaven."<sup>35</sup> It is a heaven that God has built through his work in the sphere of redemption. Heaven empowers the believer while it also beckons the believer to its final

<sup>33</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> W.J. Grier, who studied under Vos at Princeton, expertly summarized this section of the *Pauline Eschatology*. Grier wrote, "Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, and believers, being vitally and mystically united to Him, are therefore with Him in a spiritual sense, inhabiting the eternal world (heaven). See Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-3. The heavenly world and the earthly sphere are now parallel states, to both of which the believer belongs. As Dr. Vos reminds us, the Christian has only his members upon earth, which are to be mortified; he himself belongs, and as a whole belongs, to the high mountain-land of the heavenly places above. This does not mean a toning down of his interest in the appearing of Christ. 'In reality,' says Dr. Vos, 'this whole representation of the Christian state as centrally and potentially anchored in heaven is not the abrogation, it is the most intense and practical assertion, of the other-worldly tenor of the believer's life.' He is already a heaven-dweller, but his soul will actually enter into the heavenly homeland at death, and at Christ's coming his body, as well as his soul, will actually inherit the eternal order, redemption being then at last complete." See, W.J. Grier, *The Momentous Event* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 53-54.

<sup>35</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 40.

consummation. The Spirit holds these two aspects of the Christian's double life-process together.

“Heaven, so to speak, has received time and history into itself, no less than time has received unchangeableness and eternity into itself.”<sup>36</sup> For Vos, this is what distinguished Paul's two-age construction from Greek philosophical dualism. The mother-soil for the Greeks was metaphysical speculation. The mother-soil for Paul was revelation. Biblically, the historical was first, then the theological. It was through an eminently historical event, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that the parallel structure of the two ages was begotten.

### **The Interaction Between Eschatology and Soteriology**

Vos observed at the start of the second chapter, “The Interaction Between Eschatology and Soteriology,” that the topic of eschatology typically appeared last in dogmatics. In fact, forty years earlier in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vos himself had placed eschatology as the last topic discussed.<sup>37</sup> Now Vos encouraged reversing the order, or at least recognizing the centrality of eschatology, as it pervades every dogmatic topic.<sup>38</sup>

Vos examined four structural lines in Pauline teaching to test this thesis and the relationship between eschatology and soteriology. These were the doctrines of the resurrection, salvation, judgment and justification, and the Spirit.

He considered the Pauline doctrine of the resurrection first because with the resurrection “the eschatological priority of origin and the actual influence upon the soteric teaching are most palpable.”<sup>39</sup> The soteric experience by which believers are introduced into a new state is characterized as “being raised with Christ.” The one “in Christ” is a participator in the new world that Christ's resurrection had brought about.

Next Vos considered the doctrine of salvation. The eschatological strand determined both the substance and form of the soteriological strand in Paul's theology. “Keen hope had projected itself into the future, and there the habit of speech about salvation had been to no small extent acquired.”<sup>40</sup> Christians are saved by hope (Romans 8:24–25). They are destined to impending salvation, but also have a present possession.

With respect to justification and eschatology, Vos identified the point at which they intersect.

By making both the negative element of the forgiveness of sin and the positive element of bestowal of the benefits of salvation unqualified, the Apostle made the act of justification to all intents, so far as the believer is concerned, a last judgment anticipated.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>37</sup> See, Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5: *Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Kim Batteau and Allan Janssen (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 251–310.

<sup>38</sup> In the previous chapter, Vos argued, “We hope presently to show that, as a matter of fact, not only the Christology but also the Soteriology of the Apostle's teaching is so closely interwoven with the Eschatology, that, were the question put, which of the strands is more central, which more peripheral, the eschatology would have as good a claim to the central place as the others.” Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 28–29.

<sup>39</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Paul's declarations of the certainty of salvation in Christ would not be possible if justification bore with it an aspect of relativity regarding the future.

Paul widened the description of the Spirit's work in believers beyond that of the Old Testament prophets and other New Testament writers. He did this because he believed the Spirit was "before all else the element of the eschatological or the celestial sphere, that which characterizes the mode of existence and life in the world to come and consequently of that anticipated form in which the world to come is even now realized in heaven."<sup>42</sup>

Vos spelled out at the end of the chapter why a proper understanding of the relationship of eschatology and soteriology, namely, that Paul gave such a precedence to the eschatological, was so important. It provided the Apostle with a philosophy of history into which the soteric and theological could be fitted, every development construed in light of the starting point and terminus. "Eschatology, in other words, even that of the most primitive kind, yields *ipso facto* a philosophy of history, be it of the most rudimentary sort. And every philosophy of history bears in itself the seed of theology."<sup>43</sup>

Vos believed this eschatological understanding could not but produce the finest fruit of practical theology.

To take God as source and end of all that exists and happens, and to hold such a view suffused with the warmth of genuine devotion, stands not only related to theology as the fruit stands to the tree: it is by reason of its essence a veritable theological tree of life.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Religious and Ethical Motivation of Paul's Eschatology**

In the third chapter, "The Religious and Ethical Motivation of Paul's Eschatology," Vos pointed out the liberal church's hostility to the Pauline eschatology. Pauline eschatology was supernatural and heavenly-oriented. Liberalism was anti-supernatural and merely earthly-oriented. Vos's verdict was that liberalism had moved away from seeking after God and had become irreligious. "A so-called Christianity proving cold or hostile towards the interests of the life to come has ceased to be Christianity in the historic sense of the word."<sup>45</sup>

Conversely, Calvinism, which has believed that both the soteric and ethical processes exist for the sake of God, has proved itself the deepest interpretation of Pauline theology. In so far as Calvinism has sought to exalt the divine glory in religion, it has been the purest expression of the spirit of Augustinianism and the Reformation.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Coming of the Lord**

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Charles Dennison supported Vos's argumentation, but he acknowledged that Vos's placing justification in the service of eschatology was disconcerting to some. Dennison wrote, "But there are also other matters supplied by Vos which can be disconcerting. He places eschatology, or the goal of God's self-revelation, unambiguously at the center of Paul's thinking. The goal is the inheritance of God or God's fullness. This theme takes precedence over even justification since Paul's concern is for that goal that even predates sin and the Fall. Therefore, justification is merely a means to an end pertinent because of man's sinfulness." Charles G. Dennison, "The Life of Vos," unpublished manuscript in the Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>45</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 67.



In chapters four, “The Coming of the Lord and its Precursors,” and five, “The Man of Sin,” Vos declared that, for the Apostle Paul, the final issues of history and redemption are connected with the resurrection and the judgment and become concentrated with the second coming of Christ. The judgment sums up the world-process that has fallen subject to sin. The resurrection restores that which has become the prey of decadence and death. But, Vos was quick to point out, the resurrection was not a mere return of man to his pre-Fall estate. “For the eschatological process is intended not only to put man back at the point where he stood before the invasion of sin and death, but to carry him to a plane of life, not attained before the probation, not, so far as we can see, attainable without it.”<sup>47</sup>

The “Man of Sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 “is the irreligious and anti-religious and anti-Messianic subject *par excellence*.”<sup>48</sup> Vos cautioned that the idea of the Antichrist in general and that of the apostasy in particular ought to warn against an uninterrupted progress of the cause of Christ through all ages on to the end. “As the reign of the truth will gradually be extended, so the power of evil will gather force toward the end. The making of all things right and new in the world depend not on gradual amelioration but on the final interposition of God.”<sup>49</sup>

## The Resurrection

The sixth chapter, “The Resurrection,” appeared with slight changes as the lead article in the January 1929 issue of the *Princeton Theological Review*.<sup>50</sup> From 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, Vos brought out the close connection between the parousia and the resurrection. The Lord will descend and the dead in Christ shall rise first, but it is unwarranted to see a secret rapture being taught. The parousia will be an open event, not one that is shrouded in mystery. The meeting of believers with Christ in the air is unto their abode with him in heaven, not preparatory for a further earthward descent for judgment.

