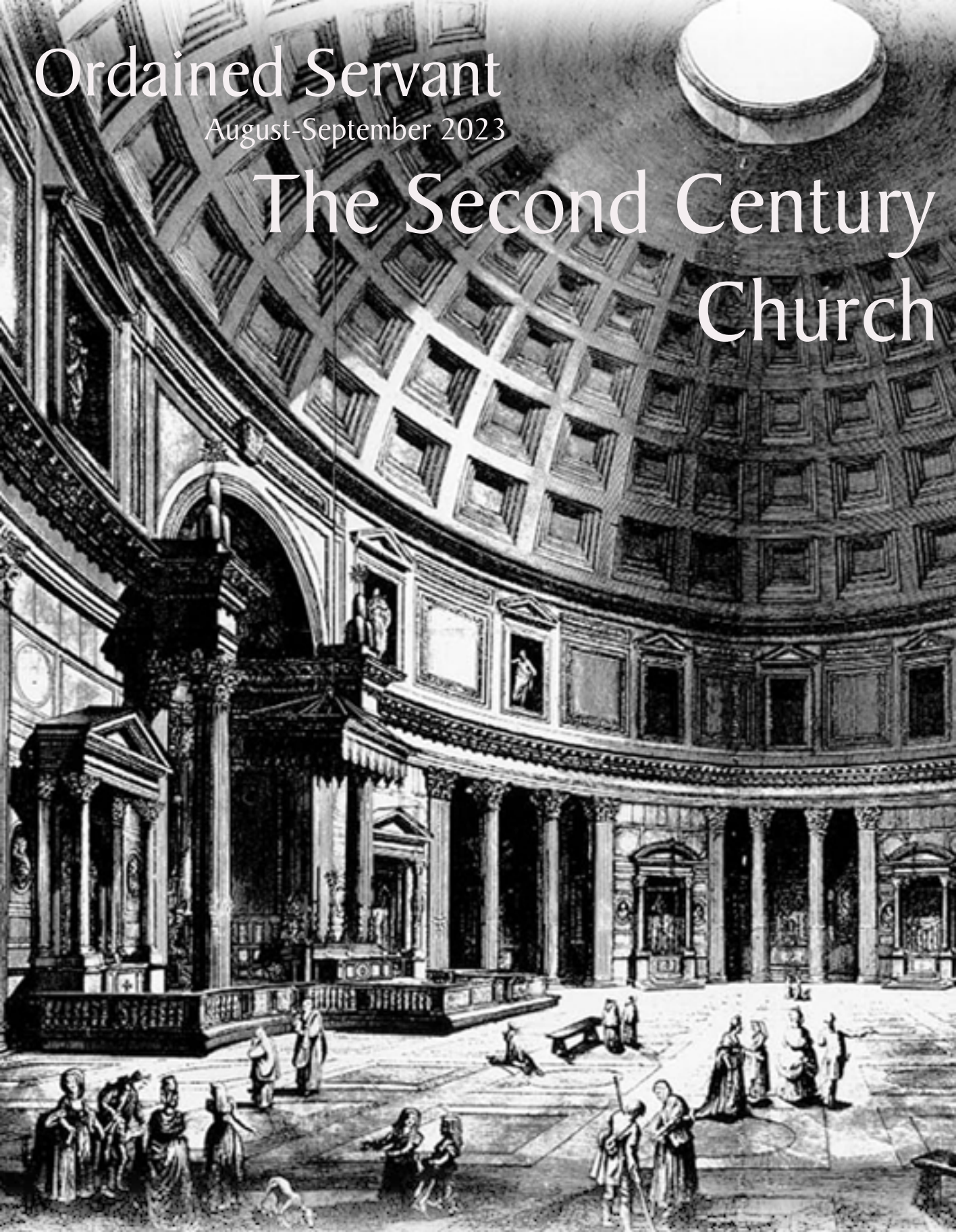


Ordained Servant

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The Second Century Church



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From the Editor

The history of the ancient church is probably not on the top of the reading list of most pastors. In recent decades there has been a push in the broader evangelical community to view the ancient church as if the Reformation never happened. But it would be a shame to neglect the riches present in the writings of our earliest church fathers. Calvin Goligher, in his article “A Guide to the Second Century Church,” presents us with several excellent reasons to explore and appreciate this historical and theological territory.

I present chapter 6, “God’s Method: Proclamation,” of my book *The Voice of the Good Shepherd*. I examine a topic often overlooked in assessing Paul’s theology of preaching: the distinction between a herald and a persuader in first century Roman culture. The difference explains much about Paul’s controversy with the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1–4, as well as expanding our understanding of Paul’s theology of preaching as proclamation.

When I left seminary (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1979), I was a fan of what is known as the Majority Greek Text, which underlies the King James Version and the New King James Version. After several years of sermon preparation using the third edition (1975) of *The Greek New Testament* of the United Bible Society (UBS 3), I realized that the UBS edition gave me access to a much wider variety of Greek manuscripts than either the Textus Receptus of Erasmus or the Majority Text. Concern with the accuracy of the Greek text is the concern of what is called Lower Criticism, whereas Higher Criticism calls into question the divine authority of the text.

Since there seems to be a renewed interest in textual criticism and the best text for faithful sermon preparation, I have asked T. David Gordon, retired professor of religion and Greek at Grove City College, to reflect on this subject.

Alan D. Strange continues his “Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” with chapter 6, dealing with censure and restoration. This chapter is also used frequently by sessions as they seek to bring judicial matters to a just and merciful conclusion that edifies the church and glorifies its head the Lord Jesus Christ.

An Older Elder presents us with letter no. 7 to a younger ruling elder. He discusses the problem of discouragement. These letters are well worth reading aloud at session meetings or shared in print with younger elders, as many sessions are presently doing.

T. David Gordon’s review article, “Real Differences: The Danger of Radical

Individualism,” looks in depth at sociologist Jean Twenge’s latest offering: *Generations: The Real Differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future*. This timely book will help officers understand the differences among various generations. Twenge also makes some predictions which seem wise and gives us a heads up for helping Christians avoid the worst of what Twenge predicts. Since the quest for self-fulfillment of radical individualism is contrary to the biblical quest for Christlikeness, Christian leaders have all the truth needed to counter such a trend.

William Edgar’s “Big Answers to Big Questions” reviews the two latest books of Os Guinness: *The Great Quest* and *Signals of Transcendence*. Guinness’s lifelong pursuit of apologetics and evangelism presents us with a unique contrast between the two books. *The Great Quest* is, as is typical of Guinness’s writings, an argument for Christianity, whereas *Signals of Transcendence* simply tells ten compelling stories of the unique ways that the Lord had created a hunger for the gospel in ten individual lives. One is the fascinating story of his own wife, Jenny’s, conversion out of the dazzling world of being a Vogue model.

