

A photograph of a white, Gothic Revival style church with a prominent steeple. The church is surrounded by trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and green. A white wooden fence runs across the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

Ordained Servant
November 2018

Leisure

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: LEISURE AS A CHRISTIAN CALLING

November 2018

From the Editor

Although I've thought and written in past years about the importance of leisure I found myself renewed in my thinking and practice by Leland Ryken's superb article "Leisure as a Christian Calling." He lays out a convincing case for thinking of leisure as a calling rather than an optional activity. In our frenetic and distracted culture important aspects of our redeemed humanity are undernourished by our neglect of leisure. Ryken provides a stimulating correction to an important failure in our cultural moment.

In my review article "Are You Woke?" I summarize and review an important new book, Alan Noble's *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age*. Noble's penetrating analysis and detailed prescription for change offers a thoughtful perspective on the challenges of witnessing the gospel in the modern world, especially analyzing the uniqueness of the electronic environment in cultivating an almost impenetrable buffer against the truth of the gospel. I say almost impenetrable because Noble believes that returning to several central Christian traditions will be used by God to penetrate the buffered souls of moderns. While perhaps underestimating that problem's presence throughout all of fallen history, Noble, like Francis Schaeffer, takes note of various ways in which modern culture channels those old human tendencies.

Ryan McGraw reviews another book in an important new series published by Reformation Heritage Books: The Westminster Studies Project: Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Whitney G. Gamble's *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* is a detailed study of how the Westminster Divines handled the antinomianism of their day. It is a highly relevant topic in every age.

Another book in an important new series reviewed by Ryan McGraw: New Studies in Dogmatics. Michael Allen's *Sanctification* is a work of systematic theology that lays a fine foundation for the actual practice of holiness by the believer.

Finally, Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband" reminds us that those Puritans were not prudes. Their marital love was passionate and romantic in the best tradition of the Song of Solomon, as Leland Ryken reminded us in his book *Worldly Saints*.¹ After all, our marriages are meant to be imperfect but real pictures of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

¹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

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

ServantLiving

Leisure as a Christian Calling

by Leland Ryken

The past two decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the subjects of vocation and work. In fact, these topics are nothing less than a growth industry in Christian circles, as seen in the appearance of books, conferences, and even permanent institutes. I am happy for the ferment.

The problem is that leisure remains what it has always been—a subject of neglect in the church and among Christians. This neglect can be traced all the way back to the people who thought and wrote most helpfully on the subjects of vocation and work, namely, the Reformers and Puritans. The Protestant tradition has elevated work and undervalued leisure. My heart soars when Luther writes that God put Adam and Eve into the garden to work. And then my heart sinks when Luther adds, “Not for leisure.”¹ Wait a minute, I say to myself. How do we get *that* from Genesis 2? Why can’t we elevate work without demoting leisure?

I speak of a great mystery, but surely an evangelical author hit the nail on the head when he titled his book *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*.² Why do we feel guilty when we relax? Partly because we have not studied the Bible to see what it says about rest and leisure. I believe we should dignify the concept of leisure, construct a Christian defense of it, and proceed to practice it guilt free.

What Is a Calling?

The Protestant tradition has been so accustomed to linking the concepts of vocation and work that when the subject of vocation is mentioned, we almost automatically assume that the discussion will focus on work. I can therefore imagine a touch of initial resistance to my claim that leisure is a calling. I do not want to soften my claim, however, so I will proceed to define what I mean by a calling.

A calling is anything that God commands us to do. When the Bible speaks of a calling, the primary frame of reference is neither work nor leisure but the call to follow and obey God. That is what the Puritans called the general calling, which comes in the same form to all Christians. One’s particular calling is any specific task or duty that God places before us.

When I speak of leisure as a calling, I do not abandon the definition that I use when speaking of work as a calling.

It is only the application to leisure rather than work that changes.

What Is Leisure?

Before I turn to the biblical data on leisure, I want to summarize what we can learn from the secular sources. What we primarily learn is information about the nature of leisure, starting with the etymology of the word *leisure*. The word can be traced back to two roots, both conveying the idea that leisure is free time. One root word is the Old French word *leisir*, from the Latin *licere*, meaning “to be allowed or to be lawful.” Our word *license* comes from the same root word.

¹ Martin Luther, commentary on Genesis 2:14.

² Tim Hansel, *When I Relax I Feel Guilty* (Elgin: David C. Cook, 1979).

In our leisure time we have license and permission to do as we please (within moral and spiritual constraints, of course). G. K. Chesterton famously said that the concept of leisure “has come to cover three totally different things. The first is being allowed to do something. The second is being allowed to do anything. And the third . . . is being allowed to do nothing.”³

The other derivation of the word *leisure* is the Greek word *skolé* or the Latin *schola*, from which we get the English word *school*. This root word carried the connotation “to halt or cease,” meaning that in leisure we call a halt to our work and develop ourselves the way we do in our education.

Based on this etymology, experts on leisure offer the following as the defining traits of leisure. First, leisure is free time or nonwork. Work belongs to the category of obligation, and leisure by contrast is free from obligation. This is important: leisure needs to feel like leisure to count as leisure. If we pursue a leisure activity as an obligation, we have missed an essential aspect of leisure.