Vos then examined the religious and doctrinal principles underlying the resurrection. He contended that the resurrection, next to the cross, was the outstanding event of redemptive history. “But Paul has first made it a focus of *fundamental* Christian teaching and built around it the entire conception of the faith advocated and propagated by him.”<sup>51</sup>

In order to understand why Paul placed the resurrection in a central position, Vos said one must grasp that, in Paul’s construction of Christian truth, there is a forensic strand and a transforming strand. The resurrection signifies the most radical and all-inclusive transforming event in the believer’s experience of salvation, the equivalence of becoming a new creation. But the resurrection also concerns the forensic aspect of the acquisition of righteousness. In the justification of Christ lies the certainty and root of the believer’s resurrection, for Christ’s resurrection was God the Father’s official declaration in regard to the Son being just. The resurrection of Christ from the dead annulled the sentence of condemnation. Paul expressed this clearly in Romans 4:25 with the parallel use of the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 134–35.

<sup>50</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Pauline Doctrine of the Resurrection,” *Princeton Theological Review*, 27, no. 1 (1929): 1–35. In the first two pages, Vos articulated the exegesis of 1 Thess. 4:16–17 and 3:13 in a different manner, but the conclusions are the same. The remainder of the article and the chapter in the book are identical.

<sup>51</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 148.

prepositional phrase “*dia*” (“on account of”) with the accusative. Christ was delivered up to death “on account of our trespasses.” He was raised “on account of our justification.”

In the matter of justification, then, Paul directs the gaze of faith not just to the crucified Christ, but also to the risen and glorified Christ in heaven, where all the merit of the cross is laid up and made available to believers. The Spirit is in the risen Christ the seal and fruit of his righteousness, the perpetual witness of the state of righteousness that has proceeded from his resurrection.

### **Chiliasm (Premillennialism)**

In the tenth chapter, “The Question of Chiliasm, in Paul,” Vos once more took a previously published article and reworked the opening pages. In 1911 he published “The Pauline Eschatology and Chiliasm” in the *Princeton Theological Review*.<sup>52</sup> In the opening sentence in the article, he wrote, “The division of the eschatological future into two distinct stages, the one of a temporary, provisional, the other of an eternal, absolute character, is probably of pre-Christian Jewish origin.”<sup>53</sup> From that statement, he went on for three pages before identifying this as the position of chiliasm.

In the reworked version for the book, he stated in the chapter’s opening sentence, “‘Chiliasm,’ more commonly called ‘Pre-millennarianism,’ occupies a peculiar place in the scheme of Biblical Eschatology.”<sup>54</sup> After that statement he continued for three pages describing chiliasm, before inserting the content of his previous article. Although he said that it was difficult to form a deliberate judgment on chiliasm either by way of rejection or enthusiastic approval, his comments revealed how lacking he held chiliasm as a method of interpretation. He stated that it was difficult to escape the feeling that this was an unmethodical procedure; it exalted the minor at the expense of the far-sweeping, age-dominating program of the theology of Paul; it abused the fundamental principles of Old Testament exegesis; it drew to itself a surplus of religious interest at the expense of what is more essential and vital in the eschatological scheme.<sup>55</sup>

If one objected to chiliasm’s hermeneutic, then a question would be raised if one believed in the second coming of Christ. The result is that the delusion is created that eschatology and chiliasm are interchangeable while in fact eschatology in its broad and tremendous significance is vanished from the field of vision.

To represent the present Christian state as followed by some intermediate condition falling short of the perfect heavenly life would be anticlimactic.

No matter with what concrete elements or colors the assumed Chiliastic regime be filled out, nevertheless to a mind so nourished upon the very firstfruits of eternal life, it can for the very reason of falling short of eternal life, have had little significance or attraction.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Eternal State**

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<sup>52</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Pauline Eschatology and Chiliasm,” in *Princeton Theological Review* 9, no. 1 (1911): 26–60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 226.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 226–27.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

Vos finished the book with a discussion of the eternal state. He addressed first the formal characteristics and then the material characteristics. The formal characteristic of the things that pertain to the eternal state is that of imperishableness. The eternal state is a realm that will never end. The chief comfort of the eternal state is the sure hope of unceasing communion with God. The Christian who knows this to be true and has realized this communion in principle knows that eschatology is not abstract speculation but the profoundest and most practical of all thought complexes.

Paul also addressed the material make-up of the eternal state. The elements of the heavenly world are the Spirit, life, glory, and the kingdom of God, but the Spirit and the kingdom of God are primary. The Spirit underlies and produces life and glory in the saints.

The life of heaven is the fulfillment of the hope set before Adam in the garden. The only reasonable interpretation of the Genesis-account (*e mente Pauli*) is this, that provision was made and probation was instituted for a still higher state, both ethico-religiously and physically complexed, than was at that time in the possession of man. In other words, the eschatological complex and prospect were there in the purpose of God from the beginning.<sup>57</sup>

Life in its eschatological import is bound to God in its production, and has a telic character directing it to God as its singular goal. In heaven, there will be no question regarding how one will spend time. The Lord God is there in his inexhaustible fullness, and in his presence there can be neither surfeit nor tedium. Vos finished the book with the sentence, “The noblest distinction of the eschatological Church consists in this that thenceforth she will be able to lay aside the armor of her militancy, because she has become the *Ecclesia triumphans in aeternum*.”<sup>58</sup>

## Reviews

Although the *Princeton Theological Journal* ran three chapters as articles in 1929,<sup>59</sup> Vos could not find a publisher for *Pauline Eschatology*. The next year he self-published 350 copies of the book. In correspondence with J. Gresham Machen he indicated that the first printing had gone so poorly that he had to order a new batch. Machen had sent Vos a copy of his newly released book, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, and apparently had requested a copy of the *Pauline Eschatology*. Vos wrote back, “It was my intention from the beginning to present you with a copy of my book, as soon as the first installment came off the press. Unfortunately I discovered so many ‘fleas’ in these first copies, that I was ashamed to send you one of these.”<sup>60</sup>

The *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* ran a small announcement under the headline, “A New Book by Dr. Vos.”

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>59</sup> The articles were “The Pauline Doctrine of the Resurrection,” *Princeton Theological Review* 27, no. 1 (1929): 1–35, “Alleged Development in Paul’s Teaching on the Resurrection,” *Princeton Theological Review* 27, no. 2 (1929): 193–226, and “The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology,” *Princeton Theological Review* 27, no. 3 (1929): 403–44. The latter two appeared unchanged as chapters 7 and 1 in the book. The former article appeared in the book as chapter 6 with a changed title, “The Resurrection,” and a slightly different beginning.