Our poem this issue is unusual in that it is unlike anything I have published since 2009 (137 poems in all). It is a poem in praise of another poem—a kind of a seventeenth-century blurb. The tribute, or ode, is for John Milton’s (1608–1674) famous epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), by his friend and fellow poet, Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)—“On Mr. Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.” The poem was first published in the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, in 1674.

Most of Marvell’s English poems, *Miscellaneous Poems*, were published three years after his death in 1681. I have chosen to reproduce the original spelling, hyphenation, and capitalization found in the Bodleian Library’s manuscript with extensive additions acquired in 1946. This retains Marvell’s sense of emphasis and meter. This was intended to be his complete poems but was never published.

Notice how Marvell reflects on his early reservations about *Paradise Lost* but slowly came to deeply appreciate Milton’s accomplishment. Ironically, Marvell’s poem is written in rhyming couplets but ends approving of the form. The lack of rhyme was somewhat controversial in his day, although it had been around since Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1616/17–1647), introduced it. It is known as blank verse or unrhymed iambic pentameter, but it is not to be confused with free verse in that the former maintains consistent meter, whereas the latter has neither meter nor rhythm. Shakespeare wrote his plays in blank verse, but not his sonnets.

The cover is a drawing by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778), the Venetian architect and artist famous for his etchings of the ruins of antiquity. The second-century Roman Pantheon was dedicated by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 126 AD. In 609 AD it became a Roman Catholic church (Basilica di Santa Maria ad Martyres or Basilica of St. Mary and the Martyrs).

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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FROM THE ARCHIVES “CHURCH HISTORY”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-31.pdf

- “The Use and Abuse of Church History.” (J. G. Vos) 5:2 (Apr. 1996): 39–41.

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

ServantHistory

A Guide to the Second Century

By Calvin R. Goligher

Church history is a source of encouragement and wisdom for serving God in our own day. Most Reformed Christians already have a keen interest in the subject. We especially love the bravery and insight of the Reformers and Puritans. Four and five centuries later, we still find that we can learn much from them.

The world has changed a lot since the Reformation, though. In that day, Christendom was tragically divided. Both sides of the Reformation conflict had much in common: the doctrines of God and Christ from the ancient councils, the basic moral vision of the Ten Commandments, a biblical understanding of the human person, and of human life from the womb to the grave, and the hope of resurrection.

Today, that world is almost entirely lost, as Carl Trueman has documented in his history of the sexual revolution, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. At the end of that book, Trueman comments that Christians today should look to the church of the second century for inspiration and guidance, because they faced challenges much like our own:

In the second century, the church was a marginal sect within a dominant, pluralist society. She was under suspicion not because her central dogmas were supernatural but rather because she appeared subversive in claiming Jesus as King and was viewed as immoral in her talk of eating and drinking human flesh and blood and expressing incestuous-sounding love between brothers and sisters.¹

For most Reformed Christians, the second century is unfamiliar territory. Where is one to begin? In this article, I will offer some suggestions about what to read and what to look for in this fascinating period of church history.

A Historical Overview

The best introductory history of the early church currently available is Donald M. Fairbairn, *The Global Church*². Fairbairn describes the early church's experience of persecution, its worship and fellowship, its authority structures, and its conflict with heresies. This book is especially good at showing the strong unity and consensus present in the church's teachings and practices, even across divisions of language, ecclesiastical custom, and various doctrinal disputes. The second century specifically is covered in chapters 3–6. These chapters show that, though the second-century church was not highly

¹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 406.

² Donald M. Fairbairn, *The Global Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

organized as it would become a few centuries later, it still enjoyed a truly unified common life in Christ through the gospel of grace.

A more comprehensive treatment of the second century church is Michael Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*.³ Kruger's academic expertise is in the history of the biblical canon, which was one of the most significant issues for Christians in the second century. Today, many scholars maintain that there was no real canon in the earliest period of the church. On their view, the canon as we know it came about when one part of the church achieved enough power to require everyone to conform to their practice (a view made famous by Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*). Kruger addresses this and many other issues very well.

To understand any period in church history, it is very important to know what doctrinal questions were being discussed, and how these questions came about. We will be disappointed if we come to the second century looking for answers based on the Shorter Catechism. We must be prepared to think about different questions, asked in different ways, and answered without the benefit of centuries of refinement and reflection. This context is presented in a very readable way in Donald Fairbairn and Ryan Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions*,⁴ particularly chapters 2–4, which explain the background to the first two ecumenical councils and the Nicene Creed that they produced.

It is worth noting that there are many significant scholarly debates about the second century church. These issues require discernment, both historical and spiritual. The perspective of the historian is often a significant factor: unbelieving scholars often explain things in a way that does not fit with the claims of orthodox doctrine. Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox scholars will often explain things in a way that Protestants would dispute. This is one reason to start with these three works. These are all written by evangelicals, so they provide “our” perspective on this history. They are not the only good overviews of the subject, but for Reformed Christians, they are a good place to start training one's powers of discernment in these areas.

These overviews are also excellent preparation for diving into the primary sources.

Primary Sources

Reading old texts can be difficult, but there are good reasons to persevere. First, it is inexpensive! These ancient texts are all freely available online, though you may prefer to buy paper copies, and you may want to purchase more recent editions with better translations. Second, these texts offer a fascinating combination of the unexpected and the familiar. These authors lived many centuries ago, in cultures vastly different from our own, so there is much that will be unfamiliar. At the same time, it is amazing how much they have in common with us. They loved the same God that we love, and they studied the same Scriptures that we read and preach. Third, reading primary texts by great theologians is often easier than reading *about* them in more recent works. C. S. Lewis put

³ Michael Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

⁴ Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

it this way in his preface to Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*: “the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his modern commentator.”⁵

In the second century, there are only a few major authors whose writings have come down to us. Three are particularly important to know: Justin Martyr (100–165), Irenaeus of Lyons (140–200), and Tertullian of Carthage (155–220). These men were quite different in background, gifting, and temperament. Justin was a philosopher who reasoned with Greeks and Jews. Irenaeus was a pastor who expounded Scripture and warned against error. Tertullian was a lawyer who used his gift for argument to guard against spiritual and moral decline in the church. Together, these men show us three different aspects of Christian faith and leadership in the second century.

The Philosopher: Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr was a Greek-speaking Christian teacher from Samaria who died a martyr’s death in about the year 165 AD. He converted to Christianity after moving through a series of philosophical schools, and finally converting to Platonism, which captured his imagination with its insights into immaterial reality. Sometime after his conversion to Platonism, Justin met an old man on a beach who told him that there were teachers even older than the Greek philosophers, with even profounder insight into ultimate reality. In fact, this old man said, everything that the philosophers knew, they learned one way or another from these older teachers. These older teachers were the Hebrew prophets, starting with Moses himself. This man led Justin to appreciate not only the deep insight and truth of the Bible but also that Christ had fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, thus confirming its truthfulness. Justin converted to Christianity, his heart burning with a longing for truth. He kept his philosopher’s cloak, though, signaling that he considered Christianity the fulfillment of his earlier search for truth.

