



sabbaticals  
ordained servant April 2021

# *Ordained Servant Online*

## *A Journal for Church Officers*

E-ISSN 1931-7115

### **CURRENT ISSUE: SABBATICALS**

**April 2021**

### *From the Editor*

I have been advocating sabbaticals for more than a decade. I was given my first one thirty-five years after my ordination—much too long to wait. I do not resent this because the Orthodox Presbyterian Church does not have a strong tradition of sabbaticals. I am very pleased to see that we are beginning to build such a tradition. It is critical to the health of our pastors and churches. David VanDrunen’s 2009 article, “Sabbaticals for Pastors,” in *Ordained Servant* marked the beginning of many more sabbaticals than we have ever had. I hope that the trend continues. A few years earlier Chad Van Dixhoorn’s article, “Taking Care of Your Pastor,” sparked interest in sabbaticals, since he encouraged them as an important ingredient in caring for pastors.

As you will see from Brett McNeill’s article, “My Sabbatical: One Pastor’s Experience,” resting is one of the most important benefits of a sabbatical. I made the mistake on my only sabbatical, late in my ministry, of spending the better part of my eighteen weeks writing a book. In retrospect that was a mistake. The list of other things I proposed to do was so long that many items remain undone. My 2009 article, “Changing Pace: The Need for Rest in a Frenetic World,” emphasized the need of rest, not as sleep, but as uncluttered time to think and reflect, the fuel for creativity that a fruitful pastorate requires. Be sure to read the three articles from our archives which I have just mentioned in “From the Archives” below.

Danny Olinger used a blank space in his life during the early Covid shutdowns to explore and write about the almost unknown writings of the late Meredith G. Kline on the book of Revelation. His “Introduction: The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation” is itself a revelation. This is a classic example of how the Lord can use trials and tribulations to bring about something beautiful. Olinger has resurrected Kline’s ThD thesis from the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary. While in deep need of editing, it is also theologically brilliant. Olinger draws from published and unpublished works to weave the elaborate tapestry of Kline’s interpretation of Revelation. *Ordained Servant Online* will serialize the chapters of this fine work.

Alan Strange continues his illuminating “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” with chapter 15 on “The Whole Church and Its General Assembly.”

William Davis’s review article, “The Importance of Biblical Anthropology,” reviews an important book on the meaning of human life, *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics*, by O. Carter Snead. Davis demonstrates the strengths

and weaknesses of this book. Although Snead focuses on law and gives little biblical support for his thesis, Davis says his “treatment of abortion law and of our culture’s assumptions about what it means to be human make the book’s central argument worthy of careful attention, especially by Christian readers.”

Darryl Hart’s “Give Me Shelter and Give Me Answers,” reviews *To Think Christianly*, a thoughtful history of L’Abri, Regent College, and the Christian study center movement. Intelligent Christian education for lay people is an important ministry of the church. Having spent six months at L’Abri from 1971 to 1972, I can attest to the great value of such an institution.

Finally, I offer another ekphrastic poem, “Dappled Light,” based on a Claude Monet (1840–1926) painting in the Currier Museum of Art “Seine on the Bougival,” (1869). Monet was the founder of French Impressionist painting in the nineteenth century. Impressionist plein air (painting outdoors) landscape painting emphasized the perception of the artist rather than a precise reproduction of a scene. However, since photography has been accepted as an art form, we have come to realize that it, like so-called realistic painting, is also from the perspective of the artist. Ekphrastic poetry accents the importance of this insight.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

## CONTENTS

### ServantRest

- Brian McNeill, “My Sabbatical: One Pastor’s Experience”

### ServantTruth

- Danny E. Olinger, “Introduction: The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation”

### ServantStandards

- Alan D. Strange, “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter 15”

### ServantReading

- William C. Davis, A Review Article, “The Importance of Biblical Anthropology,” on *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics*, by O. Carter Snead.

- Darryl G. Hart, A Review Article, “Give Me Shelter and Give Me Answers,” on *To Think Christianly: A History of L’Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*, by Charles E. Cotherman.

## ServantPoetry

- Gregory E. Reynolds, “Dappled Light”

### **FROM THE ARCHIVES “SABBATICALS”**

[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-28.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-28.pdf)

- “Sabbaticals for Pastors.” (David VanDrunen) 18 (2009): 93–97.
- “Taking Care of Your Pastor.” (Chad Van Dixhoorn) 16 (2007): 47–50.
- “Changing Pace: The Need for Rest in a Frenetic World.” (Gregory E. Reynolds) 18 (2009): 14–17.

---

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

# Servant Work

## My Sabbatical: A Pastor's Experience

---

by Brett A. McNeill

This is not intended to be a theological or academic defense of sabbaticals—there are others who are more qualified to do that. Rather, this is simply meant to be an honest reflection on my own experience, with the hope that it might help and encourage other pastors and churches to consider sabbaticals.

It all started when I asked for permission from my session to fill the pulpit for a few Sundays at a sister church while their pastor was on sabbatical. The response from my elders was, “That is fine, but what about a sabbatical for you?”

To be honest, I did not really think I needed one. I had only been a pastor for about eleven years, and things seemed to be going pretty well. But I agreed to track down some material for us to read and consider. To our surprise, there was not a lot out there, and most of what was helpful was not coming from Reformed authors. But we did find some incredibly honest and insightful materials that talked about the toll ministry takes on pastors. Pastors have one of the highest rates of burnout and depression, along with mental health professionals and social workers. This is especially true of smaller churches where pastors are intimately involved in the lives of their members—the intense counseling load, the late-night phone calls, the walking families through tragedies and grief. We did not want to wait until I felt burnt out to do something, so we began the process of planning for me to take a sabbatical the following summer.

There are so many things that could have prevented us from moving forward. We did not have the money. We did not have an associate pastor. We did not know how every aspect of my ministry would be covered in my absence. But my elders refused to let these become barriers. They committed to doing it and figuring *how*. We figured that it would cost an average of \$300 per Sunday to cover pulpit supply and mileage, so they put \$4,000 into the annual budget (and committed to putting \$700 a year moving forward toward future sabbaticals). I made a list of everything I did, and we started finding volunteers to take over those tasks while I was gone. We recruited pulpit supply for thirteen Sundays. We figured out how the session would function in my absence. But the most important thing we did was prepare the congregation. Six months before it happened, we let them know what was coming. We answered questions. We let them know I was coming back. We set the expectation that I would not be attending worship at our church during that time.

That was all the outward preparation. It was a lot of work, but it was straightforward and expected. What I did not anticipate were the fears that started to fill my heart as the sabbatical drew closer. What if the church fell apart while I was gone? What if families left? Or *worse*, what if things went well while I was gone? What if the church liked the visiting pastors better? What if they decided they did not want me back? What if I was

not indispensable? These are the secret fears of a pastor's heart that none of us want to admit.

My session has just read Eswine's *Sensing Jesus*, which talks about idols of ministry—the desire to know everything, fix everything, and be everywhere. It is far too easy for pastors to try to be their congregation's savior, rather than point them to their Savior. The idols of ministry lead us to teach our congregations to look to us rather than to Jesus. As my sabbatical drew closer and all of my fears became harder and harder to silence, my own idols became harder to ignore. And I began to worry, “What happens when all the craziness stops? What happens when I stop working on other people's issues and have to be quiet for a season? What am I going to find when I slow down, and am I prepared for what I will find?” Those questions scared me to the point where I seriously considered calling off the sabbatical. By God's grace, I did not. And so on the first week of June 2016, I began a three-month sabbatical.

The first two weeks were great. My family packed up the trailer and we headed out camping. Standard issues with camping with four daughters aside, it went well. Once we got into a rhythm, we relaxed, read books, and had fun. Feeling rested, we headed home to begin this sabbatical thing in earnest. I had been directed by some to see my sabbatical as a study leave, a time to read what I did not have time to read in the midst of ministry and work on improving myself as a pastor. My “plan” was to get up, grab my coffee and breakfast, and head into my study for the morning. I finally had time to read without feeling rushed. I could tackle (at least part of) that stack of books I had wanted to get to. I could read the Bible slowly and thoughtfully. This was what I had dreamed about for years. In the afternoons, I planned to work on house projects (I was in the process of drywalling the basement) or do something fun with the family.