<sup>60</sup> Letter, Geerhardus Vos to J. Gresham Machen, May 1, 1930 in Dennison, *Letters*, 220.

Many of the students of the Seminary in recent years have taken the elective course offered by Professor Geerhardus Vos, Ph. D., D.D., on the Pauline Eschatology. Dr. Vos has recently published a volume with this title in which the lectures are expanded into a fuller treatment of the subject in a book comprising 319 pages. The book is published by the author. Those desiring copies should correspond with him.<sup>61</sup>

The contents of the book were then listed. The announcement ended with the declaration, “Dr. Vos’ friends welcome this scholarly contribution to the literature of Pauline theology.”<sup>62</sup>

In early 1953, three-and-a-half years after Vos’s death, Eerdmans reprinted *Pauline Eschatology*.<sup>63</sup> On the front jacket cover of the Eerdmans’s reprint, F.F. Bruce endorsed the book, saying the *Pauline Eschatology* was “indeed outstandingly great . . . a rare exegetical feat.” Added to the new edition as an appendix was Vos’s article, “The Eschatology of the Psalter.”<sup>64</sup>

In his review of the reprinted *Pauline Eschatology* in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Joseph C. Holbrook praised Eerdmans for making the volume available to a wider audience, but warned that it took intellectual effort on a reader’s part to derive benefit from Vos. He wrote:

The chapters here are not summaries of exegesis in sermonic or didactic form. They are reverent exegesis itself at its best. It might even be said that the painstaking characteristic is carried to an extreme at times. Vos patiently tracks down every possible objection, no matter how far astray it takes him, at the risk of his reader’s losing the train of thought.<sup>65</sup>

After Holbrook identified Vos’s thesis, “To unfold the Apostle’s eschatology means to set forth his theology as a whole,” he stated that, if Vos was right, then “a vast area of truth has been left untouched by evangelical preaching.”<sup>66</sup> In Holbrook’s judgment, outside of obviously eschatological passages in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, preaching takes little account of Pauline eschatology. Vos showed, however, that Paul’s main

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<sup>61</sup> “A New Book by Dr. Vos,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (1930): 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Immediately after the announcement of Vos’s new book, the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* ran a notice announcing that Princeton Professor Charles Erdman had prepared for press W. J. Erdman’s *Notes on Revelation*. The Bulletin explained that Charles Erdman had worked through the manuscripts of his father, W. J., the longtime Secretary of the Niagara Bible Conference, and edited and arranged the book per an outline left by his father. In the *Pauline Eschatology* chapter “The Question of Chiliasm, in Paul,” Vos exposed the exegetical and theological inadequacy of chiliasm, which as a movement in the United States had gained popularity through the Niagara Bible Conference. Vos did not mention the elder Erdman in the chapter. Whether this was because Vos wanted to avoid conflict on the Princeton faculty with the younger Erdman, was unaware of W. J. Erdman, or for some other reason, it is not known. It also is not known whether Vos’s opposition to chiliasm contributed to his being unable to find a publisher for the book.

<sup>63</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

<sup>64</sup> “The Eschatology of the Psalter” had first been published in the *Princeton Theological Review* 18, no. 1 (1920): 1–43. See, Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 323–65.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph C. Holbrook Jr., review of Geerhardus Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, *Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 1 (November 1952): 78.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 79.

structural subjects, resurrection, salvation, justification, and the Holy Spirit, were all eschatologically conditioned.

Holbrook continued, saying that Vos's verse-by-verse exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:35–50 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–8 should provide preachers with many homiletic suggestions. He concluded, "No commentary can give what Vos gives here."<sup>67</sup>

Louis Berkhof, then the retired president of Calvin Theological Seminary, also reviewed the book in the October 24, 1952, issue of *The Banner*. Berkhof emphasized the brilliance of Vos as a theologian more than explaining what Vos as an exegete had put forth in the book. He began:

The work now under consideration was first published in 1930. It was written by the late Dr. Geerhardus Vos, a truly great theologian, of whose theology I have been a life-long student, and who was my favorite professor at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1902–1904. Of the courses which I took with him at that time several were devoted to Pauline theology and one to the theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. I thus became rather well acquainted with, and accustomed to, the profound theological thinking of Dr. Vos, his great erudition, his logical acumen, his keen insight in the various problems that presented themselves, his exceptional ability as interpreter of Scripture, which prompted Dr. Warfield to speak of him as the greatest exegete Princeton ever had, his close thinking, and his compact style of writing, which calls for close attention to every sentence.<sup>68</sup>

Berkhof agreed with the verdict of Wilbur Smith of Fuller Theological Seminary that Vos's *Pauline Eschatology* was the only great work written in the English language on the subject in the twentieth century. He informed his readers, however, that Vos's study did not follow systematic theology, where eschatology is viewed as the capstone of the whole system of theology. Rather, it was a highly specialized study in biblical theology which pays attention to Scripture's historical connectedness and consummation goal.

Vos did full justice to the biblical teaching that believers are living in the last days, the powers of the age to come already being projected into the present. Berkhof summarized:

Believers already share the resurrection life in Jesus Christ, and are with him seated in heavenly places. During their sojourn on earth, they are in principle even in possession of eternal life. But all these things also point forward to a future eventuation and perfection at the end of time.<sup>69</sup>

In conclusion Berkhof recommended that all the ministers and prospective ministers in the Christian Reformed Church take up the book not only for a careful perusal, but also for a painstaking study. He believed they would find a needed antidote "to much of the superficial, arbitrary, and artificial interpretations which are so glaringly apparent in many of the theological publications of the present day."<sup>70</sup>

### **Dr. Buswell's Premillennialism**

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Berkhof, review of Geerhardus Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, *The Banner* 87 (October 24, 1952): 1,299.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Although the original 1930 publication of the *Pauline Eschatology* garnered little attention, the eschatological views that Vos put forth became a central point of contention in the newly formed Presbyterian Church in America (which became the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in 1936.<sup>71</sup> J. Oliver Buswell, moderator of that church's Second General Assembly in November 1936, published that same year both an article, "A Premillennialist's View," that made veiled references to Vos's position, and a book, *Unfulfilled Prophecies*, which openly questioned Vos's views on eschatology.<sup>72</sup>

In the book's preface Buswell named Vos directly and acknowledged that in disagreeing with such distinguished scholars as Vos and Warfield, he realized that he was on dangerous ground.<sup>73</sup> He stated that Vos's writings were compact and somewhat difficult to interpret, and even confessed "my dear friend, Dr. Gordon Clark, feels that in some points I have misunderstood Vos's meaning."<sup>74</sup>

John Murray rushed to Vos's defense with a stinging review of *Unfulfilled Prophecies* in the *Presbyterian Guardian*.<sup>75</sup> Murray stated that "the first virtue of a controversialist is to be fair to his opponent. Dr. Buswell grossly misrepresents both Dr. Warfield and Dr. Vos but particularly the latter."<sup>76</sup> Buswell claimed that Vos's views were almost Arian in nature on pages 73, 74, 79, and 237 of the *Pauline Eschatology*. Murray examined what Vos had said on every page Buswell listed and came to the opposite conclusion for each. Vos's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:23–24 on page 237 was not his view, but a reconstruction of the premillennial view. When Vos asked about the precise meaning of "Lord" in the Pauline phrase "the day of the Lord" on page 79, the question concerned whether the title was the personal designation of Jesus or more absolutely a designation of the Godhead. On pages 73 and 74, Vos was affirming the Pauline teaching that all the prerogatives and attributes of Jehovah are recognized as present in Jesus. In light of the comparison between what Buswell charged Vos with teaching and what Vos actually taught, Murray wrote:

So we see what becomes of Dr. Buswell's allegation that "Vos's amillennialism appears confused because of his failure to recognize that our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah is 'God in the flesh' and may be addressed in terms of deity" (p. 51). Dr. Buswell is guilty of pitiable distortion and misrepresentation of a scholar who has done more than perhaps any other now living in the defense of the essential Deity of our Lord, and that upon the basis of the most exact and penetrating exegesis and apologetic.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> In 1938 the Presbyterian Church in America was sued by the Presbyterian Church in the USA regarding the similarity of the two names. The Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia ruled in favor of the plaintiff. On February 9, 1939, the church was renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>72</sup> J. Oliver Buswell, "A Premillennialist's View," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3, no. 3 (November 14, 1936): 46, and J. Oliver Buswell, *Unfulfilled Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937).

<sup>73</sup> Buswell used Warfield as the representative postmillennialist and Vos as the representative amillennialist in the volume. He did acknowledge that Warfield's and Vos's views often overlapped to the extent that Buswell sometimes classified Warfield as amillennial and sometimes as postmillennial. Buswell, preface to *Unfulfilled Prophecies*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> John Murray, "Dr. Buswell's Premillennialism," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3, no. 10 (February 27, 1937): 206–209.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 207.

Murray refuted Buswell's further contention that Vos's teaching regarding the final state was inconsistent. Murray said that he was at a loss to know what is included for Buswell in the final state, whether it includes the millennium or begins with the final judgment and consummation. In any case Murray noted that Buswell accused Vos and amillennialists of holding to a view from 1 Corinthians 15:50 that the final state must be timeless and without sequence. Murray argued that what Vos is denying is the view that Paul taught a temporal millennium that was provisional and preparatory to the final state following the second coming of Christ.

He [Vos] does not make this denial at all on the basis that there is to be no succession or that there are to be no vistas of realization subsequent to the Lord's advent, but on the basis that the second coming and the complex of events which accompanies it introduce us to the consummate state, a state the terms of which a provisional Kingdom cannot satisfy.<sup>78</sup>

Vos rightly taught that it was impossible to interject into the "age to come" any crisis such as premillennialism postulates after the millennium.

### **Richard Gaffin Jr.**

Murray passed on his appreciation of Vos's eschatological teaching to his student and later fellow faculty member at Westminster Theological Seminary, Richard Gaffin Jr. In turn, Gaffin dedicated his 1978 book *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (later republished as *Resurrection and Redemption*) in memory of both Vos and Murray. Gaffin argued that Geerhardus Vos and Herman Ridderbos were the two theologians in the Reformed tradition of interpretation who had attempted to deal comprehensively with the teaching of Paul.<sup>79</sup> In referencing Vos's *Pauline Eschatology* (1930) and Ribberbos's *Paul* (1966), Gaffin implies that Vos was the first to do so.

He then asserts that Vos and Ridderbos had departed from the traditional Reformed consensus that Paul's primary interest was justification by faith. Both theologians had concluded that Paul's primary interest was the eschatological realization of history's purpose through the death and resurrection of Christ. The *historia salutis*, not the *ordo salutis*, focused Paul's theology.

Gaffin explains that with Vos this shift is not immediately evident. Vos declares in the opening chapter of *Pauline Eschatology*, "The Structure of the Pauline Eschatology," that to unfold the Apostle's eschatology is to set forth his theology. What Vos implies in the following chapter, "The Interaction between Soteriology and Eschatology," is a rejection of the traditional view that Paul's theology was centered around the *ordo salutis*. "Rather he (Paul) views the present soteriological realities of the believer's experience out of a broader eschatological perspective and as themselves the realization of the eschaton."<sup>80</sup>

Gaffin details even further in his opening chapter, "Methodological Considerations," why Vos's insights regarding Paul are so important. According to Gaffin, when Vos called Paul "the father of Christian eschatology," he did so because he saw Paul's "energetic eschatological thinking tended toward consolidation in an orb of compact theological

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1987), 13.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



structure.”<sup>81</sup> Paul is a theological thinker, and Vos approaches the Apostle as one with whom—though his writings are Scripture, inspired revelation, as those of subsequent theologians are not—he is nonetheless involved in a theological enterprise with common features.

For Gaffin, Vos’s approach to Paul means that Paul’s interpreters (1) share a common interpretative interest with Paul, from which they should (2) seek to do justice to his distinctiveness as a theologian by (3) unraveling the doctrinal fabric of his thought as a whole, which is (4) the explication of the history of redemption.

### **Anthony Hoekema and Andrew Bandstra**

It was not only Orthodox Presbyterians, such as Murray and Gaffin, who lauded Vos’s contributions in the *Pauline Eschatology*. Anthony Hoekema and Andrew Bandstra, Christian Reformed Church ministers and longtime professors at Calvin Theological Seminary, both advocated Vos’s eschatological views. In his book *The Bible and the Future*, Hoekema stated that Vos was “a theologian who has made a significant contribution to eschatological studies, but who has not received the attention he deserves.”<sup>82</sup>

In demonstrating his point, Hoekema compared Vos’s views with the views of Charles Harold Dodd who had popularized the notion of “realized eschatology.” Dodd taught that for Jesus the kingdom was a present reality for he knew that the eschaton had broken into history. While affirming the eschatological orientation of Christianity, Dodd also denied a literal second coming of Christ, a future resurrection, and last judgment. Hoekema believed Vos’s position was biblically superior. He wrote:

In summary we say that Vos significantly anticipated Dodd in maintaining that with the coming of Christ the kingdom of God has arrived and the final eschatological era has begun. He sees Paul’s thought, in fact, as cast into an eschatological mode from the beginning, and therefore calls Paul the father of Christian eschatology. In distinction from Dodd, however, Vos clearly teaches that there will be a Second Coming of Christ, a future resurrection from the dead, and a final judgment. We therefore find in Vos a balanced approach to biblical eschatology, which recognizes the full authority of the Scriptures and does full justice to the totality of biblical teaching.<sup>83</sup>

Bandstra, and not Hoekema, taught the course on Pauline eschatology at Calvin Seminary. John Bolt testifies that it was not only one of the most popular courses at the school, but also heavily based on insights from Vos’s work.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 298.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 300–301.

<sup>84</sup> John Bolt, “From Princeton to Wheaton: The Course of Neo-Calvinism in North America,” in *Vicissitudes of Reformed Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Zoelmeer, Netherlands: Meinema, 2004), 169.