Secondly, leisure is defined in terms of certain activities that we normally think of as falling into the category of leisure. Examples are cultural pursuits, recreation, entertainment, hobbies, and social activities. Thirdly, leisure is a quality of life. An expert on leisure has written that “anybody can have free time. Not everybody can have leisure. . . . Leisure refers to a state of being, a condition. . . , which few desire and fewer achieve.”⁴

I will allow a Christian leisure theorist to provide a good summary of what leisure is in its highest reaches: “Leisure is the growing time for the human spirit. Leisure provides the occasion for learning and freedom, for growth and expression, for rest and restoration, for rediscovering life in its entirety.”⁵ That raises the bar high, and I think we resonate with that.

My thesis for the rest of this article is that leisure is as much a Christian calling as work is. I have found as much biblical data on leisure as on work. The data is more indirect and inferential than the data on work, but it is present. I will offer six strands of biblical data to defend my claim that leisure is a Christian calling.

God at Rest

Just as a Christian view of work begins with God’s act of creation, so does a Christian defense of leisure. The foundational but not final ingredient of leisure is that it is cessation from work. The great original model for this is God’s rest during the week of creation.

There is an element of mystery in God’s rest, but one of its great uses to us is that it provides an unmistakable model and warrant for human rest. The key text is Genesis 2:2–3, which states, “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” Exodus 31:17 adds to the mystery of divine rest by ascribing refreshment to God’s resting on the seventh day: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

It would appear that God’s Sabbath rest was a day of creation, not a day off. It was, to be sure, a day off from work, but the implication is that the days of creation form a week, so that God can be said to have created and instituted the seventh day of rest. A Jewish scholar claims that “it took a special act of creation to bring [the Sabbath] into being.”⁶

What are the implications of divine rest for leisure? The first lesson is that we have an

³ G. K. Chesterton, “On Leisure,” in *Generally Speaking* (London: Methuen, 1928), 111.

⁴ Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), 7–8.

⁵ Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), 35.

⁶ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 23.

obligation to have times when we call a halt to work. If God did it, we need to do it.

Divine rest sets a pattern for drawing a boundary around work and making sure that it is balanced by rest. God's design for the human race is not non-stop work.

The Sabbath and our leisure modeled on it have the nature of letting go of the utilitarian and acquisitive urges that occupy us in the workaday world of getting and spending. In rest and leisure we celebrate what has already been accomplished and realize that for the moment work is unnecessary and inappropriate. I like Kenneth Woodward's comment that "the essence of leisure [is] time off for the timeless—for thanking God for what has been freely given."⁷ Also excellent is Leonard Doohan's claim that "people who refuse to rest on the Sabbath and reject genuine sabbatical living are those who trust in their own strength rather than God's grace. . . . It is only in the sabbatical pause that we can truly open ourselves to appreciate and acknowledge what God has done."⁸

Because God established rest as part of creation, it has the force of a creation ordinance, just as work does. Regular cessation from work is a foundational principle that God has built into the fabric of human existence.

The Example and Teaching of Jesus

Divine rest is reinforced by the example and teaching of Jesus as recounted in the gospels. Jesus did not reduce life to endless work and evangelism. He found time to ponder the beauty of the lily and commanded his followers to do the same.

Here is a typical scenario from the life of Jesus: "Immediately [Jesus] made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, . . . while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land" (Mark 6:45–47). In other words, Jesus and his disciples drew a boundary around their work and obligations to others.

Here is another typical passage: "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves" (Mark 6:30–32). If we arrange the public life of Jesus into a series of typical scenes, one of them is Jesus attending what we call a dinner party—a form of leisure. If Jesus himself, who lived and died to be our Savior, found time for leisure, surely we should do the same.

In addition to the example of Jesus's lifestyle, we have his teaching and in particular his discourse against anxiety in the Sermon on the Mount. I consider this passage—actually a poem—to be a great primary source on leisure. There are two main thrusts to Jesus's discourse against anxiety in Matthew 6:25–34. One is the command not to be anxious about acquiring things like clothes and food. In commanding us not to be anxious about these material things, Jesus is asserting a prime principle of leisure, namely, the need to set a curb to the acquisitive life. The second thrust of Jesus's discourse against anxiety is the command to contemplate nature and let it influence how we live. "Consider the lilies of the field," Jesus says. Contemplating nature and enjoying its beauty is one of the world's favorite leisure activities. Jesus commands us to do it.

The Fourth Commandment

In addition to the example of God's cessation from work and Jesus's inclusion of rest and leisure in his busy life, we have the command to rest in the Decalogue. The fourth

⁷ Kenneth Woodward, "What Is Leisure Anyhow?" *Newsweek*, August 26, 1991, 56.

⁸ Leonard Doohan, *Leisure: A Spiritual Need* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1990), 46.

commandment states, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exod. 20:9–10). Although we associate the Sabbath with worship, it is unclear how early the Sabbath entailed worship. The emphasis early in the Old Testament is on the complete prohibition of work. In any case, if God commands rest or leisure in the Fourth Commandment, then it is something that he *calls* us to do. That is why I do not shrink from labeling leisure a Christian calling.