I started with a book on leadership, recommended by a friend. It was good—too good. It felt like a spotlight on all my failures in my first decade in ministry. I saw my failures and insecurities and felt overwhelmed. Very quickly I started to dread picking it up. So I tried other books, but it was going much slower than I expected. My sabbatical was almost half over, and there was no way I was going to accomplish all I had hoped to. I was not feeling encouraged and charged about the next decade of ministry; I felt anxious, weak, and scared.

By the fifth week I was a complete mess. My fears were coming true. When all the busyness of ministry stopped and I looked at my own heart, what I found was in far worse condition than I could have anticipated. After five weeks of “time off,” the longest I had experienced since high school, I was a basket-case. The idea of resuming ministry overwhelmed me, and it was not getting better; it was getting worse. I started to wonder, “Was I too broken? Was I beyond repair?”

Then wisdom came in the form of my wife (as it usually does). “When do you feel most relaxed?” she asked. Sheepishly, I told her it was when I was hanging drywall in the basement. It was there that I was able to just stop worrying about the future and process where I was at with God. She said, “So why not start there each day and work until you are ready to quit? Put everything else aside. Stop trying to do too much. Be still. Be quiet.”

So I did. I still read my Bible each morning (a few Psalms), then I headed down to the basement. Finally, after six weeks of being on sabbatical, I started to decompress. I started to gain perspective. I saw benefits to slowing down and not always being in a

rush. I realized I did not need a to-do list, I *was* the to-do list. I confessed my idols and honestly desired to see God remove them from me. Over those next three weeks, I felt the anxiety start to subside. I felt forgiveness for my failures as a pastor, as a husband, as a father, and as a child of God.

Around the ninth week I started to feel human again. By the tenth week, I started to believe that I could return to ministry when the sabbatical was done. By the eleventh week, I was looking forward to ministry. By the twelfth week, I was at a point where I felt I was ready any time. By the last week, I was eager to be back in ministry, though I hoped to do things differently upon my return.

So what did I learn? A lot. I learned that ministry takes a greater toll on ministers than they realize (and they often do not realize it until the damage is done). I learned that I had elders and a congregation who care a great deal for me and wanted to make sure that I am cared for. I learned that it is easy to hide behind our list of things to do and books to read, and that keeps us from being still and knowing God. I learned that slowing down is sometimes the hardest and most important thing we can ever do. I learned how easy it is to try to be a savior to my congregation, which I am simply not equipped to be. I learned that a sabbatical is not a study leave, but a time of rest and healing. Resting means surrendering and not accomplishing. It lays an axe to the root of our pride and self-reliance.

In retrospect, I also saw that I was overly focused on myself. I did not provide enough ways for my children to stay connected with their friends at church. I should have taken more time to play with the family. Should the Lord allow me another sabbatical, there are things I would like to do better.

Would I recommend a sabbatical to other pastors and congregations? Absolutely. In fact, I do it all the time. Commit to it. Volunteer to help. Make it happen. But I think the way we do sabbaticals is as important as having a sabbatical. Pastors need to find a way to slow down so they can reflect, pray, meditate, repent, and heal. For me that was doing projects around the house. For others it might be camping, long walks, gardening, or something else. For some, that might include reading books, taking a class, or attending a conference. Whatever it is, you need to figure it out (hopefully quicker than I did) and learn to be still. It is then that you remember he is God, and you are not. It is only then that you are really able to minister.

**Brett A. McNeill** *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as pastor of Reformation Presbyterian Church in Olympia, Washington.*

# Servant Truth

## Introduction: The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation

---

By Danny E. Olinger

While a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in the mid-1940s, Meredith G. Kline, under the supervision of New Testament professor Ned B. Stonehouse, wrote the equivalent of a ThM thesis entitled “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John.”<sup>1</sup> The work, which Kline himself referred to a half century later in print as an “unpublished paper,” can be found in Westminster’s Montgomery Library.<sup>2</sup> Whether the terminology “ThM thesis” or “unpublished paper” is used, it is easy to see on the surface why this document has existed in relative obscurity. It is arguably among the worst-typed, poorly-edited ThM theses and/or senior papers in the history of the institution. An examination of the thirty-four page document reveals multiple typos (“alreedy,” “breif”), different capitalization of the same name in a paragraph (“false-prophet,” “False-Prophet”), different spellings of the same word on the same page (“throughout,” “through-out”), multiple spellings of a name in the same section (“AntiChrist,” “Antichrist,” “Anti-Christ”), words lacking a letter (“concering”), words with a missing letter (“h shed”), verses that do not exist (John 14:54), several one-ended brackets, multiple open spaces for the insertion of Greek words where nothing appears, a block quote with a line in the middle jutting out, improvisation (“4 squared”), and the apparent use of more than one typewriter. Stylistically, it anticipates Kline’s penchant for hyphenated word creations (“harlot-Babylon,” “Scarlet-colored Beast,” “quotation-statement,” “cycle-themes,” “pre-what-have-you’s,” “Satan-controlled”), long sentences (89 words being the longest), and personal rhetorical outrage (“It is asking too much of us, to require us to cease comparing

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Meredith M. Kline in his essay on his father, “Meredith G. Kline: A Biographical Sketch,” Stonehouse served as “supervisor of Dad’s ThM thesis on the structure of the Apocalypse,” *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), xxiii. Meredith G. Kline himself referenced “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John,” as an “unpublished paper” in footnote 2 of his article, “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 1 (1996): 207. The difference in terminology between “thesis” and “unpublished paper” requires a brief explanation. Westminster Theological Seminary did not require a thesis for a ThM degree until after it went through the accrediting process in 1956. Prior to that time, a student’s “senior” paper functioned in the same manner.

<sup>2</sup> Kline’s “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John” was first listed as a holding in Westminster’s library in 1960 when he served as a member of the faculty. Although there is no date attached to the paper, Gregory Beale dates it as being written in 1945. The footnotes in the paper confirm this date as multiple works from the 1940s are cited, but none later than 1944. See, G. K. Beale, “The Structure and Plan of John’s Apocalypse,” in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, eds. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 119.



Scripture with Scripture to determine Scripture's meaning, in favor of comparing Scriptures with the devices of the Greek stage!").

Moving beyond the grammatical and stylistic considerations, however, a deeper examination reveals that it is also arguably one of the most theologically brilliant ThM theses and/or senior papers submitted at Westminster Seminary.<sup>3</sup> In the thesis/paper Kline proposed an advancement upon William Hendriksen's recapitulationist outline of Revelation, as seen in his book *More Than Conquerors*.<sup>4</sup> Although Kline agreed with Hendriksen's amillennial reading of the text, Kline thought that Hendriksen, by wrongly dividing the final chapters, had short-changed the contrast inherent in Revelation as Christ transforms his church-bride from being imperfect in the world to perfect in heaven.

That Kline, even as a student, would ruffle the feathers of an established Reformed scholar the caliber of Hendriksen gave notice of the fearlessness that would characterize Kline's theological writings from his student thesis/paper to his last published work in 2006. In ground-breaking, and often controversial fashion, Kline sought to show that the covenant theology embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms was true to Scripture, particularly how God had created man in his image and entered into covenant with him unto the end of full communion. Since he taught over half a century in the Old Testament departments of Westminster Theological Seminary (1950–1965), Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary (1965–1993), and Westminster Seminary California (1982–2001), this led to multiple books exploring God's covenantal establishment and work in Genesis.<sup>5</sup>

Following the path of the Reformed biblical-theologian Geerhardus Vos,<sup>6</sup> Kline believed that the eschatological outlook set forth at creation in the covenant of works in Genesis 2 is the mother-soil that holds the religion of the Old and New Testaments together.

---

<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, it made quite an impression upon the Westminster faculty. Three years after his 1947 graduation, the faculty extended an invitation to the then twenty-eight year old Kline to teach at his alma mater.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1944).