The *First Apology* is Justin’s appeal to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius that he prevent Christians from being unjustly persecuted by local governors. Major themes in this work include the relation of Greek myth and philosophy to Christianity, the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the place of Christians in society. Along the way, Justin mentions some of the Gnostic false teachers (Simon Magus and Marcion) who threatened to unsettle the church’s doctrine. Near the end of this work is an early description of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day.

The *Dialogue with Trypho* is a record of Justin’s debate with a Jewish critic of Christianity. It opens with the narrative of Justin’s conversion, summarized above. It deals especially with the foundational question of the relation between the Old Testament and the New. Justin spends a good portion of the dialogue expounding various Psalms to show how they speak of Christ.

Justin Martyr’s works are in volume 1 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*,⁶ which is widely available in print and online. A more recent translation is available in the *Fathers of the Church* series.⁷

⁵ St. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, trans. A Religious of C.M.S.V. S.Th. (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 5.

⁶ Justin Martyr, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).

⁷ Justin Martyr, *Fathers of the Church*, trans. Thomas Falls (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).

The Pastor: Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus grew up in Asia Minor. His spiritual mentor was the aged bishop Polycarp, who was himself mentored by the aged Apostle John, and who went on to minister faithfully decades before being martyred in the first half of the second century. So, Irenaeus was a spiritual grandson of the Apostle John. John said that he had no greater joy than that his children would walk in truth (3 John 4), and he would have found much joy in Irenaeus. As a young man, Irenaeus was sent to serve as the bishop of Lugdunum in the province of Gaul (modern Lyons in southern France). He must have been a promising leader, for he was soon chosen as the church's delegate to a synod in Rome.

This was a tumultuous time to be an up-and-coming church leader. While Irenaeus was away, the bishop of Lugdunum was martyred. Upon his return, Irenaeus was selected as his successor. He served as bishop for about two decades before his own death. During that time, he wrote the church's first big theological textbook and a small survey of the Bible. He probably wrote more than these, but these are the only writings that we still have.

Obviously, as with Justin, state persecution was a major issue for Irenaeus. But he focused his writing on combatting false teaching, which he considered an even greater challenge. The church stood firm against violent enemies outside its doors, refusing to capitulate to coercion. Would it likewise stand firm against subtle corrupting influences in its pulpits, or would biblical teaching be fatally merged with elements of false religion?

Irenaeus was just the person to tackle this problem. First, he was painstakingly careful in his research into the various strands of Gnostic error. Second, he was profoundly insightful into Christian doctrine. Whereas Justin had habitually described the Son and the Spirit as lower beings than the Father, (a type of mistake that was common enough at the time, the full implications of which would not be clear until such thinking grew into the heresy of Arianism in the fourth century), the antidote to this error did not need to wait for the Council of Nicaea. Only a few decades after Justin, Irenaeus already improved on his work by describing the three persons as equally divine.⁸

Against Heresies is the first systematic theology and the first biblical theology of the Christian church. It is not always an easy read, partly because of its sheer size and partly because large sections are taken up with the various forms of Gnosticism.

It is entirely worth the effort, though, not least because Gnostic teachings persist in our society. Our culture devalues the human body much as the Gnostics did. This attitude leads us, as it led them, either to indulge every whim of our bodies or to mistreat our bodies severely. Another feature of Gnosticism that we see today is a political elitism shrouded in mystical knowledge. Such elitism is commonplace in history, but the Gnostic version of this is especially relevant because it involved co-opting the Bible to fit their political agenda, just as our nominally Christian leaders often do. Finally, Gnostics were very anti-institutional, though they were also very interested in holding positions of influence. This was a major reason that they wished to co-opt the church—it had an institutional strength that they could never build for themselves.

⁸ On this point see Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 31.

This work is available in full in a translation from the nineteenth century. This translation is in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series (vol. 1), widely available in print and online. The best way to start reading this book is in the condensed edition by James R. Payton Jr., entitled *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith*.⁹ This edition cuts out a lot of the detail about Gnosticism, putting the focus on Irenaeus's exposition of Christian truth from Scripture. The translation is also somewhat revised.

The *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* is a short work, discovered only about a century ago in a Syriac manuscript. The focus of this work is in showing that the Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament, thus confirming the message of the apostles. I have found it to be the most accessible patristic text available. It is available in a lovely paperback edition in the Popular Patristics Series from St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.¹⁰

The Lawyer: Tertullian of Carthage

Justin and Irenaeus were clergymen, working in Greek. Tertullian, on the other hand, was a layman working in Latin. In some respects, he is not the best representative of the church fathers. He had a very intense moral and spiritual vision which led him to some extreme views. For instance, he dismissed all non-Christian philosophy, denigrated the institutional church and its ministry, and embraced a charismatic movement marked by prophecies and miracles.

However, Tertullian did contribute a great deal to the church of his day. He was a lawyer, and he employed his legal mind in defending and articulating the faith. His prolific writing includes the first use of the word "Trinity" (*trinitas* in Latin).

Against Marcion is Tertullian's most important work. Marcion was a wealthy Christian teacher in Rome who was determined to influence the church but was kept out of the ministry. In response, Marcion founded a rival church and used this as a platform for spreading his distinctive ideas, which were in step with the Gnostic teachers of the day. The most famous characteristic of Marcion's false teaching was his claim that the Old Testament was about a lower creator-god, and the New Testament was about a higher God, the Father of Jesus. Tertullian shows the falsity of this claim by demonstrating the unity of the Bible.

Marcion rejected the Old Testament entirely, along with portions of the New Testament that he thought were sympathetic to the Old Testament. He thought of Paul as a standard-bearer for a form of Christianity that truly was a Gentile alternative to the Jewish scriptures. Accordingly, he acknowledged only the Pauline letters and the Gospel of Luke, and even in these books he cut out some material that he considered too favorable to the Old Testament. For this reason, a good portion of Tertullian's work is an extended commentary on Luke and on Paul's letters, in order to show that Marcion's view of things fails to understand the Scripture that he himself acknowledges.

One of the best parts of the book is Tertullian's exposition of 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul teaches the doctrine of the bodily resurrection. This doctrine was profoundly

⁹ James R. Payton Jr., *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, ed. Paul A. Boer, Sr., trans. J. Armitage Robinson (Yonkers NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019).

distasteful to Gnostic sensibilities but was at the very center of the Christian Faith. This doctrine is still profoundly counter-cultural, as Silicon Valley consultants dream of uploading the contents of our brains to an immortal cloud server.