# ServantReading

## Current Trends in the History of the English Reformation

A Review Article

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by Edward Manger

There has been much ink spilt in the past two decades upon the issue of the English Reformation and its place in history. Historians working in the field have devoted a considerable amount of time recounting the developments that have emerged in the historiography. Particularly helpful examples are the essays: “The English Reformation after Revisionism” by Eamon Duffy<sup>1</sup> and “Modern Historians on the English Reformation” by Diarmaid MacCulloch in his collection *All things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy*.<sup>2</sup> They, amongst others, have charted the rise and fall of the popular narrative of the English Reformation articulated primarily by A. G. Dickens in his magisterial tome *The English Reformation*.<sup>3</sup> This volume undergirds the still pervasive idea that the English Reformation was in some ways inevitable, and largely complete by the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I. Dickens painted a picture of the medieval Church of England as being corrupt and decadent, ripe to fall into the hands of an anti-clerical population just waiting for an opportunity to devour it. This image was largely effaced by the work of revisionist historians, such as Christopher Haigh<sup>4</sup> and Eamon Duffy,<sup>5</sup> who argued that there was nothing inevitable about the English Reformation. In their theses, the church in England prior to the Reformation was far from the edge of collapse, but rather a vibrant and lively institution that contributed to social cohesion and the fabric of everyday life. Central to their view is that the Catholic reign of Mary I was more than a hiatus in the glorious march towards England’s natural protestant destiny, and that one could still be talking of reformations well into the seventeenth century. More recently, historians such as Peter Marshall<sup>6</sup> have trodden a careful path between the two extremes, showing that there is truth in both positions, and that the real watchwords for the English Reformation are complexity and multiplicity. It would be instructive in this, the five hundredth anniversary year of the Reformation, to look at the current state of historical thought on the English Reformation, a series of events that would define the practice of Christianity in the English-speaking world down to this very day. I shall

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<sup>1</sup> Eamon Duffy, “The English Reformation After Revisionism,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2006): 720–31.

<sup>2</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See especially Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (London: Clarendon, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> See especially Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Particularly the recent Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

attempt this by examining two books published in recent years and two books published this year among the slew of titles seeking to benefit from increased interest in the subject.

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*The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I: Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662*, edited by Anthony Milton. London: Oxford University Press, 2017, 544 pages, \$135.00.

This is the first volume of four charting the history of the various ecclesiastical bodies that developed out of the Church of England and the latter Anglican communion. The dates of this first volume are indicative of the contemporary trend for long-perspective views on the Reformation. It is divided into twenty-five chapters thematically addressing issues relating to the evolution of Anglicanism from the reign of Henry VIII up until the Great Ejection of 1662. Understandably, the book opens with a discussion of the problematic nature of the very word “Anglicanism.” The book seeks to peel away layers of preconceptions and imposed narratives that have accumulated around this word. An argument is advanced that many groups that are seen as distinct from “Anglicans,” such as Reformed Presbyterians and Puritans, were solidly within the mainstream Church of England throughout this period. The term Anglican is a later development that most non-specialists will associate with the concept of a *via media*, a middle path, between Geneva and Rome. This myth is dispelled in this volume, as the first four chapters helpfully illuminate through a chronological account of the period. The notion of “compromising” with or in any way seeking to chart a middle path with Rome on one side was anathema to both Evangelicals of the Henrician Reformation and the Elizabethan settlement. On the other hand, a distaste for Geneva was indeed held by a number in the upper echelons of society, but this was for fear of the public unrest that might result from a more “democratic” church constitution, not for its rigorous ascetic visual tastes, Calvinistic soteriology, or adherence to the Word of God as the basis for reforming the church. These were all principles accepted to a varying degree by the vast majority within the Church of England.

A highlight of this volume is Diarmaid MacCulloch’s essay on the international nature of the English Reformation, reflecting an emphasis prevalent in the recent literature: the interconnectedness of the Reformations across Europe. England was far from “isolated” or a unique case in the broader Reformation, but constantly interacted with the most influential thinkers in the Reformed world. The influence of Peter Martyr and Martyn Bucer is well documented, but the connections go deeper and further. As the Marian exiles rose through the ranks of Episcopal theologians, they had direct contact with the likes of Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger, regularly communicated with bishops, and sided with them against those who would later be called “Puritans” over issues of conformity, such as the vestments controversy of the 1560s.

The other stand out chapters are by Chad Van Dixhorn and Ann Hughes who helpfully place the Westminster Assembly and the Cromwellian church within the broader chronology of the Church of England. Far from constituting a break with what had gone before by attempting to establish a “new” church, both were contained within the existing national church. All participants (other than the Scottish commissioners) in the Westminster Assembly were ordained members of the Church of England who were seeking to reform that institution, not break away from it or end

it. As such, the Westminster Assembly and Cromwellian church can be seen as part of Anglicanism in a way that Presbyterians and modern Anglicans have often overlooked. The restoration of the monarchy and the events of 1662 whitewashed much of what was achieved during the 1640s and 1650s and effectively forced that period out of the mainstream Anglican narrative.

Also helpful are Peter Lake's and Peter MacCulloch's complementary chapters on what has been called "avant-garde conformity," which was the embryonic manifestation of what would later become the Arminian movement of the Laudian period. This avant-garde conformity is most famously characterized by Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker. This article goes some way to helping us move past the stereotyped image of crypto-papists attempting to pervert the course of true Reformation, or heroic defenders of beauty in worship against Puritan iconoclasts. Instead, we must see them as nuanced as any of their contemporaries, committed to the Word of God and the cause of the Reformation.

This volume is highly to be praised, it is replete with the most recent scholarship and rigorous research by some of the most able and impressive historians working in the field today. For anyone wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the terrain of the current debates surrounding the English Reformation, this can not be too highly recommended.

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*Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England*, by Eamon Duffy. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 448 pages, \$48.00.

Eamon Duffy substantially redefined the way historians discussed the English Reformation with his treatment of popular religion in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*.<sup>7</sup> He argued persuasively for the vital and dynamic reality of English Catholicism prior to the Reformation and the near success of the Catholic Church under Mary I. All subsequent historians have had to reckon with this thesis, and many owe a debt of gratitude to Duffy for this insight. It has been challenged and modified, yet not completely overturned.

This volume is a collection of the essays published by Duffy over the past forty years, having been updated and corrected where necessary. It is insightful to see the thought of this important historian over an extended time period, and recurrent themes begin to emerge. Duffy is himself a Catholic, and the largest section of this volume comprises a set of essays relating to the experience of English Catholics during and after Elizabeth's reign. In these, the reader is treated to an insight into a world that is often left out of narratives of the English Reformation, where Catholics are seen as either evil opponents of the gospel, or agent-less victims of cruel religious oppression. The truth is that they were neither. Duffy investigates the establishment of the English college at Rheims for the training of English priests, and the infighting of Jesuits and Jansenists in their approach taken to the re-evangelization, as they saw it, of England. These essays go a long way to humanizing the Catholic population, showing they were not a faceless, homogeneous mass of seditious traitors. In reality they had their own internal debates and acted with real agency, making decisions to conform or resist and strategized as to how they might most effectively reach their countrymen who had turned away from the sources of authority that had been for so long the keystone of English society.

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<sup>7</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

The first three essays in this volume are a reassessment of the work and life of Thomas More (1478–1535). There is an inevitable amount of overlap and slight repetition, which is hard to avoid in three separate essays on one man. The main thrust of the argument in all three is to re-cast More as a committed humanist in line with Erasmus and move away from the popular image of him as the arch villain of Henry's reign, most recently popularized by Hillary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. Alongside this central aim Duffy also establishes More's credentials as a systematic and sophisticated thinker and apologist for the traditional faith against Evangelicals during the reign of Henry VIII.