After the Fall

While my topic of leisure as a calling does not require me to talk about the effect of the Fall on leisure, I am going to do so because it is part of the total picture. The effect of the Fall on leisure warns us against abuses of leisure in our lives. The primary data on the perversion of leisure from its godly intention is simply a look around us, where we find empirical proof that the Fall changed everything in regard to leisure.

But the Bible, too, paints pictures of perverted leisure, showing us that after the Fall leisure has had the potential to degenerate into immoral activities and triviality. The book of Ecclesiastes provides haunting pictures of the emptiness of leisure that the quester experienced when he turned leisure into his central life interest. His futile experiment began with a conscious decision: “I said in my heart, Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself” (2:1, RSV). What followed was a litany of cheap and tawdry leisure pursuits: “I searched . . . how to cheer my body with wine. . . . I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man” (2:3, 8). In that same passage, it is obvious that the wealthy quester went shopping on a grand scale—recreational shopping in a courtly mode. Further, “I kept my heart from no pleasure, . . . and this was my reward for all my toil” (2:10). We know that the author is talking about leisure because leisure is a reward for toil—something we enjoy after we have worked to make it possible.

And what was the result of this pursuit of leisure apart from God? Emptiness. We read, “Behold, all was vanity [literally vapor] and a striving after wind” (2:11). There is an important lesson here: despite all my enthusiasm for leisure, it needs to come as a byproduct from something more substantial than leisure itself. Part of the restorative value of leisure is that it offsets the rigors of work. It is like dessert after the main meal. Just as dessert cannot carry an entire meal, leisure cannot give purpose to a whole life.

Old Testament Religious Festivals

Another body of data is the Old Testament prescription of an annual calendar of religious festivals or feasts. Before I unpack the biblical data, let me reply to what is an entirely plausible initial resistance to what I am about to say. Aren’t the Old Testament religious festivals worship experiences like our Sunday morning worship services? My answer is no; they were more like the evangelical institution of a Christian summer camp. Certainly worship was a central part of the annual Old Testament events, but there was a social and celebrative aspect as well. I consider them a form of religious and spiritual leisure.

What does the Old Testament say about these events? First, there were six annual required festivals. They went by such names as “holy convocations” and “appointed feasts.” They were accompanied by strict prohibition of work. I think they resembled our Thanksgiving Day celebrations when observed as a day of thanks to God with a church service as part of the mix.

When Moses recapitulated the rules of religious festivals originally recorded in Leviticus 23, three of them were expanded to include annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. These were group events that included camping out.

They were so communal that Jesus’s parents left Jesus behind in Jerusalem by mistake, just

assuming that he was part of some other family's entourage.

In Nehemiah 8 we catch a glimpse of what the feast of booths was like. The people went out from the city to the hills, where they built makeshift booths from tree branches. On the occasion of the rediscovery of the law recorded in Nehemiah 8, the camping trip lasted seven days.

One reason I put the Old Testament religious festivals into the category of leisure is that they put a halt to work, and this is an essential feature of leisure. A second reason is that they had some of the physical and social properties of leisure. I would call these festivals and feasts sanctified leisure.

Respecting Our Creaturely Selves

I will make one more argument for the necessity of leisure, this one based on inferences about the kind of people God created us to be. I would call this a Christian principle but perhaps not an explicit biblical teaching.

An evangelical author titled one of his books *Your Right to Rest*.⁹ If we look at what people are like, it appears that the book title understates the case. We do not simply have a right to rest; we have a need for it. Living responsibly includes living in accordance with the kind of creatures God made us. Our mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing require that we rest and refresh ourselves and take breaks from work. Burnout is an established phenomenon in our culture. The chief cause is excessive work and insufficient leisure. Burnout is not God's goal for people.

The person who coined the word *workaholic* speaks of the self-deception of trying to live as if we do not have a body subject to certain limitations.¹⁰ One of the limitations of the human body is that it cannot work nonstop. It needs rest and leisure. So do our minds and emotions. Because we are physical creatures subject to physical and psychological laws, to have regular times of leisure is to live in accord with the Creator's plan for us. We are also created to seek reward from our work. I have always found evocative the phrase in Ecclesiastes 4:9 about people having "a good reward for their toil." Leisure is one of the good rewards for our toil.

Applications

I am ready to turn to applications, and these are intended to shift the discussion from *why* leisure is a calling to thoughts on *how* leisure can be a Christian calling. The first of four applications that I will make is that we need to take stock of where we personally stand in regard to our leisure lives. That begins by pondering the case that I have made for leisure as a Christian calling. Are we convinced that God wants us to have rest and leisure in our lives? If the answer is yes, we have a mandate to make sure that the quantity of our leisure reaches a certain minimal and respectable level.