Against Marcion is available in volume three of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

Conclusion

The church of the twenty-first century faces many challenges. Our world is awash in sexual immorality and false ideology, and our society holds a sharply negative attitude to the church. Inside the church, many are seeking to steer our institutions towards agreement with the world's agenda. There is a chaotic aspect to the life of the church today that makes it relatively easy to accomplish that agenda. Many Christians have only a surface knowledge of biblical teaching on many subjects, so they absorb the prevailing cultural "common sense" and dress it up in biblical language—exactly what the Gnostics were trying to get Christians to do in their own day.

This happens in the realm of sexual morality, as Christians struggle to maintain a biblical sexual ethic over against hookup culture, easy divorce, homosexuality, and transgenderism. It happens in the realm of doctrine, as Christians hear from pulpits secular ideas— "Love is love," "the right side of history," "your truth"—dressed up in biblical terminology. Many Christians are quite ignorant of the Old Testament, and so they find it plausible that we should (in the words of megachurch pastor Andy Stanley) "unhitch ourselves" from it.

In light of all this, we should be thankful for second-century fathers who taught on the relationship between philosophy and theology, the unity of the Old and New Testaments, Christian worship, sexual ethics, and community life.

The main thing is not to read everything about the second century and its history, but to actually share in the spiritual and intellectual life of the great Christian teachers of that time. They loved the Bible and held to it against the trends of their society. They loved each other and found a way to build lasting communities of worship and charity. They loved the truth and pursued it not only in Scripture but wherever it could be found, thus offering an unexpected fulfillment of the human search for truth that was the heart of ancient philosophy. We may hope that what God accomplished through them he will accomplish again in our own time.

Calvin R. Goligher *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian church and serves as the pastor of First Orthodox Presbyterian church in Sunnyvale, California.*

Servant Word

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: God's Method: Proclamation,¹ Chapter 6

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

—1 Thessalonians 2:3–4

*In the world of advertising
there's no such thing as a lie.
There's only expedient exaggeration.*

—Roger Thornhill²

*The bias of each medium of communication
is far more distorting than the deliberate lie.*

—Marshall McLuhan³

In my effort to defend the superiority of preaching as the most essential medium for communicating the gospel, in my 2001 book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*,⁴ I insisted that preaching as a medium of communication is not foolish; rather, it is the message of the gospel that is foolish to the unbeliever. I knew that in Paul's world public oratory was held in high regard. But in my effort to set forth the four excellences of preaching as God's chosen medium⁵ I missed a very important dimension of Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians 1–4.

¹ Adapted from Gregory Edward Reynolds, "A Medium for the Message: The Form of the Message Is Foolish, Too," in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, eds. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), 311–34.

² Alfred Hitchcock, *North by Northwest*, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1959.

³ Marshall McLuhan, *Counterblast* (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), 119.

⁴ Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

⁵ Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 333–45. 1. Preaching is God's Choice; 2. Preaching is an authoritative monologue; 3. Preaching is the Voice and Presence of the Great Shepherd; 4. Preaching is the unique power of a living voice.

Persuasion or Proclamation?

It was David Wells's two-part article titled "The Theology of Preaching: The Biblical Word in the Contemporary World"⁶ that helped me rethink my understanding of Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians 1–4. I was brought face to face with the idea that the means of presenting the foolish message was also foolish in the eyes of the world according to the Apostle Paul. Wells's insight into the nature of Paul's conception of preaching is based in part on the exegetical and historical work of Duane Litfin, who has done extensive research on the nature of first-century Greco-Roman rhetoric and the homiletics of Paul.⁷

The preaching of the gospel is a unique kind of public rhetoric formed by the message of the gospel. The word that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 1:21 to describe his preaching, κηρύγματος (*kērugmatos*), refers to both the content and the form of the communication—to both the message and the nature of the preaching itself as an act of public communication. For Paul, the danger faced by the Corinthian congregation was not simply in elevating rhetoric to too high a position but in being impressed by a type of rhetoric which Paul rejected as unsuitable to preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. But why the confusion over this word "preaching"?

The KJV, following the *Geneva Bible* (1599) verbatim,⁸ appears to equate "foolishness" with the act of preaching, whereas it is actually ambiguous and leaves the interpretation to the reader: "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." But that, unfortunately, is not the focus of most commentators.

As far back as Calvin, the "foolishness" in this verse is attributed to the message of the gospel, not the form of its presentation.⁹ There are exceptions. A century after Calvin, commentator Matthew Poole (1624–1679) seems to affirm the ambiguity of the KJV translation,

It pleased God to institute the great ordinance of preaching the gospel, (which they count foolishness) as the sacred means by which he would bring all those that give credit to the revelation of it, and receive Christ held forth in it, to eternal life and salvation.¹⁰

⁶ David Wells, "The Theology of Preaching: The Biblical Word in the Contemporary World—Part One: The Biblical Word, —Part Two: The Contemporary World," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 9, no. 1 (2009): 4–52.

⁷ Duane Litfin, "Swallowing Our Pride: An Essay on the Foolishness of Preaching," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, eds. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 106–26; "Understanding Your Critics: An Outsider's Analysis," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, vol. 6 (1995): 85–99; *Saint Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); "The Perils of Persuasive Preaching," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 4, 1977): 14–17.

⁸ *The Geneva Bible* 1 Cor. 1:21, "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 20, trans. John Pringle (1546, repr. 1847, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 84–5.

¹⁰ Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Thomas and John Turnbull, 1801), 418.

But nineteenth-century commentator Charles Hodge (1797–1878) asserted, “The ‘foolishness of preaching’ means the preaching of foolishness, that is, the cross.”¹¹ In the twentieth-century, Leon Morris (1914–2006) commented, “The word rendered *preaching*, *kērugmatos*, does not mean, as the English might suggest, the act of preaching. It directs attention rather to the content of the message.”¹² After citing an impressive consensus among twentieth-century New Testament scholars, he concludes by citing William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther in their commentary on 1 Corinthians as they assess the King James translation of “preaching” in 1 Corinthians 1:21 to be “superseded in almost all modern versions to indicate the content of the message.”¹³

Thus, the modern trend in translation has been to clarify the ambiguity of the KJV by making the interpretive decision that the message is where the folly lies:

“God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” (NIV)

“it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” (NKJV)

“it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” (ESV)

Wells’s article illuminates the distinction between the rhetoric of proclamation and persuasion in Paul’s thought and practice and hence in the Greco-Roman world in which he ministered. This is not to say that the church has never recognized this distinction, but simply that exegetically the distinction Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16 has not been as sharply focused as it needs to be in the present climate of thought. So, I have concluded that the ambiguity of the KJV translation, intended or not, best captures the range of the meaning of Paul’s phrase “the folly of preaching” (μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος *mōrias tou kērugmatos*).