<sup>5</sup> See, Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (South Hamilton, MA: M. G. Kline, 1986), "Genesis" in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed., edited by D. Guthrie (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970), 79–114, and *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. J. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Kline's appreciation of Vos's biblical-theological hermeneutic is evident throughout his writings. In his first published article in 1953, "The Relevance of the Theocracy," (*Presbyterian Guardian* 22, no. 2 (Feb. 16, 1953), Kline appealed to Vos as support to argue against a belief that a combination of the family, church, and state could produce the theocracy. Kline said that the family, church, and state "do not have their being in the same 'dimensional' sphere as the Theocracy. They exist in the sphere of common grace; but the Theocracy in the sphere of Consummation. As G. Vos points out: 'The significance of the unique organization of Israel can be rightly measured only by remembering that the theocracy typified nothing short of the perfected kingdom of God, the consummate state of Heaven (*Old and New Testament Biblical Theology*, 1942, p. 80)" (26). Near the end of his academic career, Kline stated in the preface of his 1986 book, *Kingdom Prologue*, that what he had done in writing on Genesis was to take "what is in Vos's Biblical Theology the infrastructure, the particular historical pattern in which the periodicity principle gets applied" and make it the surface structure in examining Genesis (5). Then in 2001, the year Kline retired from teaching, he dedicated *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions* to "Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) pioneer of the biblical theology way." Fittingly, Howard Griffith and John Muether borrowed from Vos when they entitled their festschrift for Kline, *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator*, which was Vos's dedication to his *Pauline Eschatology*. Griffith and Muether wrote, "Dr. Meredith G. Kline has in many ways carried on and built upon the insights of Dr. Vos in the field of biblical theology. His work expresses the vision of that God who is Alpha and Omega" (10).

In Vos's words, "Insofar as the covenant of works posited for mankind an absolute goal and unchangeable future, the eschatological may be even said to have preceded the soteric religion."<sup>7</sup> In the biblical account, eschatology precedes soteriology.

In his second published article in 1953, "Intrusion and the Decalogue," Kline explained the relationship in a way that Vos would have approved. In the opening sentence, Kline wrote, "It is by tracing the unfolding eschatology of Scripture that we can most deftly unravel the strands of Old Testament religion and discover what is essential and distinctive in it. For eschatology antedates redemption."<sup>8</sup> Kline then stressed that both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are eschatological in that they offer a way to the consummation, but the covenant of works comes first. The door through the covenant of works was never opened as Adam transgressed God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God could have brought eternal perdition to Adam by his covenant-breaking repudiation. That is, the Fall might have introduced at once a consummation of universal damnation, but God, by the principle and purpose of divine compassion introduced the covenant of grace, with its historical corollary common grace, as the new way of arriving at the consummation.<sup>9</sup> "This change in covenants from works to grace," Kline said, "did not change the canons of eschatology."<sup>10</sup> What changed after the Fall is that the conditions of the covenant of grace must be performed vicariously and as a redemptive accomplishment by the God-man.<sup>11</sup>

Forty-six years later in a review in *Kerux* of Gerard Van Groningen's *From Creation to Consummation*, Kline indicated that he still held to this Vosian understanding. Kline first praised the substance of Van Groningen's biblical-theological approach to Scripture as "happily he appreciates the foundational character of creation and seeks to highlight the eschatological aspect of the historical process, emphases dear to the Vosian hearts of the *Kerux* readership." Such praise of Van Groningen's work, however, was short-lived as Kline argued that Van Groningen's denial of the covenant of works had led him to

---

<sup>7</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology of the Psalter," in Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1986), 325. On the back jacket cover of Kline's *Glory in Our Midst*, T. David Gordon argues that "the vision of Geerhardus Vos is never more articulately or thoroughly developed than in the writings of Meredith G. Kline . . . [I]n all of Kline's writings, the reader perceives the profoundly eschatological perspective that undergirds and shapes the entirety of biblical revelation."

<sup>8</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "Intrusion and the Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal* 16, no. 1 (1953/54): 1.

<sup>9</sup> Kline, "Intrusion," 2, and Meredith G. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 155.

<sup>10</sup> Kline, "Intrusion," 3. In this statement, Kline affirmed the key point in Vos's contention that eschatology precedes soteriology. That is, the consummation hope of full communion with God set before Adam in the garden is not cast aside after the Fall into sin. Rather, it continues and is accomplished through the promised seed of the woman in the covenant of grace.

<sup>11</sup> In "Intrusion," Kline used the terminology "covenant of works" for the Genesis 2:16–17 covenant that God established with Adam at creation and the terminology "covenant of grace" for the Genesis 3:15 promise of deliverance that God gave to fallen Adam and Eve. When Kline stylistically revised "Intrusion and the Decalogue" for inclusion in his 1972 book, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, he changed "covenant of works" to "covenant of creation" and "covenant of grace" to "covenant of redemption." In his books *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy, Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) and *Kingdom Prologue*, he preferred the terminology "covenant of creation" and "covenant of redemption." However, when writing journal articles or reviews, such as his review of Gerard Van Groningen's *From Creation to Consummation* (*Kerux* 14, no. 2 (Sept. 1999), Kline often reverted—perhaps through editorial influence—to the traditional Reformed terminology of "covenant of works" and "covenant of grace."

misconstrue the goal set before Adam in the garden. Van Groningen asserted that Adam already had everything in relationship to God as a creational gift. Kline replied:

That assertion contradicts the obvious. Vos rightly declares that according to the apostle Paul "the only reasonable interpretation of the Genesis-account" is "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" (*The Pauline Eschatology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952] 304).<sup>12</sup>

Kline then added observations that spoke just as much about Kline's biblical-theological understanding of Scripture as they did against Van Groningen's folly in denying the covenant of works and the eschatological hope it communicated. For Van Groningen to declare that Adam was in possession of everything in relation to God at creation left room for neither eschatology nor the new benefits that come to humanity through Christ and the Spirit's work. It is the Spirit who transforms man's spiritual nature that he might advance to the estate of confirmed righteousness prerequisite to the reception of the guaranteed felicity of the eternal Sabbath. It is also the Spirit who brings about physical glorification, the supernatural, consummating transfiguration that renders the cosmos a new heaven and earth for man. In Van Groningen's proposal, the eschatological acts of God that propel man towards the consummation and the consummation itself are stripped of their biblical meaning. The result is that Van Groningen did what Kline endeavored never to do when exegeting Scripture—Van Groningen missed the message of the Sabbath.

Kline saw the biblical concept of Sabbath rest permeating the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Old Testament texts such as Genesis 2 and Isaiah 66 present Sabbath rest in terms of enthronement after the completion of labors by which royal dominion is manifested or secured. The biblical identification of Jesus as the second Adam in the New Testament guarantees that his redemptive achievement fits into both the eschatological structure that informed the covenant of works and the Sabbath rest that was promised therein. Kline said, "Indeed, Christ's work is explicitly expounded by the Scriptures as a recreation and perfecting of the imago Dei and as a bringing of his people into their Sabbath rest in the land of access to the tree of life."<sup>13</sup> Further, the Sabbath rest of the risen Christ is his kingly session at God's right hand. For believers to live and reign with Christ in the new heavens and new earth is to participate in his royal Sabbath rest.

In his writings, Kline traced the outworking of the covenants and the movement in the history of redemption in accord with the message of the Sabbath. In addition to his work on Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch detailed in his book *Treaty of the Great King*, he also took a keen interest in Job<sup>14</sup> and the minor prophets, particularly Zechariah.<sup>15</sup> But, no book in the

---

<sup>12</sup> Meredith G. Kline, review of *From Creation to Consummation* by Gerard Van Groningen, *Kerux* 14, no. 2 (Sept. 1999): 69. Kline argued along the same lines in *Kingdom Prologue*. He said, "The eternal state itself, when it was attained, would not of course be a mere perpetuation of man's original beatitude. In fact, the latter would . . . be no blessing at all in view of the eschatological hope instilled in man's heart as image of God and in view of the kingdom-program assigned to man with its ultimate objective of construing the cosmic-human temple-city" (61).

<sup>13</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "Job," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. C.F. Pfeiffer and E.F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1962), 459–490.

<sup>15</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical Theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2001).

New Testament caught Kline's attention concerning the fulfillment of the covenantal promises through the person and work of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit like Revelation did. He wrote articles, such as "The First Resurrection" and "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation," that focused directly on the proper interpretation of Revelation 20. He wrote other articles like "Death, Leviathan and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1" and "Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium" where the exegesis of Revelation was central to the arguments being made. Further, in three of his major books, *Images of the Spirit*, *Glory in Our Midst*, and *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*, Kline exegeted and referenced Revelation more than any other New Testament book.

This might have been expected given Kline's covenantal hermeneutic that led him to trace the line of redemptive-historical development from creation to consummation. Revelation with its declaration that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10) and its picture of the church's heavenly life with God often provided the capstone for Kline's explorations.