Taking stock also requires that we make a realistic assessment of the special problems that leadership and service in the church pose for Christians. I do not have space in this article to survey the leisure problem in our culture at large, so I will just summarize what the data shows, namely, that most people do not find enough time for leisure. I believe that this problem is more severe for many Christians because of their sense of duty and commitment to Christian service. In fact, there seems to be a correspondence between diligence in Christian service and lack of leisure in a person's life. It is well established that pastors struggle to find time beyond service to people and the church.

⁹ Wayne Oates, *Your Right to Rest* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

There are no easy answers here. Our initial response is that it would be self-defeating to the work of the church to encourage those who are most active to cut back so they can engage in leisure. It may even seem unchristian. But if leisure is a Christian calling, it should not be regarded as optional or unworthy of cultivation and stewardship. On the surface, leisure can seem like self-indulgence, but *not* to engage in leisure can be a form of shortchanging others, including spouse and family.

For my second application I want to reach into the wisdom of secular sources on leisure theory. Leisure theorists have evolved a paradigm called the time continuum. It consists of the twenty-four hours that make up every day. At one end of the continuum is obligation, consisting of work (*all* work, not simply our job). On the other end is freedom from obligation, consisting of leisure. We cannot add to one without subtracting from the other, and therein lies our problem.

But leisure theorists have also evolved a category in the middle of the continuum that they call semi-leisure. Activities in this category are a combination of obligation and freedom. The degree to which they are experienced as either drudgery or leisure depends partly on the attitude with which we perform them. My application is that we can make creative use of semi-leisure, importing qualities of leisure into activities that might otherwise add still more work to our lives.

My third application concerns education in leisure. We do in our leisure time what we have *learned* to do. Learning is simply another name for education, broadly defined. Who is ultimately responsible for seeing that all aspects of the Christian life are being covered in a local church? The minister is—not in the sense that he needs to do all of the educating, but in the sense of ensuring that the issues are being addressed *somewhere* (in sermons, Sunday school classes, small groups, etc.).

It seems likely that the topics of work and vocation are adequately taught in Reformed churches. It is less clear that leisure is receiving its due. I was exhilarated to learn that New England Puritan Cotton Mather preached a sermon on “how to employ the leisure of the winter for the glory of God.” I will add that education in leisure is a parental responsibility and that someone needs to be prompting Christian parents to exercise that responsibility. In our culture at large, children and young people are mainly left to themselves to forge standards and practices in their leisure lives. The standards and practices of many Christian young people are barely distinguishable from those in the youth culture at large.

My final application is that the usual standards of stewardship apply to our leisure as well as our work. Perhaps because my vocation is that of a literature teacher, when I assimilate Jesus’s parable of the talents, I am thinking as much about stewardship of leisure as of work. Leisure is an opportunity that God has entrusted to us. According to Jesus’s parable, God expects a return on what he has entrusted. Applied to leisure, this extends to both the quantity and quality of our leisure activities. In Jesus’s parable, not cultivating an opportunity is pictured as burying the master’s money in the ground.

The take-away value of what I have said in this article might be to ponder what burying a talent looks like in our leisure lives, and then to resolve to be like the faithful stewards of Jesus’s parable rather than the wicked and slothful servant who did nothing with the opportunity that had been entrusted to him.

Leland Ryken is emeritus professor of English at Wheaton College, where he continues to teach part-time. He has published more than fifty books.

ServantReading

Are You Woke?

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age, by Alan Noble. Grand Rapids: IVP, 2018, 192 pages, \$16.00, paper.

“Woke” is the new byword for social awareness. Noble’s book on Christian witness is a quest to awaken a world numbed by the immanent frame of the contemporary mindset. Noble includes Christians in his critique of modernity showing that we are not immune to the cultural smog we breath. He is also aware of the important influence of electronic media in cultivating this way of thinking, which locks us into the lie that what you see is what you get. This is the buffered self of sociologist Charles Taylor,¹ whose thinking has deeply influenced Noble. The Internet spreads us over a thin surface of reality and tends to block out transcendent realities, especially the immanent presence of the true and living God. Metanarratives are out since everything has a natural explanation (3). Back in 1968 Francis Schaeffer was one of the first to alert thoughtful twentieth century Christians to this danger. In his influential book *The God Who Is There* he warned that secular people “have already accepted with an implicit faith the presupposition of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system.”²

This should not surprise us since we are born in our first parents, “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). This, of course, is not unique to modernity—although enhanced by the electronic matrix—as Puritan Richard Sibbes eloquently reminds us:

The souls of most men are drowned in their senses, and carried away with weak opinions rising from vulgar mistakes and shadows of things. Satan is ready to enlarge our imaginings of what is outwardly good and evil, and to make them greater than they are; he is ready to make spiritual things less than they are, and to present them through false glasses. And so men, trusting in vanity, vanquish themselves in their own apprehension of things. It is a woeful condition when both we and what we highly esteem vanish together. And this will happen, as truly as Christ’s judgment will come to victory. To the extent that the *vain heart* of man is enlarged to conceive a greater good in the things of this world than there actually is, so the soul is enlarged to be more aware of misery when it sees its error. This is the difference between a godly, wise man and a deluded worldling: what the one now judges to be vain, the other will

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991); *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1989).

² Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1968), 111.

hereafter judge, when it is too late. But the vanity of our natures is that, although we avoid above all else being deceived and mistaken in present things, yet in the greatest matters of all, we are willingly ignorant and misled.³

Noble has also been deeply influenced by the philosopher James K. A. Smith,⁴ who has in turn been influenced by Charles Taylor and written about Taylor's sociology.⁵ Thus, Noble acknowledges a measure of agreement with the secularization theory of the mid-twentieth century, but believes that it was essentially wrong because Christianity remains popular in the United States. But Noble adds a caution: "But while Americans haven't lost faith, the space that faith fills in our lives and our ability to effectively communicate what the Christian tradition means has changed" (175). Noble's numerous citations of these two authors whet the reader's appetite for more.

One of the great strengths of Noble's book is that both his critique and the application of his critique are of equal length. This is refreshing since most books on this topic are long on critique and short on what to do about it, or they may have lots of practical advice with no analytical foundation.

Noble also flavors the narrative with many personal examples of his own shortcomings. While some of us older Christians would not be comfortable doing this, at least to the extent that Noble does—especially older New Englanders like myself—he will certainly appeal to his generation that thirsts for authenticity. His honesty should be applauded.

In his introduction Noble shows that Christians have unwittingly succumbed to the idea that Christian faith is simply a preference (1). One barrier to comprehending the gospel is "the practice of continuous engagement in immediately gratifying activities that resist reflection and meditation" (2). Another is "the growth of secularism, defined as a state in which theism is seen as one of many viable choices for human fullness and satisfaction, and in which the transcendent feels less and less plausible" (2). The challenge is to break through the protective, defensive bubble of the modern person with the gospel. It is incumbent upon Christians to consider the ways that their lives have compromised with the ways of the buffered self (7). The following two parts of the book unpack these concerns.

In Part One, "A Distracted Secular Age," Noble analyses the barriers that endless distraction and the buffered self present to disruptive witness. His final chapter describes the human quest for fullness as a chief motivational factor in human life, one that needs to be addressed in Christian witness.

In his first chapter Noble focuses primarily on the electronic distractions that consume our attention. The boundary between work and leisure is blurred, so that people are constantly available for "communication" (13). The "electronic buzz" has fostered a whole new industry of mindfulness techniques and institutions. In some ways this seems

³ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (repr. 1630, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 112–13; *The Bruised Reede and Smoking Flax 1630* (Menston, Yorkshire, England: The Scholar Press, 1973), 302.

⁴ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016); *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁵ *How (Not) to Be Secular*.

to me, as a former member of the sixty's counterculture, to be a revival of our rebellion against the "military industrial complex," or what seemed to us the inauthenticity of modern culture. But the contemporary mindfulness movement is not a back to nature rejection of modernity as much as a means of dealing with the electronic environment—a kind of détente (15–18).

The electronic world seeks to capture our attention in order to gather our data through a relentless bombardment (18). I have always warned people that by joining Facebook they are engaging in the largest focus group in history. Consequently much of our privacy is disappearing, but like fish in water we remain largely unaware of how all-absorbing this environment is. All of this unsuits us for concentration and thoughtfulness, thus undermining the kind of reflective discussion necessary for sound Christian witness. We are adrift in a sea of triviality (22) that enables people to ignore the logical flaws in arguments, to resist introspection, and to assume that "conversations about faith can be easily perceived as just another exercise in superficial identity formation" (25). In this context the gospel seems like "just another image vying for our time" (29). Thus, evangelical witness often naively clothes its evangelism in pop culture, unaware of how the medium is an integral part of the message (30).

In chapter 2 Noble investigates the buffered self. The modern quest for fullness is subjective, looking within for meaning (36). We have moved from faith to feeling, assuming that there is no transcendent source for fullness and meaning. "We are buffered selves, protected behind a barrier of individual choice, rationalism, and a disenchanting world" (37). In this way Christianity becomes just another lifestyle choice (38). The everchanging inner life is always aware of numerous alternatives (42–43).

Noble counsels humility through proper self-assessment in resistance to what he calls "the immanent frame" (55). This means becoming aware of our being seduced by the ways in which the modern world advertises itself as being the product of human ingenuity and achievement (57). Noble insists, "Our witness must work to disrupt the normative experience of life in a closed frame" (58).

The last chapter in Part One deals with the human quest for fullness. "[A] culture of technological distraction inclines us to look for meaning in preoccupation, novelty, consumer choices, and stimulation" (62). Moderns are not disposed to seek fullness from a transcendent source. Identity formation through self-expression is believed to be the only path to fulfillment (62). Noble believes that the urge to justify one's existence is essential to our being human (64–65). But the wonder of being alive in this world is suppressed by the buffered self. "To live a life of meaning is to have an interpretive framework for explaining how our significance relates to the rest of existence" (67). But a kind of popular existentialism moves people to believe that there is no inherent meaning in anything. We must create meaning from within (68). Citing Calvin, Noble asserts that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are inextricably related, thus emphasizing the human need for God, for becoming like Christ by his grace rather than through seeking self-actualization (71). Taylor observes that "a total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend toward emptiness: nothing would count as a fulfillment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfillment" (74). The inherent futility of this quest points to the need for something beyond the self. Noble concludes Part One: "A disruptive witness denies the entire contemporary project of treating faith as a preference" (81).