The importance of appreciating the proper semantic range of the κηρύξ word group should not be underestimated. Gordon Fee asserts that 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16 is “the key theological passage to the whole Corinthian correspondence,” and perhaps “the whole Pauline corpus.”¹⁴ Duane Litfin warns, “It is not too much to say that an entire philosophy of ministry is at stake here. Seeker strategies and church growth theories come into question.”¹⁵

Paul begins his homiletical polemic in 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16 referring to the apostolic message with the common word εὐαγγελίζω (1:17 εὐαγγελίζεσθαι *eὐangelizesthai* to announce good news). This word, in both its verb and noun forms, shares an important

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1860), 21.

¹² Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 45.

¹³ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 108–10. Litfin cites C. H. Dodd (1936), J. B. Lightfoot (1895), Archibald Robinson and Alfred Plummer (1911), James Moffat (1947), G. G. Findlay (1983), A. M. Hunter (1944), F. W. Grosheide (1953), C.K. Barrett (1968), Hans Conzelman (1969), and Gordon Fee (1987).

¹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, “‘Another Gospel Which You Did Not Embrace’: 2 Corinthians 11:4 and the Theology of 1 and 2 Corinthians,” in *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 122, cited in Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 14.

¹⁵ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 111.

element with the other prominent word, in both its verb and noun forms, that Paul uses to describe his preaching—κηρύσσω (1:21 κηρύγματος *kērugmatos*, 1:23 κηρύσσομεν *kērussomen*)—it is the public declaration of information that does not originate with the one doing the announcing. The same is true of a less common word used by Paul in 2:1 to describe his preaching, καταγγέλλω (καταγγέλλων *katangellōn*). Litfin explains,

If we are careful to maintain the balance between the meaning of the verb (“to proclaim as a herald”) and the significance of the *-ma* suffix (“result”), we discover that the “result” of this particular verb is not merely content, but content in a particular *form*, namely, “proclamation” or “heralding.” This is why a lexicographer such as Gerhard Friedrich in his article on *kerygma* in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT 1965, p. 714), concludes that the word “has a twofold sense . . . , signifying both the result of proclamation (what is proclaimed) and the actual proclaiming. In other words, it denotes both the act and the content.”¹⁶

Having discerned the focus of Paul’s concept of the apostolic preaching as a herald, it remains to distinguish this from the persuader, a distinction that has been almost completely ignored by recent New Testament scholars and interpreters.¹⁷ In Greco-Roman rhetoric the message of the orator was designed by him to persuade the audience based on his analysis of the audience. It was an audience-driven profession.¹⁸ It was thus a very important skill for the statesman and the legal advocate, and so considered “the most characteristic feature of civilized life.”¹⁹

The herald, on the other hand, was “an executive instrument. Being only the mouth of his master . . .”²⁰ Unlike the orator, who is responsible to persuade the audience, the herald is only responsible to deliver the message of his master faithfully. “Unlike the orator, the herald was not results-driven; he was obedience-driven.”²¹ So when Paul came to Corinth, the congregation expected an orator not a herald. They held the art of public persuasion in very high esteem. This led to their contempt when assessing Paul’s preaching: “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account’” (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul is evidently well aware of the nature of their expectations as he consistently uses the language of the herald, and not the orator or persuader, to describe his own preaching.²² He accounts for the negative evaluation of his preaching by a significant segment of the congregation as a problem with “worldly standards of judgment.”²³ Paul is frank in reporting the nature of the criticisms: “Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you

¹⁶ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 113, citing “κήρυγμα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: 1965), 3:714. See also Duane Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching: The Apostle’s Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 200. Here he corrects the name of the scholar he is quoting. It should be Gerhard, not Gustav, Friedrich. I have changed this in the quote and added the Kittel reference. See Litfin’s expanded discussion, 195–213.

¹⁷ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 113–15.

¹⁸ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 117.

¹⁹ Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 16, quoting George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under the Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3.

²⁰ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 118n27 “κήρυγμα,” 687–88.

²¹ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 119.

²² Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 122n30.

²³ Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Preaching*, 134.

in all things” (2 Cor. 11:6). It is largely the form or manner of Paul’s preaching that is under attack.²⁴ His lack of eloquence was an embarrassment. Thus, Paul is forced to explain his *modus operandi* as a preacher.²⁵

A prominent place in Paul’s corpus that he appears to use the language of persuasion is 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” This is Paul’s only use of this term to describe his preaching (πείθω, *peithō*); it “simply refers to the agency of the preachers, not their rhetorical strategies.”²⁶ It is a term used infrequently in ancient rhetorical texts and describes “non-rhetorical behavior.”

In fact, the entire section (2 Cor. 4–5) is one of the locations in the Corinthian epistles which most strongly echoes the anti-rhetorical concerns of 1 Cor. 1–4. Paul was careful to portray his ministry as that of a herald rather than a persuader, and his single use of the elastic term *peitho* in 2 Cor. 5:11 constitutes no exception.²⁷

In Acts 17:2–4; 28:23–24, we observe that

Paul’s rhetorical approach drew not on the orator’s repertoire of persuasive strategies designed to engender πίστις, but on authoritative, Scripture-backed witness to the crucified Christ.²⁸

Paul understood that his task was to proclaim a God-given message whose power and effectiveness was in the hands of the sovereign giver (Rom. 1:16). His task was to be faithful in proclaiming that message—period (1 Cor. 4:1). But the message of his Lord was full of imperatives to repent and believe, turning from the idols and sins of this world (1 Thess. 1:9). So it is not a question of application or motivation, but rather whose application and motivation. Paul stuck steadfastly to the applications and motivations of his Lord.

Litfin rejects the idea that the rhetoric which Paul opposes is the deceitful and self-aggrandizing sort.²⁹ Rather, Paul was concerned that the persuasive techniques of good rhetoric, fine for natural purposes of the state and court, would produce merely natural rather than spiritual results in preaching.³⁰ Paul’s alternative is the proclaimer or witness, rather than “the results-driven dynamic of Greco-Roman persuasion itself.” “The Corinthians were for the most part little people with mere pretensions of culture and status.”³¹ “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor. 1:26).

“Paul argues that he could not pour the gospel into the mold of Greco-Roman eloquence without thereby emptying the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17)” (159). The results of his preaching were dependent not on his persuasive powers but the “power of God” (*dunamei theou* δυνάμει θεοῦ, 1 Cor. 2:5). The Corinthians had not abandoned the message of the

²⁴ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 137.

²⁵ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 141.

²⁶ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 189.

²⁷ Litfin, “Swallowing Our Pride,” 122n30.

²⁸ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 190.

²⁹ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*. There are three excursuses on this topic: “Good Rhetoric Versus Bad Rhetoric,” on pages 150, 260, 294.

³⁰ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 152.