But, there was more to why Kline in his articles and books cited Revelation so often. He also understood Revelation to be a microcosm of the Bible as a whole, a covenant witness document of Jesus. He declared,

The Apocalypse is a covenant witness document of Jesus, the faithful witness, presenting his claims as the covenant Lord, testifying that he is the mighty messianic Angel, who was sent, who came and conquered, and is now invested with the Glory-Spirit, all authority in heaven and earth his. In demonstration thereof the Apocalypse confronts us with an overwhelming assemblage of images of his mighty acts as victor over the dragon and the beasts, judge of the nations, possessor of the keys of death and Hades, divine priest-kin *who redeems a countless multitude out of all to enjoy and serve God in the heavenly Zion forever.*<sup>16</sup>

As the last portion of the above quotation testifies, Kline did not see Christ alone in Revelation. He also saw the church that Christ had redeemed and was refashioning in his image to be his bride for all eternity. This transformation of the church from a pilgrim below to dwellers in the Father's glorious mansion above through union with Christ and the down payment of the Spirit is a theme that Kline reinforced when talking about the message of Revelation. In *Kingdom Prologue*, he stated, "The Book of Revelation unveils the transforming work of the Spirit as he brings the church from its creation as candle-like image of the Glory-light of Christ (Rev. 1) to the perfecting of this Glory-image in the church at its ultimate merging with the heavenly Glory-community in the eternal temple-city (Rev. 21)."<sup>17</sup> In *Images of the Spirit*, Kline expressed it this way, "The church as portrayed in Revelation 21 and 22 is a church recreated in the likeness of Christ, the Glory-robed priest of Revelation 1. Coupled in this portrait with the symbol of the temple-city, New Jerusalem, is the symbol of the 'bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2)."<sup>18</sup> In *Glory in Our Midst*, he said, "It is Christ, the Son of Man who has decisively overcome the satanic dragon and has been established in supreme heavenly authority with cosmic dominion (cf. Rev. 1:12ff., 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14, 12:1ff.; 20:1–3), who then proceeds to

---

<sup>16</sup> Kline, *Glory in Our Midst*, 88 (emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 232.

<sup>18</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 49.

fashion the seven menorah-churches, the true temple-city, by his authoritative, creative word through the power of the Spirit (cf. Revelation 2 and 3).”<sup>19</sup>

Kline’s passion was to show from Genesis to Revelation how this blessed covenantal reality came to be—the risen Christ dwelling with his Spirit-forged church in his holy temple-city on the mountain of God, the heavenly Zion. The realization of the hope of believers is found only in appeal to the merits of their Redeemer’s work in history and the Spirit’s application of the sanctifying efficacy of the perfected priesthood and sacrifice permanently embodied in the risen and divine Savior.<sup>20</sup> The movement of redemptive history towards completion of the covenantal promise in Christ finds its capstone in Revelation, “the fairest gem in Scripture.” Revelation unites “in a fitting consummation of the Divine Word the most precious themes of the Bible, illuminating the prophetic element of the Old Testament, elaborating and unifying the eschatological outlines inherent in the teaching of Jesus, Paul and the rest of the New Testament, and providing an inspiration by its solemn majesty that is not afforded so impressively anywhere else.”<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, in his writings, Kline explored the way that the two-register cosmology of the heavens and the earth that was presented in Genesis 1:1–2:3, a theological mapping of the cosmos with space and time coordinates, was developed throughout the Bible and came to a conclusion in Revelation. In the book of Revelation, “each series of visions or happenings on earth is introduced by a disclosure of the heavenly control center of the universe, where the earthly judgments are decreed and whence their executive agents descend.”<sup>22</sup> It is the place in Scripture, “with its characteristic opening of the heavens,” where one finds a formative impact linguistically of the two-register cosmology. It is also in Revelation at the consummation of redemptive history that “the visible-invisible differentiation of space comes to an end as the heavenly Glory is unveiled to the eyes of redeemed earthlings, their perceptive capabilities transformed now by glorification.”<sup>23</sup> The boundary of heaven and earth disappears. God himself is the Glory-temple, the realization of the Sabbath promise put forth at creation.

The chapters that follow will unpack these and other themes that Kline saw in this New Testament “covenant witness document of Jesus” and “fairest gem of Scripture.” Examined in detail will be Kline’s unpublished thesis “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John,” his articles related to Revelation, “The First Resurrection,” “The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation,” “Death, Leviathan and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1,” and “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium,” and the Apocalypse-related sections of his books *Images of the Spirit*, *Glory in Our Midst*, and *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*.

**Danny E. Olinger** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

---

<sup>19</sup> Kline, *Glory in Our Midst*, 162.

<sup>20</sup> Meredith G. Kline, review of *The Unity of the Bible* by H. H. Rowley, *Westminster Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (1956): 18.

<sup>21</sup> Kline, “Structure of Revelation,” 2. For the sake of consistency and readability, quotations from Kline in the footnotes have been grammatically corrected. In this quotation, “th eschatological outlines” and “solumn” have been changed to “the eschatological outlines” and “solemn.”

<sup>22</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” in *Essential Writings*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

# Servant Standards

## Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

---

by Alan D. Strange

### Chapter XV The Whole Church and Its General Assembly

1. The whole church consists of all the members of its regional churches.

**Comment:** The Presbyterian church, in any of its respective denominations and discrete bodies, such as is the OPC, consists of all the members of its regional churches, governed by all its presbyteries. The nomenclature “whole church” here refers to the church as defined by this FG: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This is not an assertion, obviously, that the OPC exhausts the meaning of “church,” as if the OPC in its FG failed to recognize the whole church as it exists throughout the world in many different denominations.

2. The general assembly, which is the governing body of the whole church, shall consist of not more than one hundred and fifty-five voting commissioners, including the moderator and stated clerk of the previous assembly, the stated clerk of the current assembly, and such ministers and ruling elders as are commissioned by the respective presbyteries in accordance with proportions determined by a previous general assembly. In the event that the general assembly fails to establish such proportions, the next general assembly shall consist of every minister and of one ruling elder from every local church.

**Comment:** The general assembly serves as the governing body of the whole church, in this case the OPC, even as does the presbytery for the regional church and the session for the local congregation. The OPC in drafting this FG has decided, given its relative overall size and the number of its presbyteries (sixteen at this writing), that the assembly shall consist of not more than 155 voting commissioners. Several of these commissioners are automatically selected: the moderator of the previous assembly, the stated clerk of the previous assembly (if different than the present stated clerk), and the stated clerk of the current assembly.

The rest of the assembly consists of the ministers and ruling elders commissioned by the respective presbyteries in the number accorded to each, determined by a previous assembly. If the general assembly fails to establish such proportions for presbytery representation, the next assembly will consist of every minister of the OPC and of one ruling elder from every local church. This has served as an effective prod to every assembly to establish such proportions: it is generally agreed that an unproportioned assembly, consisting of every minister in the OPC and a ruling elder from every congregation, would prove unwieldy and destroy the character of the OPC GA as a truly

deliberative body. The assemblies, then, are always duly proportioned to retain that deliberative character.<sup>1</sup> The established proportion customarily yields, roughly, two-thirds ministerial and one-third ruling elder membership from the respective presbyteries.

Some have complained that there are not an equal number of ministers and ruling elders commissioned to serve at each assembly. This is true and reflects the historic practice of having more ministers than ruling elders in the church's highest judicatory, no small part of which involves the practicality of the matter: given the worldly employment of ruling elders, it is significantly easier to secure the attendance of ministers at the assembly. For this same reason, many of the committees of the assembly also reflect this same practice of greater ministerial involvement. Some would also note, beyond the practical considerations, that the Presbyterian church has generally desired the judicatories of its assemblies, beyond the level of the session, to retain a ministerial or pastoral sensibility, which is best secured by having a higher proportion present of those who hold the ministerial or pastoral office.