The third section of the book is composed of essays concerning the later Reformation, again adding weight to the view of the Reformation as a long multiplicity of events and developments rather than one or two single large shifts. One particularly interesting chapter examines Richard Baxter's ministry as a model of the Reformed ministry, arguing that his methods were not unique and indeed can be seen as constituting the pinnacle of a legitimate tradition of ministry that existed within the English church, even if it was ultimately overlooked following the Great Ejection. The other chapters in this section address the long Reformation and the debates that continued past 1662 and 1688 over the nature of the Protestant church in England, religious tolerance, and the place of Catholicism within that dynamic. Thus, he extends the Reformation further than most text books or single volumes will usually attempt to do. This volume is a worthy read for those interested in exploring some overlooked aspects of the English Reformation and a worthwhile antidote to accounts that can easily fall into Protestant triumphalism.

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*Reformation Unbound: Protestant Visions of Reform in England, 1525–1590*, by Karl Gunther. London: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 296 pages, \$29.99, paper.

Originally published in 2014, but republished in paperback this year, Karl Gunther has sought to revise our current understanding of the English Reformation by reappraising the development of the radical element within it. He contends that historians have seen radicalism as a phenomenon that emerged late during the reign of Elizabeth I. He endeavors to put together a compelling case over the course of the book that the roots of this movement go back further than has traditionally been appreciated. He contends that from very early in the English Reformation there was a spectrum of voices calling for a complete overhaul of the theology and ecclesiology of the church in England in the most definitive terms.

It is a well-written, well-researched book, full of fascinating insights. One must concede that Gunther is almost certainly correct that at least some historians have overlooked the range of revolutionary and extreme opinions that were circulated in the first half of the sixteenth century. However, he does not clearly show that this is currently a widespread trend amongst recent scholarship. Thus, he overstates his case and as a result can not be said to have significantly changed our understanding of the landscape of the English Reformation as he claims to be doing. A more accurate description of the effect on this book is that it causes a subtle reorientation of emphasis. The first chapter of the book is devoted to works published during the Henrician Reformation. He examines texts that, interestingly for readers of *Ordained Servant*, show that there were calls for the establishment of a system of church government that included the eradication of Episcopacy and the equality of ministers even at this early stage. He does not argue that there was a simple, straight line joining

these writings to the latter Presbyterian controversies of the second half of the sixteenth century, but that they informed and encouraged latter thinkers who did not emerge from a vacuum but drew upon these earlier publications.

Gunther then moves onto the experience of the Marian exiles with a discussion of texts relating to Nicodemism. This was a term coined to describe those who were Protestants but conformed to the Catholic Church reinstated by Mary I, rather than face persecution. Those who had fled to the continent were scathing about these Nicodemites, denying, outright, the possibility of communion with Catholics. They wrote in the harshest terms against the outward conformity of those who remained in England, equating association with Catholics with a denial of Christ himself. Gunther also offers a re-examination of the controversy that arose amongst the exile community in Frankfurt over the use of vestments and the Edwardian Book of Common Prayer. This he sees as a precursor to the vestarian conflict and debates surrounding conformity in the 1560s and onwards. The men who took part in these debates came back to England under Elizabeth's reign and rose to positions of prominent influence; for example, William Wittigham, who translated the Geneva Bible and was one of the main protagonists of the controversy in Frankfurt, became Dean of Durham. These chapters adequately show that the Puritans, who were to emerge as a prominent party within the church in the later sixteenth century, were not a late development or new party espousing novel ideas. They were part of a continuity of thought and practice within the church from the Edwardian church and Marian exile.

The flaw in Gunther's book is one of ambition rather than one of argument or sources. He is correct that radical voices were present and active in the English Reformation, however, he does not fully demonstrate how prominent or powerful they were early on, or that many of today's historians would disagree with this. For example, his treatment of texts published during the reign of Henry VIII would have benefited from establishing that they had a wide readership or broad influence, or that previous historians had neglected them as sources. Overall this book fits into the contemporary historical preoccupation with adding complexity and nuance. It adds another piece to the historical puzzle of the English Reformation and reminds us to appreciate the diversity of thought and ideas within it, not just accept the dominant narratives we have inherited. However, Gunther's narrative is itself perhaps less radical than the subjects of his study.

\* \* \*

*Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism* by Patrick Collinson. London: Cambridge University Press 2013, 252 pages, \$29.99, paper.

Patrick Collinson had a career that spanned over half a century, during which he became the foremost historian of Puritanism. This was the book he was working on when he passed away in 2011. As such, it forms an important contribution to the history of the Puritan movement.

The book opens with Collinson's assertion that it is "rather less and much more than a biography of Richard Bancroft" (1), and he is right. It is not a straight forward biography of a primate of the Church of England, as was Collinson's masterly treatment of Bancroft's predecessor Edmund Grindal.<sup>8</sup> The book ends just as Bancroft is raised to the primacy as Archbishop of Canterbury, and does not focus on the life or

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519–1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).

inner-workings of the man, but is comprised of a series of vignettes of Bancroft's interactions with Puritanism.

Bancroft was, even before his elevation to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, at the center of the life of the Church as Bishop of London from 1559 to 1570 and acting as the chaplain to Archbishop Whitgift. The previous archbishops, Parker, Grindal, and Whitgift, had all been soteriologically Calvinist and staunchly Protestant, yet all had faced controversy over the conformity of ministers within the Church; over vestments; over the prayer books; and over the practice of preaching and prophesying conventicles, the latter of which had effectively ended Grindal's archbishopric. Bancroft is a significant divergence from this trajectory, less adamantly Calvinistic and more certainly anti-Puritan. Collinson traces this development in his character over the events and controversies of the latter sixteenth century.

Collinson deals with the Marprelate Tracts, a series of tracts written under a pseudonym that argued vehemently and satirically against the Episcopal government of the church. They advocated for the establishment of a Presbyterian system of ecclesiastical government modelled upon Geneva. These tracts, which had widespread support among Puritan-minded clergy, caused a stir in the Church which precipitated the eruption of a pamphleteering war. Bancroft was one of the foremost opponents of the tracts and their philosophy of church government. Yet this was the first attempt, or at least first significant attempt, at articulating a divine right form of Presbyterian government in England, i.e., that it was not just the best, most pragmatic, or even closest to the early church, but that it was discernibly ordained by God in the Scriptures. Until this point, no, or very few, Protestants had been arguing that Episcopacy was divinely ordained either. It was only in response to this attack from the Puritans that a defense along these lines was formulated by supporters of the status quo. Collinson argues that it is not clear, however, in all the opposition given by Bancroft, that he was convinced in his mind that Episcopacy was divinely ordained.

For Bancroft the issue was at its central point one of conformity and obedience, in this he stood in the line of Bullinger, Cramner, Latimer, and Ridley, those who had become unassailable through their status as martyrs. This is seen in Collinson's discussion of the Hampton Court Conference, where in 1604 Puritan ministers met with bishops to dispute a list of contentions in front of the new King James I. Bancroft was infuriated with the trifling nature of some of the Puritans concerns, even to the extent of irritating the King with his opposition. It is a fascinating point in the history of the Church in England, a moment where things could have gone in a variety of ways. Bancroft is largely responsible for the way in which events did play out, against the Puritan interest.