³¹ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 153.

cross, they only failed to grasp its implications for preaching. The centrality of Christ stands in sharp contrast with the Corinthians' personality and persuasion centered approach. "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17). "It is precisely this human dynamic . . . that Paul is here disavowing."³² The weight of the orators' ability was for Paul shifted to the message and its application by the Holy Spirit. The theocentric nature of the gospel has "a persuasive dynamic of its own."³³ "Paul seemed to conceive of these two persuasive dynamics—that of the rhetor and that of the cross—as mutually exclusive."³⁴ Faith is not a human possibility open to the influence of the orator but a divinely given ability dispensed by the Spirit through the hearing of the word of the cross.³⁵

Paul's task was not to create a message to persuade but to deliver a message already given—a decidedly humbler task.³⁶ The Roman *praeco* or herald was an oral proclaimer who did not enjoy a high social standing.³⁷ But the audience was "dethroned from its proud role as judge."³⁸ The root of the problem in Corinth was the pride of which Corinthian factionalism and the criticism of Paul's preaching were merely symptoms.³⁹ They were mistakenly judging Paul by the world's public speaking standards. Christ and him crucified is the point of preaching, not the preacher.

Recently R. Larry Overstreet has challenged Litfin's assertion of the distinction between persuasion and proclamation.⁴⁰ Overstreet offers a nice survey of New Testament uses of the *peithō* (πείθω) word group as well as many other Hebrew and Greek words that describe the ministries of prophets and preachers. However, it seems that he has misunderstood Litfin's basic point. When, as Overstreet quotes, Litfin states that the preacher "is not called upon to persuade the hearers to respond,"⁴¹ he is not saying there is no need to apply the truth of the proclamation to the lives of the hearers. Litfin insists:

We need not refrain from urging, entreating, exhorting or beseeching our listeners to follow Christ. The essence of the gospel is invitation, and some of the terms used in Scripture—for example παρακαλέω (Acts 2:40) and δέομαι (2 Cor. 5:20)—clearly portray this aspect of the preacher's ministry. Nothing we have said is meant to deny the validity of straight forward encouragement or exhortation to receive the gospel. After all, invitation in and of itself can scarcely be viewed as a persuasive technique designed to induce, rather than simply be the agent of, *yielding*.⁴²

Litfin is using persuasion in a technical way to describe the ancient audience-driven mode of rhetoric, which he sees appearing in modern form in the preaching of, among other

³² Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 177.

³³ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 178.

³⁴ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 179.

³⁵ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 181.

³⁶ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 185.

³⁷ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 206–7.

³⁸ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 212.

³⁹ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 219.

⁴⁰ R. Larry Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014).

⁴¹ Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching*, 30.

⁴² Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 348.

things, the Church Growth movement. He would also see it in Overstreet's own advocacy of the invitation system. Litfin distinguishes between two types of audience adaptation:

Training in ancient rhetoric was designed to help the speaker mold his efforts to the needs and values of the audience so as to produce the desired response. The Christian preacher, on the other hand, molds his efforts to his audience for a different reason: to ensure that they comprehend the King's message. The preacher should use all the techniques at his disposal to put the message in terms his audience can understand, to break through the hearer's defenses so as to confront him or her with the truth.⁴³

Litfin attributes persuasion to the Holy Spirit, which is clearly the biblical emphasis.⁴⁴ But in Overstreet's discussion of persuasion in Paul's epistles he quotes Litfin's identification of the force of the persuasion verb in 2 Timothy 1:5: "Because Paul was persuaded that Timothy possessed true faith (v.5), . . . he urged the young minister to fan into flame (or perhaps, "keep at full flame") his God-given ability for ministry."⁴⁵ His footnote indicates that Overstreet thinks this shows Litfin's inconsistency. Again, however, I think Overstreet misunderstands Litfin's more precise use of "persuasion."

Litfin gives a very helpful list of practices he believes Paul's theology of preaching would have us avoid:

- *Gatherings centered on a charismatic, pseudo-celebrity communicator who revels in the spotlight.*
- *Styles of preaching or music that tend to rev up the emotions but short-circuit the listener's engagement with the gospel.*
- *Sentimental story-laden messages that captivate the audience but fail to direct them to Christ.*
- *Empty, anthropocentric pulpit therapy that draws the listener in by purporting to deal with life's issues while lacking the gospel's biblical and theological substance.*
- *Interminable invitations designed to wear down resistance until someone, anyone, responds.*
- *Such techniques as asking people to raise their hands to be prayed for and then urging all who raised their hands to come forward.⁴⁶*

Proclamation and the Plausibility Structures of the Ancient World

In his concentration on Paul's homiletical vocabulary in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians, Litfin identifies the main target of Paul's polemic, concentrating on the Pauline distinction between persuasion and proclamation.

It is our thesis that perceived deficiencies in Paul's preaching, when measured against Greco-Roman eloquence, precipitated many of Paul's difficulties in Corinth. These

⁴³ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 347–48, cf. 279.

⁴⁴ Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching*, 30

⁴⁵ Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching*, 45.

⁴⁶ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 349.

were the deficiencies that prompted a section of the Corinthian congregation to complain about Paul's preaching and declare independence from him.⁴⁷

Paul recognized that the rhetorical form that so enchanted some in the Corinthian congregation was a poor medium for the gospel, because it catered to the secular assumptions of the first century Greco-Roman world.

The critically useful concept of plausibility structures is used extensively by sociologist Peter Berger in explaining the sociology of knowledge. In *A Rumor of Angels*⁴⁸ he describes the church in the context of modern secularization as a "cognitive minority."⁴⁹ Such a minority experiences "cognitive dissonance," as it encounters a general culture which does not share its assumptions about reality—its "plausibility structures." The church either adjusts to the cognitive majority by revising its ideas or it defends itself against the general assumptions of the culture. Plausibility structures are the "social networks and conversational fabrics"⁵⁰ which reinforce ideas of what is credible in a given culture and thereby legitimize these assumptions.

A good example of the Apostolic encounter with the plausibility structures in Paul's day is Porcius Festus, who was largely ignorant of Judaism and emerging Christianity. The account in Acts describes the controversy between the Jews and Paul's belief in the resurrection of Christ as "certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive" (Acts 25:19). The idea of resurrection appears to be entirely outside of Festus's universe of discourse, which are part of the plausibility structures of the Greco-Roman world.

Paul's encounter with the Athenians is one of the more dramatic examples of the cognitive dissonance that results from encountering the prevailing viewpoint. "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked" (Acts 17:32). The concept of resurrection was not part of the plausibility structure of the Athenian thinkers. Wells sums this up nicely, "The wisdom of the cross and the wisdom of the world are, in fact, two competing, mutually exclusive frameworks for understanding reality."⁵¹ Wells suggests that when Paul says, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4), he is using "god" to refer to "the culture which functions as a substitute for God. . . . In other words, 'this age' offers a set of alternative loyalties which in combination are a substitute for the true and saving knowledge of God."⁵²

In Corinth the fabric of assumptions that made up the thinking of their Hellenistic culture still had deep roots in the thinking of the newly formed congregation. In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul identifies the plausibility structures of the Greco-Roman world out of which the Corinthian church had been called. He focuses his insight on his preaching because it had been criticized and judged inferior by the Corinthians

⁴⁷ Duane Litfin, *Saint Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 187, quoted in David Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 31n12.