The presbyteries of the OPC employ their own processes, ordinarily detailed in their by-laws or standing rules, for electing ministerial and ruling elder commissioners to the general assembly. Some have a strict election of such, others use some sort of rotation system, while still others utilize some combination of rotation and election. In any case, whatever process of electing the proportioned ministers and ruling elders for the assembly that a presbytery employs, assemblies in the OPC generally enjoy a healthy balance of ministers and elders, and not only from the larger more wealthy churches but also from the smaller struggling churches: attendance at the GA does not depend on everyone "paying their own way," but monies for such come out of a common General Assembly Operating Fund.<sup>2</sup>

3. The general assembly shall meet at least once in every year. On the day appointed for the purpose the moderator of the preceding assembly shall open the meeting and preside until a moderator is chosen. In the event of his absence the member present who was last elected moderator of the general assembly shall preside in his place. Each commissioner shall present his credentials to the clerk of the assembly. Any twenty of these commissioners, of whom at least five shall be ministers and at least five ruling elders, being met on the day and at the place appointed, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business. No commissioner shall have a right to deliberate or vote in the assembly until he has been enrolled.

---

<sup>1</sup> This stands in contrast to the PCA, in which the GA is composed as follows: "It shall consist of all teaching elders in good standing with their Presbyteries, and ruling elders as elected by their Session. Each congregation is entitled to two ruling elder representatives for the first 350 communing members or fraction thereof, and one additional ruling elder for each additional 500 communing members or fraction thereof" (*BOCO* 14.2). This yields too high a number for a properly deliberative body. Most agree that the maximum for such is in the four or five hundred range (the House of Representatives in the American Congress currently has 435 members).

<sup>2</sup> See GA Standing Rules 12.5 for GA financing and Rule 12 more broadly for financing of all the programs run by the broader church, under GA supervision. I would argue for such a common purse to be employed more widely for the use and benefit of less prosperous churches, especially in depressed economic areas. Charles Hodge addressed such in his sermon before the GA when he preached before it in 1847, having moderated in 1846, and in his article, "Sustentation Fund" (*The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 38.1, 1866, 1–24).

**Comment:** The general assembly is to meet at least annually. The moderator of the previous assembly presides until the point in the docket, which is quite early, at which a new moderator is elected. If the moderator of the previous assembly, for whatever reason, is not present at the assembly, the last elected moderator who is present shall preside until a new moderator is elected. Commissioners are to present credentials to the stated clerk, and this is commonly accomplished by the calling of the roll, presbytery by presbytery, with the stated clerk noting the presence of those affirmed earlier to him by the stated clerks of the respective presbyteries. This roll call is always the first item of business after the call to order and worship, since assembly enrollment must precede commissioners deliberating or voting in the assembly. Any alternates replacing absent commissioners are also at that time recognized and seated, as well as non-commissioned committee representatives, who are given the privilege of the floor with respect to the business of the committee they represent. All of this is in keeping with the Standing Rules of the General Assembly.<sup>3</sup>

A quorum for the general assembly is any twenty of the commissioners selected by the presbyteries. Of this number, there must be at least five ministers and five ruling elders. That number is needed both for the constituting and continuing of a general assembly. Problems sometime arise if a general assembly does not adjourn when anticipated and commissioners leave for home, resulting in a “rump” assembly, which, though having a quorum, is too diminished for a body making important decisions for the whole church. This has happened but not in recent years. Assemblies have remedied the problem of low numbers by establishing safeguards ensuring timely adjournments and thus retaining the kind of numbers needed for the proper conduct of business while the assembly remains in session.

A more unusual occurrence is the lack of a quorum to constitute an assembly. Such a purposeful lack occurred in 2020 when the coronavirus epidemic made meeting unviable. This lack of a quorum, coupled with the use of certain provisions of the GA Standing Rules,<sup>4</sup> allowed the moderator of the previous assembly and the stated clerk, in consultation with the Arrangements Committee and other relevant GA committees, and in keeping with the strictures of the civil authorities, to postpone the meeting of the assembly to the following year.<sup>5</sup>

4. The moderator of the preceding assembly, or a minister appointed by him in his place, shall preach a sermon at the opening of the general assembly. Each session of the assembly shall be opened with prayer. And the whole business of the assembly being finished, and the vote taken for dissolving the present assembly, the moderator shall say from the chair, "By virtue of the authority delegated to me by the church, let this general assembly be dissolved, and I do hereby dissolve it, and require another general assembly, chosen in the same manner, to meet at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A.D. \_\_\_\_\_," after which he shall pray and return thanks, and the apostolic benediction shall be pronounced.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Standing Rules*, chapters 1–4.

<sup>4</sup> See *Standing Rule 2.3*.

<sup>5</sup> The 87<sup>th</sup> GA (2020) was postponed to 2021. So, all the business scheduled to be before the assembly in 2020 came before the assembly in 2021, together with the matters due to come before the assembly in 2021.



**Comment:** The moderator of the previous assembly, or someone appointed by him, opens the general assembly by preaching a sermon. It is customary to do this in an opening worship service in which the Lord's Supper is also administered. Each session, not simply each day, opens with prayer (an assembly day now has, typically, five sessions: two morning, two afternoon, and one evening). Hymns are also customarily sung to begin each session. Once all the business of the assembly is concluded, the moderator from the chair issues the solemn declaration (the explicit wording for which is given in section 4, above) dissolving the assembly and, following prayer and thanksgiving, pronounces the apostolic benediction. Some have argued that since only a minister can pronounce a benediction, this presumes a minister must be moderator. Others reckon that a ruling elder elected moderator may simply ask a minister to close the assembly on his behalf by pronouncing a benediction.

5. When any emergency shall require the calling of a general assembly sooner than the time specified by the previous assembly, the moderator of the previous assembly, or in the case of his absence, death, or inability to act, the stated clerk, at the request of twenty presbyters, including at least five ministers, and ruling elders from at least five congregations, shall call a special general assembly. The moderator or the stated clerk, as the case may be, if otherwise qualified to do so, may be one of those making the request. For this purpose a circular letter shall be sent, specifying the particular business of the intended meeting, to every minister and to the clerk of every session at least twenty days prior to the meeting. Nothing shall be transacted at such special meeting except the particular business for which the assembly has been convened.

**Comment:** Just as provision is made for emergency meetings of lower judicatories, so also for the general assembly. While not uncommon to call for a special meeting of a presbytery, it has never been deemed necessary in the history of the OPC to call an emergency meeting of the general assembly. Were one to be held, it would be called by the moderator of the previous assembly, or, if he could not do so, the stated clerk, at the request of twenty presbyters, in which number there must be at least five ministers and ruling elders from at least five different congregations.

The communication that goes around to all the churches (to every minister and clerk of session) must be sent at least twenty days prior to such a meeting. This letter must detail "the particular business of the intended meeting." When the emergency assembly convenes it may not transact any business at the special meeting other than the particular business for which it has been called to meet.

6. The general assembly shall seek to advance the worship, edification, and witness of the whole church. It shall seek to resolve all doctrinal and disciplinary questions regularly brought before it from the lower assemblies. It shall seek to promote the unity of the church of Christ through correspondence with other churches.

**Comment:** The general assembly, concerning itself as it does with the whole church, seeks to advance the worship, witness, and edification of it by the work that it does at the assembly and by the committees erected by the assembly to conduct its business in an on-going fashion, particularly the program committees for home and foreign missions as well as for Christian education. In addition to these program committees, assemblies also have important standing committees, including one addressing appeals and complaints, which helps prepare cases for and make recommendations to the assembly as it resolves

doctrinal and disciplinary questions regularly brought before it from the lower assemblies (overtures from lower judicatories can also bring doctrinal matters before the assembly).<sup>6</sup>

Besides offices like stated clerk (which reports to the Trustees of the GA) and statistician, committees also include ones dealing with a unified budget (Committee on Coordination), diaconal matters, ministerial care, chaplains, the OPC historian, and ecumenicity. The last of these, working with the stated clerk, also promotes unity through correspondence and exchange of fraternal delegates with other churches (e.g., in NAPARC and the ICRC).<sup>7</sup>

7. The duties peculiar to the general assembly include organizing regional churches, reviewing the records of the presbyteries, and calling ministers or licentiates to the missionary or other ministries of the whole church directly or through its standing committees.

**Comment:** The assembly is the body which organizes new regional churches (and their presbyteries), exercises review and control over the records of presbyteries, and issues calls to missionaries or others (like general secretaries of program committees) who are serving the whole church, customarily through the respective committees erected to address such. For example, the committee on foreign missions regularly issues calls to missionaries serving abroad, and each of the program committees directly employs their general secretaries and other staff at their discretion. This means that the program committees enjoy executive powers, as do commissions or boards, under the general oversight of the assembly.