In Part Two, “Bearing a Disruptive Witness,” Noble offers excellent prescriptions for disruptive witness in our personal habits, church practices, and cultural participation. He invites us to challenge the assumptions of unbelievers with countercultural thoughts, words, and deeds, meant to purposely disrupt the assumptions of moderns.

Noble reminds us that secularism is not so much a rejection of Christianity as a “deeply ingrained cultural assumption” (85). Thus, we “simply can’t reorder society or argue our way out of this societal condition” (87). In discussing some of the dangerous liabilities of the electronic environment, I have often said the same, encouraging wise navigation of our situation, while building the kingdom, not through cultural transformation, but through discipling the nations one convert at a time. Noble describes our task as a disruptive witness in every part of life. This is similar to McLuhan’s idea of a counter environment, which I have co-opted and applied to the church.⁶

This means “we must abandon practices adopted from the secular marketplace that trivialize our faith, and instead return to traditional church practices that encourage contemplation and awe before a transcendent God” (88). In other words, we must ourselves be disrupted by God as our creator and redeemer before we can be disruptive witnesses. Noble describes this as a “*double movement* in which the goodness of being produces gratitude in us that glorifies and acknowledges a loving, transcendent, good, and beautiful God” (92). Noble goes on to demonstrate this double movement in Scripture from passages like 2 Peter 3:4, Matthew 5:16, and 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (95). So our lives must allude to something beyond ourselves, to God (97), “unsettling our notions of a containable universe and a self-defined individual” (101). Noble quotes a lengthy passage from Calvin’s *Institutes*: “our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone. . . . [W]e cannot aspire to Him in earnest until we have begun to be displeased with ourselves” (107–8).

Noble speaks honestly of his own struggles with his smart phone and his embarrassment at saying grace in restaurants, but recommends it as a type of disruptive witness (114). He goes on in a surprisingly traditional way to recommend sabbath keeping as a radically disruptive testimony that there is something more important than this present world (115–18). Noble does tell us that he is part of a Presbyterian church.⁷

In the penultimate chapter Noble calls the church back to means-of-grace ministry instead of imitating the latest cultural fad. Noble really understands the relationship between form and substance, medium and message. He asks four penetrating questions to be asked of all media used in the church (125). It is refreshing to read a millennial who understands that tradition, good tradition based on Scripture, can be normative and should always be explored to find out why generations have practiced in such ways. Noble agrees with Smith that historic liturgies embody the presence of both God and his worshipping people (137).

Noble concludes this chapter by valorizing prayer and the Lord’s Supper as two aspects of the liturgy that “most strongly challenge life in a closed, immanent frame” (141). This is the most important and useful chapter in the book.

⁶ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 298–308.

⁷ Noble attends a Presbyterian Church in America church plant in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

The final chapter addresses disruptive witness in cultural participation. As an English professor Noble has seen how the reading of twentieth-century literature can assist a disruptive witness. Books like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises*, which describe the world as a bleak place, can puncture the buffer and reveal the cross pressure between belief in a meaningless world and longing for meaning and hope (149).

Noble goes on to explore the three points of contact described by Taylor as points where "the cross pressure is most keenly felt: our human agency, our moral obligations, and our aesthetic experiences" (151). "The test of our beliefs is whether they can account for existence as we know it" (152). Although we know that the truth suppressing activity of the unbeliever's thinking distorts the way things actually are, nonetheless the givenness of our own natures and God's world are always impinging on the fallen human consciousness through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Noble makes a strong plea for the importance of stories because of their power to "portray worlds, not just ideas" (155). Of course, the entire Bible proves this value. But not all stories are helpful and some are dangerous. The best stories instill in us what C. S. Lewis described in *Mere Christianity*: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world" (159). I think Van Til would modify this to say that this is the only explanation, but Lewis's point is well taken. Noble explores the value of stories by looking at examples from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, and the W. H. Auden poem "Funeral Blues," recited in the 1994 movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (161–65).

I wish Noble had used the doctrine of original sin more in his analysis of the buffered self. He seems to assume it, but could have been more explicit. Thus, a more explicitly presuppositional approach to the human condition would be helpful.⁸ Certainly the idea of unsettling people (60) reminds us of aspects of the presuppositional method.

This leads us to recognize that, while the environment of modernity adds unique challenges to our understanding of the human condition and to witness, human nature has not essentially changed; only the means of buffering the self have changed. Whether Paul was evangelizing in Jerusalem or Athens his basic approach assumed a natural resistance to the truth, a presentation of the gospel that calls people to reckon with God, and a deep dependence upon the internal work of the Holy Spirit to convict sinners of the truth of the gospel. Only the effectual work of the Spirit can burst the bubble of rebellion and suppression of the truth.