Written in Collinson's engaging prose and full of insights accumulated over a lifetime of study, this book is absorbing in its focus on the interplay of two factions within a church. As with the other titles I have reviewed above, the aim was to add depth and to deconstruct the simple narratives that surround characters and events in the English Reformation. Collinson achieves this by fleshing out Bancroft and his opponents, the Puritans, so the reader gains an appreciation for the views and issues at the center of either side of the contemporary debates. This is a fitting final volume for one of the truly great historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

## **Conclusion**

The four books I have reviewed in this article differ in many ways: in aim, style, layout, and length. However, they also have similarities: each one seeks to move away from overtly praising the Reformation or being critical of it as have historians of past



years. Discussion of theology does not take center stage in any of these books, and the relative merits or demerits of various doctrines are not examined. Instead, all these books are informed by current historical mores, the desire to advance past simple narratives and repetitions of familiar stories with typecast heroes and villains. As such they look to overturn and re-examine past Reformation histories, to seek the overlooked and unappreciated aspects of an event, a movement, or a person, or even groups of people. The express purpose is always to give a more fully rounded and deeper understanding of the incredibly fraught and complex forces that brought about such a dramatic shift in society. In doing so, the modern historians reveal their distaste for the dominant historiographies that have emerged to reinforce certain groups within the contemporary church, whether it be Evangelical, broad church, or Anglo-Catholic. Instead of seeing a strand that leads from the early sixteenth century to any of these groups as the “rightful” inheritors of the Church in England, these histories show that there were multiple voices and parties within the church from the very first days of Reformation theology being consumed within the shores of England. With each vying for power and containing its own inconstancies and idiosyncrasies, it was by no means clear who would emerge victorious. The identity of the Reformed church in England was still being shaped and undergoing change well into the seventeenth century and beyond, making the Reformation difficult to date. The debates remain as hotly contended as they have ever been; and, although historians may agree on these very broad points, there is still much disagreement and there are areas that are benefiting from fresh appraisals, new research, and brand-new study. In this Reformation year, the history of the English Reformation is as vital and fascinating as it has ever been.

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# ServantReading

## 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

*by Tony Reinke*

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by T. David Gordon

*12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, by Tony Reinke (with foreword by John Piper).  
Wheaton: Crossway, 2017, 224 pages, \$14.99, paper.

Journalist and author Tony Reinke has written the book that many Christians have wished someone would write; a thoughtful, well-informed analysis of the smartphone (the most intrusive, and therefore most life-altering, of the various digital technologies) that is neither techno-philic nor techno-phobic, and that is intentionally (and persuasively) focused on the question of how this technology affects Christian discipleship. Reinke's concern is not about how smartphones alter political discourse, public education, etc.; his concern is primarily about how the phone shapes us as followers of Christ.

As is appropriate to such a timely work, Reinke's thinking is informed both by broad reading in the Christian tradition and by intelligent interviews with contemporary theologians, pastors, educators, philosophers, and ethicists. Reinke is well acquainted with the works of those whom we call "media ecologists;" he has digested the insights of Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, Daniel Boorstin, Neil Postman, Nicholas Carr, Douglas Groothuis, and Sherry Turkle, and has consulted with theologians and philosophers from John Flavel and Blaise Pascal, through the twentieth century's G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, to contemporaries such as Tim Keller, Rick Lints, Jamie Smith, John Dyer, Alan Jacobs, Oliver O'Donovan, and John Piper (and others). The breadth of his sources makes it difficult for readers to dismiss his thoughts as merely his own idiosyncratic opinion. Happily, despite Reinke's thorough familiarity with pertinent thought on the matter, his book does not read at all as a dull or merely academic survey; pulsating throughout the prose is the drive of a follower of Christ, eager to believe, quick to repent, and indignant at the Enemy's counterfeit of the true life our Redeemer offers and calls us to.

The chapter titles alone will intrigue many of this review's readers: "We Are Addicted to Distraction"; "We Ignore Our Flesh and Blood" (Ken Myers has often lamented the "disincarnate" nature of phones); "We Crave Immediate Approval"; "We Lose Our Literacy"; "We Feed on the Produced"; "We Become What We 'Like'"; "We Get Lonely"; "We Get Comfortable in Secret Vices"; "We Lose Meaning"; "We Fear Missing Out"; "We Become Harsh to One Another"; "We Lose Our Place in Time".

I have become so accustomed to the abuse/misuse of Scripture citations in so many publications that I only occasionally bother to consult them. After consulting the early citations here, I abandoned that practice. Reinke's citations (with just the Scripture references) are as apt as any I have encountered; they are not at all superficial "proof-texts." They are profound and persuasive. In remarkable succinctness, Reinke provides a rich biblical assessment of the categories of the "seen" and "unseen," with due warnings for

how the onslaught of visual images on our smartphones calls our attention to exactly the opposite of what we ought to attend to. Groups who study this book together would be well advised to take turns reading aloud the Scripture passages Reinke cites in order to derive the full benefit from this volume.

I was pleased that Reinke has observed the paradox that others (Giles Slade, Sherry Turkle, Nicholas Carr, Maggie Jackson, Alastair Roberts, William Deresciewicz, et al.) have observed: that typical use of smartphones robs us of both true solitude (and self-knowledge) on the one hand, and of true society (and other-knowledge), on the other. Readers unfamiliar with this paradox will be fascinated by Reinke's seventh chapter.

This is perhaps the most practical volume touching on digital media that I have read; nevertheless, Reinke issues no imperatives. His effort is to demonstrate what is going on in the faux, profit-driven, narcissistic, contemporaneous, image-based world of the smartphone, so that his readers will have to wrestle with how to benefit from the best of this tool while evading its worst. Towards the end, however, Reinke does raise the question (197–98) of a temporary or permanent “cold-turkey” opt-out of their use (and, earlier in the book, he quotes approvingly Alan Jacobs's having done so, 116–17), though he has not (yet?) made that decision himself. Though Reinke eschews imperatives, he routinely passes along sound advice on how to moderate and discipline smartphone use so as to evade/avoid their most damaging effects.

A Quibble (a little bickering over words).

Reinke rightly says that the challenge of determining what constitutes the proper use of these (fairly new) devices properly falls on the shoulders of this generation, an observation he derived from Oliver O'Donovan, and with which I concur. Like the initial colonizers of any new world, the original inhabitants thereof profoundly shape the experience of future denizens. However (and I am merely quibbling with the title here), I would suggest that the smartphone is not *changing* this generation (it may have changed *us*); it *shapes them initially*, so they do not even notice the ostensible “change.” The prairie-dog world of digital adolescents who pop up and down from one environment to another incessantly is the only world they know; and this is precisely why they will have difficulty taming the beast. They will not realize one day that it is harder to read Tolstoy novels than it once was, because they have *never* read Tolstoy novels (or, ordinarily, even Hemingway's novelettes). They have not *lost* an attention span they once *had*; they never had one to *lose*. The smartphone may well be “changing” our culture, and has “changed” many of us adults, but it is the nursery in which the Millennials were reared, and they cannot perceive any change in themselves at all. But this is mere pettifogging; O'Donovan and Reinke are right in assigning the duty of taming the smartphone to the Millennials, and only an academic nitpicker such as myself (who teaches/nitpicks an introductory course on Media Ecology) would bother to split this hair.