8. The general assembly is not invested with power, by virtue of its own authority, to make pronouncements which bind the conscience of the members of the church. Yet the deliverances of the general assembly, if declarative of the Word of God, are to be received with deference and submission not only because of their fidelity to the Word of God but also because of the nature of the general assembly as the supreme judicatory of the church. Deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and other actions which have the effect of amending or adding to the subordinate standards shall not be binding unless they have been approved by the general assembly and presbyteries in the manner provided in this Form of Government for the amendment of the constitution.

**Comment:** The assembly does not enjoy plenipotentiary power but is restricted, as is all of the church, to exercise its power as a proclamation of the Word of God. Another way of putting this is to say that all church power is ministerial and declarative, not magisterial and legislative. The general assembly, for example, does not have the power, as the 1934 GA of the PCUSA claimed with respect to J. Gresham Machen and the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, to issue orders or declarations on its own authority; rather, the general assembly properly issues directives solely as an administration of the Word of God. The 1934 GA acted as if the assembly possessed magisterial power, as the Roman Catholic Church claims in promulgating canon law.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *Standing Rules*, chapter 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Standing Rules*, 10.2.g. ICRC is the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

<sup>8</sup> Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (1940; repr. Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1992), 103–114; D.G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education and The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1995), 27–39.

Only the Word of God properly binds the consciences of the members of the church. No judicatory, including the GA, can bind consciences simply by the issuance of a directive on the basis of its own authority.

That having been said, any deliverance of the GA that is properly declarative of the Word of God is to be received by the faithful as something to be heeded. Given that the GA is, in fact, the highest judicatory of the church, its deliverances, when properly declarative of God's Word, are to be received "with deference and submission," being faithful as they are to the Bible and because the GA is the final court of appeal here on earth. No such deliverances, however, including the recommendations of study committees and other special committees adopted by the GA, properly have the effect of amending the constitution of the church. The subordinate standards can be amended only through the process provided for such in FG 32.

**Alan D. Strange** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as professor of church history and theological librarian at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and is associate pastor of New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in Joliet, Illinois.*

# ServantReading

## The Importance of Biblical Anthropology

### A Review Article

---

by William C. Davis

*What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics*, by O. Carter Snead. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2020, 321 pages, \$39.95.

The laudable efforts O. Carter Snead makes as the director of the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame to protect the lives of unborn children, their mothers, and all neighbors in need make it unpleasant to point out difficulties with *What It Means to Be Human*. I have been involved with pro-life causes for nearly forty years, and the central concern of Snead's book is showing that the law should protect every human life, "regardless of age, disability, cognitive capacity, dependence, and, most of all, regardless of the opinions of others" (270). All humans, he argues, from conception until biological death, are persons, and the law should acknowledge that and protect them. The fact that current law does not protect the very young and others with health challenges the way that it protects the healthy and cognitively able is evidence, Snead says, that the anthropological roots of the law are defective.

When Snead extends his discussion beyond abortion, however, his zeal to protect the unborn leads him to paint pictures that may hinder effective pastoral care. These sections are not essential to Snead's primary message about protecting the vulnerable. His treatment of abortion law and of our culture's assumptions about what it means to be human make the book's central argument worthy of careful attention, especially by Christian readers.

Snead's book is a single argument for an ambitious thesis: The anthropology of American public bioethics is Expressive Individualism. This anthropology is inadequate to lived human reality because it "forgets the body" by failing to take human finitude and dependence into account. American public bioethics ought to be grounded in an anthropology that treats all human organisms regardless of age, ability, or cognitive capacity as full members. As embodied beings we are all limited, dependent, and on a "scale of disability." The law should encourage the formation of the social networks, virtues, and moral imagination that will fulfill our obligations to give sacrificial care to all humans in need.

By "American public bioethics" Snead means the laws and ethical discussions governing and informing American medical practice. His focus is more on laws and Supreme Court decisions than on the actual practice of medicine. This does not make a difference when he is addressing abortion or physician-assisted suicide; it makes a significant difference, though, when he turns his attention to assisted reproduction and end-of-life decision-making in the hospital. The term "Expressive Individualism" comes from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*,<sup>1</sup> and it refers to the assumption that "the individual,

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Taylor develops his analysis in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke

atomized self [is] the fundamental unit of human reality” (86). On this view, the self has no unchosen obligations; its project is to define itself through the autonomous exercise of the will.

The heart of Snead’s argument is his claim that Expressive Individualism is inadequate to lived human reality. Drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel, Snead advocates an anthropology that takes our embodied existence seriously.<sup>2</sup> Snead’s anthropology makes our mutual dependence and social connectedness fundamental. Relationships and obligations exist whether we choose them or not. Networks of unconditional sacrificial giving and grateful receiving begin with family relatives and extend outward to all in need. The virtues of gratitude, just generosity, hospitality, and taking on others’ suffering as our own are pursued in response to our finitude and need for each other. Those responsible for shaping our moral imaginations should encourage growth in this “ethic of giftedness” (100). Snead contends that the law should contribute to shaping our moral imaginations, so if the law is teaching only Expressive Individualism, it needs to be changed.

Chapter 3—the longest in the book by far—traces the history of abortion law in the United States, giving a detailed account of the *Roe v. Wade* decision and the decisions after it that have dealt with efforts to limit the right to abortion. With many Supreme Court rulings to consider, Snead finds multiple grounds for concluding that Expressive Individualism is the underlying anthropology. Having already argued that this understanding of human existence is inadequate, Snead proposes (in broad terms) ways that the law should be changed to take human embodiment (and in particular the vulnerable lives involved) firmly into account. Crucial to Snead’s argument is his claim that the law must treat all human organisms as *persons* with the same dignity as healthy, mature adults. The dependence and vulnerability of both the unborn child and the mother generate an obligation for the law to protect and care for both of them.

The discussion of abortion is followed by a shorter analysis of assisted reproduction in Chapter 4. Unlike abortion law, the laws regulating assisted reproduction provide no more than consumer protection for people seeking fertility services. The near silence of the law on protecting the children created by in vitro fertilization (IVF) is evidence, according to Snead, that Expressive Individualism is the grounding anthropology. The abuses he describes involving screening embryos to select a baby’s sex or to avoid a Downs Syndrome child are genuinely alarming. Snead would have the law fight these abuses, as well as study the negative health consequences for babies conceived via IVF.

The shortest chapter in the book looks at what the law and bioethical consensus encourage and allow in end-of-life medical decision-making. Snead divides his treatment into two parts. The first considers life-sustaining medical treatment and in particular the difficulties that arise when a person nearing death is unable to make decisions about their own care. Snead argues that the use of living wills to allow incompetent patients to exercise their autonomy insists on binding the patient to choices made long before knowing what their condition will be. He contends that in this the law refuses to take into account the patient’s diminished physical and mental condition. Snead proposes that an adequate anthropology of embodiment would empower proxy decision-makers to make choices with

---

University Press, 2004) and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animal: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1999) and Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

the current limitations in mind, enfolding the sick person in their social network rather than confining them to their individual past choices.

The second part of Snead's chapter on death and dying concerns physician-assisted suicide. Focusing on the Oregon law that first legalized physicians prescribing lethal doses of drugs to allow "death with dignity," Snead quickly details the many ways that Oregon's law puts the individual's power of choice over everything else, including the sound practice of medicine. Even though this section of the book is brief, it provides the strongest reason to think that Snead's thesis—that Expressive Individualism is driving the law—is correct.

The final chapter gives a clear, concise summary of Snead's overall argument. He makes clear his hope that as the law takes embodied human flourishing more seriously, the law will step in and provide all the protection, care, and moral formation that others fail to provide. Snead's expansive notion of the state's authority over many areas of life is evident throughout the book. In his conclusion, he insists on it.

The issues that Snead surveys to make the case that the law needs to change are politically contentious and touch the lives of most people. Much is praiseworthy about the book. His persistent and forceful appeal for the law to protect vulnerable humans, especially unborn children and people nearing the end of life, will be bracing for readers already committed to a biblical view of humans as God's image-bearers. Although Snead does not mention religious reasons for cherishing all human lives, what he says the law should do to protect human life is consistent with a biblical anthropology. The larger ethic he advocates, with its concern for the vulnerable, the sick, and the challenged, is also consistent with a biblical understanding of how humans should treat each other. How Snead gets from the facts of vulnerability to the existence of moral obligations to give care (and without reference to God's law) is not explained carefully in the book. Readers familiar with God's law will see merit, though, in the virtues Snead commends and the importance of cultivating moral imaginations that see every human as a person worthy of protection and care.