While Noble's sociological analysis and prescription for witness may not be completely satisfying for the presuppositionalist, his book offers an intriguing analysis of the contemporary situation and some thoughtful and stimulating proposals for improving our witness.

Unencumbered by clichés or facile solutions Noble's book is a valuable contribution to the conversation about how to reach our lost world.

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⁸ Noble has told me that he is familiar with Van Til through Covenant Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary lectures, which have dealt extensively with presuppositionalism.

Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, *by Whitney G. Gamble*

by Ryan M. McGraw

Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, by Whitney G. Gamble. Studies on the Westminster Assembly. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018, 187 pages, \$40.00.

This series of books introduces readers to historical figures and backgrounds surrounding the assembly that produced the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. As the church approaches the four-hundredth anniversary of the production of these documents, it must grapple with the fact that it needs to understand the different world in which they arose in order to keep using them today. Whitney Gamble's contribution to this series is particularly important because she shows ably how the threat of antinomianism shaped the concerns of the Westminster divines and the documents that they produced at virtually every turn. Antinomianism did not necessarily mean the same thing in the seventeenth century as it does now. Yet Gamble's thorough contextual study of this issue will help readers both understand the theology behind the Westminster Standards and see parallels to contemporary issues that face the church today.

This book is well-written, thoroughly researched, and clearly argued. Gamble wisely begins the narrative of antinomianism well before the first meeting of the Westminster Assembly, which turned its attention heavily to this topic for the first two months of its meetings. She appeals to how various authors used David's sin, repentance, and restoration to illustrate the different theological positions involved (cf. conclusion). This provides readers with a clear point of comparison that makes this study easy to follow. Antinomians, such as John Eaton, argued that God saw sin in David, but that he no longer does so in believers, because David belonged to the old age rather than to the new covenant (16). Antinomians also argued that faith was a means of realizing that one had already been justified rather than an instrument through which one receives justification (50–54). Gamble traces the initial effort of the Westminster divines to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles and their subsequent fresh formulation of issues such as justification, faith, repentance, and good works. She shows the thorny issues involved in the interrelationship among these doctrines and provides a faithful roadmap of the theological options available at the time. She concludes that the assembly's work was largely a failure in that the Westminster Standards did not become the confession of the English church; yet, on the other hand, the continuing influence of these standards on the church worldwide is staggering (157). If antinomianism is integral to the history of these documents, then this study provides essential background to understanding what they mean.

Many of Gamble's findings are important for historical and for contemporary theology. For example, her assertion that identifying the Sinai covenant as a covenant of works was a traditional antinomian move, while requiring some careful qualifications, is an important point in the historical development of Reformed covenant theology. She even challenges the valuable findings of Mark Jones on this point, arguing for a lesser degree of diversity within the assembly over the nature of the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of

grace (139). Gamble's historical work will bring a fresh voice to the table in contemporary discussions of such issues. This is also true in relation to the question of whether faith is a condition of the covenant of grace. Antinomians regarded this as legalism, and they tended to relegate scriptural imperatives to the task of promoting the conviction of sin (50).

What made the antinomian error so dangerous was that most of what the antinomians had to say was true. The covenant of grace depended wholly on Christ and not on believers or on their faith. The Holy Spirit did create an obedient disposition in Christians, making obedience natural and a matter of course. However, this did not remove the biblical realities that believers were united to Christ by faith and that they were "children of wrath" before they embraced him. Teaching that salvation does not depend on our faith is not the same thing as saying that Spirit-supplied faith is not a condition of entrance into the covenant of grace and of interest in Christ (144). Moreover, the fact that Christians are delivered from the law does not negate the fact that the Spirit writes the law on their hearts as they hear, study, and practice its teachings. This is a great benefit of union with Christ and one of the primary objects of redemption in Christ. Like most historical and contemporary errors, antinomianism was mostly right in what it asserted. Yet the places in which it was incomplete had, and continue to have, massive theological and practical implications. Gamble's study has potential for clarifying such discussions.

There is one significant weakness in this work. It is interesting that the author aimed initially to study debates between John Owen and Richard Baxter, yet, in the end, Baxter receives no mention and Owen only one passing reference. Gamble stresses the debates and writings of the Westminster Divines to the neglect of the broader theological context, both in England and on the continent. This makes it more difficult for readers to understand where theological debates at Westminster fit in the broader Reformed world. For example, when treating the imputation of Christ's active obedience, her analysis of the assembly's conclusions are sound, but it is surprising that she makes no reference to the background of this debate in the international controversy that started between Johannes Piscator and Theodore Beza. Gamble's analysis of the Westminster Assembly's minutes and related documents is superb, but the narrow focus of her research limits the reach of her work.

Studies like this one can help readers better understand the meaning of the Westminster Standards. The relatively recent publication of the assembly's *Minutes and Papers*¹ adds a new dimension to such studies. While delving into these documents is not a sufficient cause of creating a broad picture of the development of the thought standing behind these doctrinal standards, it is a necessary one. Gamble's book takes us one step closer to doing so in relation to a vital issue that touches many areas of the Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

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¹ Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1653*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Sanctification, *by Michael Allen*

by Ryan M. McGraw

Sanctification, by Michael Allen. New Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017, 302 pages, \$22.99, paper.