I hope Reinke's book receives a wide readership; and I hope many will read it and discuss it as a group, in the manner C. Christopher Smith suggested in his recent *Reading for the Common Good: How Books Help Our Churches and Neighborhoods Flourish* (2016). It will not be the “last word” on the smartphone, and it isn't entirely the first; but for those attempting to follow Christ with one of these in purse or pocket, it is currently the best.

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# ServantReading

## Making Sense of God *by Timothy Keller*

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by Dale Van Dyke

*Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*, by Timothy Keller. New York: Viking, 2016, 254 pages, \$27.00.

I was skeptical. Although I had benefited greatly from *The Reason for God* (2008), I doubted Keller had another worthwhile apologetics book in him. I was wrong; *Making Sense* is significantly different, and better. *The Reason for God* was written to answer common objections to the Christian faith (the problem of evil, idea of hell, exclusivity, etc.). However, the times are changing. As secularism has advanced, the “nones” seem to have moved from questioning the Christian faith to a comfortable and convinced unbelief. Consequently, as Andrew Wilson neatly puts it: “*Making Sense of God* isn’t so much a series of answers for those who think they have questions (like *The Reason for God*) as it is a series of questions for those who think they have answers.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Making Sense*, Keller, in his classic literary style, doesn’t address questions no one is asking but rather raises the ones they should be asking. He calmly but masterfully challenges the unexamined faith claims of the new secular religion.

In the first two chapters Keller confronts two widely held assumptions: secularism is inevitable in a modernizing world (ch. 1) and, unlike faith, it is based on pure reason and scientific observation (ch. 2). He argues that the “secularization thesis”—modernization inevitably results in secularization—has “been empirically shown to be false” (24). While the church seems to be declining in Europe, it is growing dramatically in other parts of the modernizing world, e.g., China. In fact, not only is secularism not inevitable, but there is substantial evidence that it is declining! “University of London professor Eric Kaufmann, in his book *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?*<sup>2</sup> speaks of ‘the crisis of secularism’ and argues that the shrinkage of secularism and liberal religion is inevitable” (24).

The primary problems facing secularism are 1) secularists tend not to reproduce and, 2) most significantly, secularism cannot account for actual human experience.

Strict secularism holds that people are only physical entities without souls, that when loved ones die they simply cease to exist, that sensations of love and beauty are just neurological-chemical events, that there is no right or wrong outside of what we in our minds determine and choose. Those positions are at the very least deeply counterintuitive for nearly all people, and large swaths of humanity will continue to simply reject them as impossible to believe. (23)

In chapter 2 Keller quotes contemporary philosophers to refute the claim that secularism, unlike religion, is based purely on science and reason. “Twentieth-century thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, have argued that all reasoning is based on prior faith commitments to which one did not reason” (34).

Like Paul on Mars Hill, Keller repeatedly uses respected cultural authorities to reveal the inherent flaws of a secular worldview. For example, he references Michael Polanyi to show “there is no such thing as an objective, belief-free, pure openness to objective evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Tim Keller’s Invitation to the Skeptical*, The Gospel Coalition, September 21, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-making-sense-of-god>.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth: Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile, 2011).

There is no view from ‘nowhere’ ” (36). Nietzsche is called upon to show that secularism has no coherent basis for morality. Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov exposes the irrational ethical reasoning of secularism by summarizing it this way: “Man descended from apes. Therefore we must love one another” (42). This is typical Keller—use “secular” sources to challenge secular assumptions—and he does it very well. The extensive references to Bellah, Lilla, Taylor, and so on, gives cultural weight and street credibility to Keller’s argument.

In Part Two, “Religion is More than You Think,” Keller contrasts secularism and religion, specifically the Christian faith, on the issues of meaning (ch. 3), satisfaction (ch. 4), freedom (ch. 5), identity (chs. 6–7), hope (ch. 8), morality (ch. 9), and justice (ch. 10). Those who’ve read Keller’s *Preaching*<sup>3</sup> will find this material familiar, but it is an insightful analysis of secularism and a useful aid to pastors striving to address both their secularized community and secularizing congregation. In each chapter Keller exposes the unmoored assumptions of secularism and concludes with a short defense of the Christian faith. Christ alone provides

a meaning that suffering can’t remove, a satisfaction not based on circumstances, a freedom that does not hurt but rather enhances love, an identity that does not crush you, a moral compass that does not turn you into an oppressor, and a hope that can face anything, even death. (215)

In Part Three, “Christianity Makes Sense,” Keller concludes by giving six brief arguments for God (ch. 11) and then a specific case for believing in Jesus (ch. 12). Some may consider this treatment to be far too brief, others might think it insufficiently pre-suppositional, but it supports the purpose of the book well and warmly invites a skeptic to consider the claims of Christ.

*Making Sense of God* is not an exhaustive discussion of the issues it addresses. While the decline of secularism is good news, it may be exaggerated. It would have been helpful to include a discussion of the devastating impact secularization is having among those who profess Christ, particularly here in America. As Steve Bruce has pointed out, apostasy isn’t the only indicator of secularization. “While the British secularized by abandoning their churches, Americans have secularized their churches. In Europe, the churches became less popular; in the United States, the churches became less religious.”<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, *Making Sense* is very good at what it does: challenging the false assumptions and illogical conclusions of the secularist’s faith and inviting a skeptical culture to see the truth of Christ as the most coherent, rational, liberating, and satisfying truth.

I highly recommend *Making Sense* for every pastor, church planter, and evangelist in the OPC. It is an insightful road map to the secular faith of our day. It will help you avoid answering the questions no one is asking and help you to invite your neighbors to consider the questions for which secularism has no answers. This would be a terrific neighborhood book study.

*Making Sense of God* would also be excellent for a Sunday School class or small group study. It will encourage the saints by showing the coherence of the Christian faith and arm them for more helpful conversations with their unconverted family members and neighbors. Ultimately, *Making Sense* will remind you of the sheer joy and privilege of being a Christian in a lost world!

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156.

# ServantPoetry

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Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)

## The Coronet

When for the thorns with which I long, too long,  
With many a piercing wound,  
My Saviour's head have crowned,  
I seek with garlands to redress that wrong:  
Through every garden, every mead,  
I gather flowers (my fruits are only flowers),  
Dismantling all the fragrant towers  
That once adorned my shepherdess's head.  
And now when I have summed up all my store,  
Thinking (so I myself deceive)  
So rich a chaplet thence to weave  
As never yet the King of Glory wore:  
Alas, I find the serpent old  
That, twining in his speckled breast,  
About the flowers disguised does fold,  
With wreaths of fame and interest.  
Ah, foolish man, that wouldst debase with them,  
And mortal glory, Heaven's diadem!  
But Thou who only couldst the serpent tame,  
Either his slippery knots at once untie;  
And disentangle all his winding snare;  
Or shatter too with him my curious frame,  
And let these wither, so that he may die,  
Though set with skill and chosen out with care:  
That they, while Thou on both their spoils dost tread,  
May crown thy feet, that could not crown thy head.