Snead is at his best when he is explaining Supreme Court decisions. His account of the history of the high court's rulings on abortion is clear, precise, illuminating, and sobering. He details the ways that Justice Blackmun's reasoning in *Roe v. Wade* depends on legal inventions and novel philosophical arguments never considered in the cases that put the issue before the Supreme Court. Moreover, Snead traces the shifting basis for the right to an abortion from privacy, to liberty, and finally to equality. Without laying any stress on it, Snead makes clear that Supreme Court appointments make a significant difference in the extent to which U.S. law allows the meaning of the life of an unborn child to be determined entirely by the child's mother.

Snead's claim that Expressive Individualism is the anthropology underlying abortion is tempting, but not convincing. This is most evident in the high court's willingness to shift the grounds for its conclusions. Abortion law is *consistent with* aspects of Expressive Individualism, but any individualism explains the law if an unborn child is not a person. Yet Snead's careful explanation of Expressive Individualism shows that it is a threat to all people who are not capable of exercising their capacity for autonomous choice in a robust way. The use he makes of MacIntyre, Taylor, and Sandel to explain the defects in this kind of self-centered approach to human existence is valuable in itself. Carl Trueman's recent *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* traces the fruit of Expressive Individualism in the

Sexual Revolution of the last sixty years, and Snead's compact account of this "modern self" is a useful way into the current discourse on the self's quest for identity.<sup>3</sup>

Snead's dissatisfaction with Expressive Individualism turns out also to work against his stated goal of fostering a political consensus for reforming the law on a more adequate anthropology (10). If his analysis is correct, enough Americans now embrace Expressive Individualism for the courts to take it for granted. Any political debate about establishing a different foundation will depend on reaching out to people who will find Snead's alternative bizarre. Readers who already understand the futility of making autonomous self-assertion our chief end will find Snead's misgivings about Expressive Individualism heartening. Self-centeredness in fact leads to loneliness and undermines real community. As Snead notes, though, Expressive Individualism is at least in part a reaction to stifling moral demands from people in authority. Readers in the grip of Expressive Individualism—the people Snead needs to join the political conversation—are likely to see his alternative vision for the law as paternalistic, authoritarian, and even oppressive.

This rhetorical weakness, though, is relatively minor compared to the curious deficiencies in his treatment of assisted reproduction and life-sustaining medical treatment. His description of assisted reproduction correctly identifies many of the ways the techniques involved can be abused. Snead incorrectly suggests, though, that everyone who makes use of these techniques has killed some of their children in order to have a living child. Most major cities have fertility specialists who will commit to using procedures that honor the life of every embryo conceived and endeavor to bring them to term. In a *Bioethics* class of twenty students at Covenant College last year, I had two students announce (without prompting) that they were conceived by IVF. Their parents were and are PCA members in good standing, and no embryos were destroyed in the process. Snead is right that the law does far too little to protect unborn children in the assisted reproduction process. Telling only part of the story about how IVF works runs the risk of leading people to believe that all parents of IVF babies were reckless with human life.

The most disappointing section of Snead's book is his brief discussion of decisions surrounding life-sustaining medical treatment. Most of what he says about the laws and hospital practices regarding end-of-life decision-making is fifteen years out of date. I have been serving as a volunteer ethics consultant for hospitals since 1995. The legal and medical environment that Snead describes would have been accurate back then. Patients who could not make decisions about their own care were called "incompetent," and the "living wills" in use were blunt instruments that asked the medical team to obey choices made years before that rarely fit the situation the patient was facing. Things have changed a lot in end-of-life law and practice since 2005. No patient is called "incompetent" without the declaration of a court. Patients who cannot make decisions are called "decisionally incapable," and maybe only for a short time. The rise of Palliative Care as a medical specialty has shifted the focus from what the doctors think is best for the patient to what the patient would choose. Most importantly, Advance Directives have replaced living wills as the legal means of documenting a person's intentions for end-of-life care. Every state legislature has designed and approved specific forms that empower a surrogate decision-maker—usually a loved one—to make choices according to the patient's values in light of the actual medical situation. The changes to the law and medical practice that Snead calls for to take human embodiment seriously have already taken place. It is hard to explain why

---

<sup>3</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

Snead does not celebrate these developments. His readers deserve a more current picture of how these decisions are made. With an outdated picture, people may neglect to bless their families by documenting their intentions for medical care at the end of life.<sup>4</sup>

*What It Means to be Human* is a valuable resource for people eager to understand how abortion law changed so quickly in less than one generation. It is also a concise summary of recent efforts to diagnose a key element in the spirit of the age (Expressive Individualism) and to explain the alternative vision for human flourishing offered by critics of Enlightenment Individualism such as MacIntyre, Taylor, and Sandel. Snead's argument that American public bioethics is ultimately rooted in Expressive Individualism is less convincing. Weaker, more pluralistic explanations are available, and some recent developments in the law and medical practice suggest that Americans are taking vulnerability and concern for others more seriously: End-of-life law and practice is one area; the rising acceptance of COVID-19 mask and vaccine policies that put the public good ahead of individual rights is another.

As a final word, it is worth noting that Snead assumes that the purpose of the state is to protect *and provide for* human identity and flourishing (269). Consistent with this understanding of the extent of the state's mandate, Snead would remedy our current situation by giving the state the authority to "create, maintain, and nurture the networks of unconditional giving and grateful receiving," to inculcate the virtues of dependence, and to cultivate the "moral imagination" of citizens (274). He would give the state the authority to "step in" whenever these networks and virtues do not result in care for the needy. It is hard to see biblical warrant for giving the state this kind of power. God's Word gives the state a clear role (to maintain order and to punish wrongdoers), but responsibility for shaping the moral imagination, forming virtuous people, and nurturing the God-created networks of mutual accountability are the work of the church, the family, and other voluntary mid-level institutions between individuals and the state. If the state intervenes wherever it sees an unmet need, it is likely to cause individuals and these institutions to withdraw from making the sacrifices involved. Rather than strengthening biblically sound networks and virtuous character traits, giving a coercive power the authority to enforce them will in fact weaken the networks and virtues that are nothing if they are not voluntary.

Snead's willingness to give the state such a large role, though, comes from his frustration that no one is stepping up to protect the vulnerable and provide for their needs. He does not mention the church or any other institutions, instead placing the blame on Expressive Individualism. If families, communities, and, most of all, churches were caring for the vulnerable—including pregnant women and their babies—Snead would not have to propose that the state take on the task. I agree with Snead that the law is doing too little to protect the unborn. I also agree that the vulnerable need more than protection and that the networks, virtues, and moral imagination that he commends should be nurtured in order to promote flourishing. State coercive power cannot do that effectively. The church, however, can and should.

**William C. Davis** is a professor of philosophy at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia and a member of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church (PCA).

---

<sup>4</sup> Spurred by the 1989 PCA Study Committee Report on Heroic Measures at the End of Life, I have written on the biblical basis for the use of Advance Directives and what God's law says directing how they may be used faithfully. See Bill Davis, *Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision-Making at the End of Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017).



# ServantReading

## Give Me Shelter and Give Me Answers

### A Review Article

---

by Darryl G. Hart

*To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement*, by Charles E. Cotherman. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020, xv + 301 pages, \$35.00.

What sort of theological education is available to lay people? Maybe the better question is, where do church members go for theological instruction that is not part of a degree program? Orthodox Presbyterians recently have debated the merits of women writing theology. Some officers have questioned whether women should venture into a domain reserved for special office or academic theologians. But this kerfuffle ignored the larger question about the value of doctrinal understanding among the laity. On the surface, who could object to lay men and women wanting to know more about theology and being sufficiently proficient to offer some comment and guidance? Confessional churches, after all, have catechisms which encourage the laity to explore the faith. These communions also call for parents (usually lay people) to give a kind of theological education to children. Meanwhile, for the last sixty years Reformed seminaries have offered a variety of degrees to people who have no intention of being ordained. Theological education for the laity, consequently, appears to be a wholesome endeavor.