Christians have always given attention to the role of holy living in relation to the gospel. Whether they have stressed imitating Christ to the neglect of justification by faith or they have pressed justification by faith in ways that make personal holiness suspect, the question of how holiness relates to the gospel persists. This is largely because such questions arise within the pages of Scripture itself. The series of which this book is a part aims at theological “renewal through retrieval” (15). Far from simply regurgitating past ideas, retrieval involves “relearning a lost grammar of theological discourse” (16). In this vein, Michael Allen’s account of sanctification is systematically robust, historically informed, and biblically faithful. While it does not provide readers with the depth of practical detail that most will need to grow in godliness, it gives them the foundational gospel principles without which they cannot take even a step forward in the Christian life. This makes this book important for all believers, but especially for those entrusted with the task of teaching others how to live the Christian life.

Allen treats this theme in ten chapters relating sanctification to the gospel, God, creation, covenant, incarnation, union with Christ, justification, grace and nature, grace and responsibility, and grace and discipline. He argues that sanctification must be related to all these doctrines in order to remain grounded in the gospel (44). It is not really until chapter eight that he begins to treat issues traditionally associated with sanctification directly (199). This is one of the greatest strengths of this work, as the author roots the holiness of believers in the character of the God who saves them in Christ. In a time when many Christians associate the gospel more with benefits than with the Christ who brings benefits with him, this emphasis is needed desperately. The character of the holy triune God and the nature of union with Christ are some of the primary reasons why the gospel must ultimately include sanctification. It is only this line of thinking that removes the question as to why we should obey God if we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. A man-centered gospel might be content with forgiveness without likeness to God. However, a God-centered gospel begins with forgiveness without being satisfied with anything less than perfection in holiness before the Lord in glory. While Allen draws from a wide range of authors throughout the centuries, John Calvin looms large in these pages, especially in chapters six and seven. He notes as well the powerful influences of John Owen, Edward Fischer, G. C. Berkouwer, Oliver O’Donovan, and John Webster on his thinking on this subject (45). The irenic spirit exemplified by the author, drawing valuable insights even from those with whom he has significant disagreements, is a needed model in the church today as well. We should avoid the extreme of treating all opinions as equal as well as that of refusing to learn from those who stand on the other side of a debate. In doing so, Allen has developed a full and satisfying account of biblical sanctification.

In this reviewer’s estimation, Allen’s reflections on the relationship of justification and sanctification to each other and of both to union with Christ can open fruitful avenues in

modern debates over these topics. He mediates between competing options related to the *ordo salutis* with two important observations. First, he writes,

Justification serves as the basis or ground for the transformative sanctification by the Spirit; syntactically, this is evident in that [Heb.] 8:10–11 describe a sanctifying work of the law written upon the hearts, and 8:12 says this transformation occurs “for” or “because” there is a justifying work of forgiving their iniquities finally and fully. (182)

Secondly, he writes,

Sanctification is the final cause of double grace; in other words, God justifies us so that God can and will sanctify us. Justification is not meant to be a final or ultimate blessing, but it is an entryway blessing that brings one into a journey that terminates in a still greater benefit: the transforming presence of the glorious God of the gospel. (183)

This obviates the problem of forcing readers to choose between union with Christ without any causal or logical order to justification or, alternatively, rooting sanctification in justification rather than in union with Christ. One of the benefits of such theological retrieval is that it reveals the existence of more theological options than the terms set by contemporary debates want to give us. Perhaps adding more voices to the conversation will pave a forward path in such debates.

I have one minor quibble with this book in relation to the author’s appeal to John Owen on the habits of grace. While Allen rightly points to Owen’s insistence that the Spirit infuses habits of grace in believers through their union with Christ (250–51), he neglects Owen’s equal insistence that infused habits of grace are insufficient to produce actual holiness. Owen insisted that believers need continual acts of the Spirit in every act of obedience to God. This strengthens the relationship between sovereign grace and the human responsibility to pursue holiness. Later Allen adds that infused habits of grace do not detract from “ongoing acts” of grace (254), yet this still falls short of Owen’s robust emphasis on the continual and personal acts of the Spirit in the lives of believers. This minor adjustment would make a great book even better.

This book does not answer every vital question related to sanctification. It will not provide a pathway to personal holiness in light of a proper exposition of the Decalogue, for example. However, it places the pursuit of holiness on better theological footing than most modern treatments. Allen’s trinitarian, Christological, systematic, and exegetical approach to his subject gives readers the foundation that they need to take Christ’s call to holiness seriously and to build on this foundation solidly. Owen believed that falling short of such biblical meditation left us without the materials needed to foster faith, and that this was the primary reason why most Christians did not make greater progress in their sanctification. The fact that this is precisely the point at which Allen meets his readers shows how necessary this book is for the church today. While we need more than such theological reflection, we certainly do not need less, and if we bypass it entirely then we will cut off our progress in holiness at the knees.

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ServantPoetry

To My Dear and Loving Husband

by Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672)

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay;
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.