⁴⁸ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor, 1969), 42–4. For a more recent explanation of Berger's cognitive terminology see Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions without Becoming a Fanatic* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 31–36.

⁴⁹ Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 7.

⁵⁰ Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 43.

⁵¹ Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 14.

⁵² Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 35–6.

according to the exacting and high standards of the best of ancient rhetoric. Their expectations of Paul's preaching revealed a deep seated commitment to the Greco-Roman canons of persuasion.

The Medium of Proclamation Is Suitable to the Message of the Cross

Gospel rhetoric, or the method and medium of preaching, must be suited to the message of the crucified Savior. Because the medium is the message—or is inextricably connected with the message—then the method of proclamation must suit the message of the crucified and risen Lord. This appropriateness is two-fold.

First, Paul's own rhetorical weakness ("I am unskilled in speaking," 2 Cor. 11:6) is appropriate to the humiliation required to gain entrance to heavenly glory.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1–5)

Added to his weakness is the self-conscious choice Paul has made not to use the tools of the persuader,⁵³ but rather of the herald of another world—a world at sharp odds with the present world and the plausibility structures of this present evil age. It is precisely because Paul does not want them to be impressed by human oratorical ability that he amplifies his own weakness and the form of delivery as that which by its very nature calls attention to the author of the message, rather than the messenger. The form of heralding is well-suited to a message that is intended to humble the pride of sinners to bow before the crucified Lord. "[W]e have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Litfin concludes by contrasting the art of persuasion with Paul as a herald:

These are high demands indeed. They are in fact demands the itinerant Apostle could not meet. Nor did he aspire to. As we shall see, Paul's goals as a missionary preacher were not those of the Greco-Roman persuader. They were the goals of a simple herald, goals that were dramatically different from those of the polished orators of the Greco-Roman world of the first century.⁵⁴

Second, the task of proclamation as a herald is itself appropriate to the nature of the gospel message. The preacher is an announcer of the message of the one who has conquered sin and death. So here what is humiliating for the messenger, as Paul learned in the face of the mockery of Athenian intellectuals (Acts 17:32), is also suited to the exaltation of Christ. He possesses the royal authority to send messengers throughout the world with a declaration of amnesty for sinners and liberation from slavery to the First Adam—a message incomprehensible to proud sinners.

⁵³ Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 15.

⁵⁴ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 116.

One thing the gospel herald did not have in common with his secular counterpart was immunity. His proclamation was not protected by the state.⁵⁵ The Greco-Roman world was not hospitable to Paul's medium or his message.

This unique form of public communication, while using common grace elements of classical rhetoric, established a new genre of rhetoric—a gospel rhetoric suited to the new age of the Spirit of the crucified and resurrected Christ, an age anticipated by the prophets of old, in which the medium of the herald perfectly suits the message.

The Power of Proclamation in the Modern World

Today's gospel herald must neither embrace nor ignore the plausibility structures of modernity. The ESV translates 1 Corinthians 2:4 "plausible (πειθός, "persuasive" NKJV and NIV, "enticing" KJV) words of wisdom." This is what was driving and shaping the preaching of Paul's opponents in Corinth. Our culture has its own set of assumptions. For example, people often assume that it is intolerant for a person to believe that his religion is true as opposed to all other religions. Or they assume that moral principles are cultural constructs which are binding only in the culture that constructed them. Resurrection and even non-material life is inconceivable to many.

The plausibility structures of modernity have a new medium of discipleship—electricity and the communication media it animates. Electronic, especially visual, media are more suited to persuasion than proclamation. The royal announcement of kerygmatic preaching is more suited to the proclamation of the gospel, in which the messenger comes as a humble servant of the King, who is now temporarily invisible to mortals. The herald depends for persuasion, not on his oratory, but on the Spirit, who is the agent of this heavenly sovereign. Because we are in the same world in which Paul preached, the persuaders' tendency to favor form over substance has simply marshaled a host of new tools for their purposes. We now live in a highly mediated culture, as Wells observes,

Style often trumps substance and appearance threatens to substitute for reality. These substitutes dominate modern consciousness, given the electronically mediated nature of much of our reality. So complete is the triumph which television, the internet, and movies have achieved that moderns now often find reality itself rather boring in comparison to its imaginary or virtual substitute.⁵⁶

Wells is especially helpful in articulating the church's compromise with our culture, especially in its concept and expectations of preaching.⁵⁷ The church is preoccupied with technological methods to meet what are perceived to be the "real needs" of modern people. Hence the preacher is expected to be the successful business man and wise psychologist presenting techniques to "manage the outer world . . . and get control over the inner world. . . the common human preoccupations with health, wealth, safety, psychological well-being, and protection."⁵⁸ Paul, on the other hand, was occupied with another world and the age to

⁵⁵ Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching*, 23.

⁵⁶ Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 1.

⁵⁷ Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, chapter 8, "The Fourth Temptation: The Compromise of the Church," 278–310.

⁵⁸ Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 20–21.

come. Such a message “required a different kind of presentation from the one that was from ‘below’ and was expressing a purely human perspective.”⁵⁹

Messages designed to attract the world dilute the strong note of authority that comes with a message from the heavenly realm. “The orator was concerned with the management of life’s crises, with the affairs of this life, but the preacher comes to frame those issues in the light of eternity.”⁶⁰ The preaching of the orator “gives knowledge neither of God nor of ourselves. It produces no awe in his presence and no wisdom in ourselves.”⁶¹ Evangelical preachers have given in to triviality, uncertainty, and complacency—so much a part of the air we breathe.⁶² The only antidote to the *Zeitgeist* is the proclamation of the theology of the Bible as God’s challenge to man, modern or otherwise.

It is of particular interest at this point that in 1995 Duane Litfin addressed The American Society for Church Growth.⁶³ After describing the differences between Greco-Roman orators and heralds in the context of 1 Corinthians 1–4, Litfin summarizes the core criticism of the critics,

. . . your critics intuitively perceive the Church Growth Movement to have lost sight of the contrast which so alarmed the Apostle Paul. They perceive you often to be operating out of the very Persuader’s Stance Paul disavowed.⁶⁴

Can we let Paul’s warnings register with us here for a moment? The issue in these passages was not the *content* of the Gospel, which Paul affirms the Corinthians held fast; the issue was one of *methods*, methods which held the potential of either *displaying* or *displacing*, the power of the cross. Can there be any higher stakes?⁶⁵

Indeed, not. “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1:17).