But a question that haunts such a positive estimate is whether churches are delinquent in providing the sort of doctrinal instruction lay people want (and related, whether sermons are sufficient). Charles E. Cotherman's new book, *To Think Christianly*, is a great resource for considering at least some of these questions. It is a history of the rise of institutions since 1960 in both Canada and the United States whose mission was to provide instruction for Christian lay people. The specific institutions Cotherman covers are Regent College in Vancouver, L'Abri, the Ligonier Study Center, and the Center for Christian Studies in Charlottesville, Virginia. Many readers may be unfamiliar with James Houston, the man responsible for bringing Regent College to fruition. In the case of L'Abri and Ligonier, with Francis Schaeffer and R. C. Sproul the guiding figures behind them respectively, many people in NAPARC churches will understand how ordinary the idea of lay theological education outside a degree-granting institution is. After all, Schaeffer and Sproul are virtually household names among evangelicals who lean Reformed. And yet, their institutional outlets were study centers designed to draw upon theology as the source for answers to hungry lay Christians' questions about life. No one arguably complained about the effects of these parachurch, lay-driven institutions on the work of pastors and Reformed congregations. Still, that Schaeffer and Sproul responded to an itch in the church world is one indication that the churches were not providing what lay people wanted. That is, at least, one way to read Cotherman's generally fine history of what he calls "the Christian Study Center Movement."

The unofficial guru of this surge in theological education outside the church and for the laity was Francis Schaeffer, a missionary to Switzerland with ties to the Bible Presbyterian Church. Evangelism to children began in 1948 but by 1951 the Schaeffers had begun to bring

people into their chalet for meals, conversation, and counsel. By 1955 this informal effort blossomed into something more formal and the beginnings of L'Abri as both a Christian study center and a residential community where young inquirers went to find answers to questions about what used to be called "the meaning of life." This was the springboard for Schaeffer's own emergence in the 1960s as an influential apologist, with books and speaking tours in the United States to back it up.

By 1968 L'Abri's reputation had grown to inspire a study center in Vancouver (British Columbia), first conceived by local businessmen and spearheaded by James Mackintosh Houston, a geographer who had studied at Oxford University. The aim of Regent College was a one-year course of study (with a certificate) and a place for research, comparable to the Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. Regent and L'Abri in turn became the inspiration for the C. S. Lewis Institute, begun in 1973, in connection with the University of Maryland. Just a little before that, R. C. Sproul had founded the Ligonier Valley Study Center outside of Pittsburgh with significant initial support from that city's Coalition for Christian Outreach. At roughly the same time, the New College Berkeley, located in California, began as another center in the orbit of L'Abri. The last institution to follow in Cotherman's narrative is the Christian Study Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, began in 1974 in close connection with Trinity Presbyterian Church (PCA).

Cotherman does not say much about the historical context of these centers, even though the photos he includes show earnest Christians from the 1970s looking every bit like the Jesus People. Did the baby-boomer generation exhibit a degree of hunger for theology that earlier and later generations did not? Or did the first two decades of the Cold War, in combination with Vietnam, race relations, and the sexual revolution, raise a host of considerations that young people encountered on college campuses but found no obvious responses to in the churches? Just as important was the expansion of higher education at this time. Evangelicals, like many other groups, were going to college in record numbers thanks to the expansion of university programs and state funding for such study. Part of the backdrop of the Christian study center movement may well have been a generation of Protestants going to secular universities, encountering material with which their parents and pastors were unfamiliar, and looking for Christians who could speak to those topics. All of these factors may explain why the study center phenomenon prospered for a time and then required adjustments to sustain its activities.

For whatever reason, the popularity of study centers declined by the late 1970s. The case of Ligonier is instructive. What began as a study center in the early 1970s, partly inspired by L'Abri along with support from networks among Pittsburgh churches, evolved into a parachurch ministry with little in-person opportunities. Initially, Ligonier had a campus made up of homes where staff lived and that provided accommodations for students. In 1978 when the center completed construction of its first dorm, Ligonier had hosted over 3,000 students for overnight stays. Where Ligonier differed from L'Abri, according to Sproul, was that Schaeffer's work was primarily evangelistic (with a good dose of apologetics) while the western Pennsylvania center was committed to theological education for the laity. By the late 1970s, however, Sproul and his colleagues became convinced that Ligonier needed to expand and that the way to do so was through media. In 1977 Ligonier launched *Tabletalk* magazine. Five years later, thanks to technological developments that made VHS recordings and distribution affordable, Ligonier devoted resources to tapes of Sproul and other teachers for sale to viewers and students. By 1985 Sproul and his staff decided to leave the Ligonier campus in Pennsylvania and create offices in Orlando where they would produce the magazine, VHS tapes, and other materials. That was the last year that Ligonier held a summer course at its original Pennsylvania location. One factor behind this development was the

ebbing appeal of residential study centers. The thought of living together, working on common projects, and studying in community may have been largely a product of 1960s idealism.

The other cases of Regent and Charlottesville also indicated the limits of the Christian-study-center-as-residential-community model. Although inspired by Schaeffer, James Houston, the initial leader of Regent, saw a way for the institution to become a training center for Young Life staffers. But other advisors and some of the faculty at Regent balked at that idea and shepherded the college into a graduate school of theology associated with the University of British Columbia. Regent remains one of Canada's largest graduate schools in theology. This turnabout was a possible outcome from the very beginning since many of the Plymouth Brethren, largely academics, associated with the institution from the beginning had received doctorates in theology, biblical studies, or church history at British universities (partly the function of existence within Britain's Commonwealth of Nations). In the United States, in contrast, the chances of study centers moving to degree-granting institutions was the path pursued by mainline Protestant churches almost eight decades prior. By the 1970s, the academic discipline of religious studies was the way that universities and colleges brought faith on campus.<sup>1</sup> As a result, when in the mid-1980s the popularity of informal theological education subsided at the Center for Christian Study in Charlottesville, the institution became a kind of headquarters for Christian ministries at the University of Virginia with programs for the edification of its own students who lived at the Center. (The Center's programs also include ministry to non-residents.) After 1990, Charlottesville's Center, with Drew Trotter at the helm, became the hub for a consortium of Christian study centers at college and university campuses across the United States.

Cotherman's multi-institutional narrative is not meant to be one of declension. His conclusion indicates support for such an enterprise. He appeals both to James Davison Hunter's idea of "faithful presence" (that Christians should seek influence not through big, visible causes but by ordinary, humble means). The author also throws in current platitudes about social justice which seem far removed from the original mission of the study centers. Aside from the odd parts of the conclusion, Cotherman not only raises questions about the theological education of the laity but also about the timing of Christian young people eager to know more about the faith. Where today do people go for the sort of lectures students at L'Abri and Ligonier heard by Schaeffer and Sproul? One hunch is that the integration of faith and culture or politics and society is now easier to find and to do than it was seventy-five years ago. Practically any Christian professor or pastor can write a book about art, music, politics, economics, or law from what they claim is a Christian worldview. But the persistence of Sproul's own popular theology seems harder to find even as Ligonier itself keeps their founder's recorded speaking and teaching alive.

Whatever the legacy of the Christian study center, the church's laity have moved higher up the scale of academic degrees and professional careers than their parents and grandparents. Providing the current generation of young adults guidance in theology that is both serious but not overly technical remains a challenge today every bit as great as it was when Francis Schaeffer started L'Abri.

**Darryl G. Hart** is distinguished associate professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan and serves as an elder in Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan.

---

<sup>1</sup> The parallels between these Christian study centers by evangelicals and earlier denominational campus ministries among mainline Protestants between (1900–1930) are uncanny. See D. G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

# ServantPoetry

---

G. E. Reynolds (1949–2050)

## Dappled Light



"Seine on the Bougival," Claude Monet (1869), The Currier Museum of Art

## Dappled Light

The dappled river and the bridge  
Give the painter of light an edge,  
Imagining a world of pure beauty  
In which plein air is your duty.

Giverny is the perfect place  
To paint the loveliness of space,  
To catch a thousand different plays  
Of light on each scene as it lays

So differently at each moment  
Of the sun's frolicking intent  
To make the viewer wish to dance—  
A kind of Paradise by chance.

Such beauty is not at all untrue,  
Although construed so not to rue  
The day of birth or death as right;  
It's meant to show another Light.