So, as a preacher, I should be happy to be found foolish, not in understanding Paul, but in the gospel task. Thus, the foolishness of the message of the good news of heavenly amnesty, as well as the foolishness of the act of proclaiming the word of our heavenly Victor, are appropriate to the *sui generis* act of God in Christ on the cross.

Preaching (whose form and substance is thought to be foolishness to this present evil age) challenges the plausibility structures of this world and is perfectly suited to the history and experience of the Reformed church.

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⁵⁹ Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 22.

⁶⁰ Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 24.

⁶¹ Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 27.

⁶² Wells, “The Theology of Preaching,” 41.

⁶³ Duane Litfin, “Understanding Your Critics: An Outsider’s Analysis of a Core Criticism of the Church Growth Movement,” *The Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, vol. 6 (1995): 85–99.

⁶⁴ Litfin, “Understanding Your Critics,” 92.

⁶⁵ Litfin, “Understanding Your Critics,” 97.

Servant Word

Text Criticism

by T. David Gordon

Cultures, perhaps like individuals, seek equilibrium. When the cultural left pushes further left, the cultural right tends to push further right. In my own lifetime, I may have observed this several times: mid-century communists probably birthed the John Birch Society, the hippies may have instigated the *National Review*, *Roe v. Wade* likely incubated Theonomy and the Moral Majority, and the woke left *yin* today appears to be provoking its Christian *yang* of biblicism (and revived theonomy).¹ Those who deny certainty provoke hyper-certainty. Whether for this reason or simply because nature abhors a vacuum, it appears to me that there is more discussion of biblical text criticism today than there has been in a half century or more.

As an individual with three graduate degrees in biblical studies, I welcome any intellectual effort directed towards Holy Scripture, especially since the late Peter L. Berger² ruined my sleep by persuading me that, for most people, religion is not an intelligent concern. My Greek students for four decades were fairly tolerant of Greek, and many of them liked it, but even my one-hour lecture on text criticism in second-year Greek appears to have moved them to alternate thoughts of suicide or murder, and I know for whom the latter was directed. For me, therefore, to encounter *any* interest in text-critical questions of the Bible is an oft-sought oasis.

Still, I wonder what is provoking a renewed interest in the once-boring field of text criticism. Thomas Kuhn thought that intellectual revival (especially in the empirical disciplines) was ordinarily provoked either by new tools (electron microscopes, MRI, et al.) or new paradigms. I have not witnessed any new paradigms in biblical text criticism, and few new tools have demonstrated significant promise. At any rate, the editor of *Ordained Servant* is not the only one who believes there appears to be renewed interest in the matter, so I will provide a few thoughts that may assist church officers who wish to address this issue.

By introduction, I would remind church officers of the need for humility regarding the matter. Few of us, even seminary graduates, are trained in text criticism beyond the introductory level. Further, even the late Bruce M. Metzger (1914–2007), who was perhaps the leading American expert in text criticism, expressed caution about the very discipline to which he devoted much of his professional life:

¹ Scott Clark discusses what he calls “QIRC,” which stands for the Quest for Illegitimate Religious Certainty. Readers can search his Heidelbergblog to find his discussion of the general intellectual quest for such certainty. In my lectures, I have frequently argued that the original Edenic temptation was an example of this: “Then you will be like God, knowing” as God does, rather than as a dependent, mutable, and fallible creature does.

² Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Recovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

The range and complexity of textual data are so great that no neatly arranged or mechanically contrived set of rules can be applied with mathematical precision. Each and every variant reading needs to be considered in itself, and not judged merely according to a rule of thumb. . . . Since textual criticism is an art as well as a science, it is inevitable that in some cases different scholars will come to different evaluations of the significance of the evidence.³

Exactly one century before Metzger, Robert Lewis Dabney, at the conclusion of a forty-three page discussion of “Doctrinal Variant Readings” in the Greek testament, also urged humility regarding the matter, saying:

If all the debated readings were surrendered by us, no fact or doctrine of Christianity would thereby be invalidated, and least of all would the doctrine of Christ’s proper divinity be deprived of adequate scriptural support. Hence the interests of orthodoxy are entirely secure from and above the reach of all movements of modern criticism of the text, whether made in a correct or incorrect method, and all such discussions in future are, to the Church, of subordinate importance. Yet they have their interest, and should receive the intelligent watch of the teachers of the Church. Absolute historical certainty of results is not to be expected, since so many of the documents of the primitive Church are gone forever; but probable conclusions are all which are to be expected.⁴

As the English Puritans frequently observed, there should be a direct correlation between light and heat; where we have little of the first, we should have little of the second. This adage probably confounds the American populist, who ordinarily holds the strongest opinions in areas of his least competence. For example, consider how heated some individuals become about a favored translation, individuals who often have studied neither Hebrew nor Greek. I taught Greek for forty-one years, and there is no translation that I have any passion for, though there are many that I appreciate.

In the following, I would like to address several matters: the scale of the question, the “families” of manuscripts, and some counsel to church officers.

The Scale of the Question

The vast majority of variant readings in the original Scriptures have no consequence on interpretation and are merely variants of spelling, such as *elthato* or *eltheto* (ἐλθάτω or ἐλθέτω) in “your kingdom *come*,” in the Lord’s prayer. Such variation in the second

³ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), xxiv, xxviii. Hence *TCGNT*.

⁴ Robert Lewis Dabney, “The Doctrinal Various Readings of the New Testament Greek,” *The Southern Presbyterian Review* xxii:2 (April 1871): 234. For a systematic theologian, Dabney demonstrated a remarkable grasp of text criticism as it had been practiced to his day. His article reviewed, among others, the text-critical work of Richard Bentley (1662–1742), Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693–1754), Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), Johann Jacob Griesbach (1745–1812), Johann Leonhard Hug (1765–1846), Johannes Martin Augustinus Scholz (1794–1852), Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), Constantin von Tischendorf (1815–74), Samuel Prideaux (1813–75), and Henry Alford (1810–71). Unfortunately for Dabney (and for us), another decade passed before Brooke Foss Westcott (1825–1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828–92) published their influential, two-volume *The New Testament in the Original Greek* in 1881.

orist spelling is equivalent to variants between British and American spelling of words such as “colour” or “color.” Robert Lewis Dabney, in an article largely defending the *textus receptus* (RLD followed J. L. Hug in referring to it as κοινή ἔκδοσις), found only six variants that were doctrinally significant, which in total would hardly constitute two sentences. And, as we observed earlier, Dabney’s opinion was that “no fact or doctrine of Christianity would thereby be invalidated,” regardless of how we resolved those disputed texts.

The two significantly lengthy passages that have textual variants are the longer ending of Mark (16:9–20) and the *pericope adulterae* at John 7:53–8:11, neither of which would alter our understanding of what the Scriptures “principally teach,” namely, “what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man” (Westminster Shorter Catechism [WSC] 3). The several things that the longer ending of Mark records in the post-resurrection narrative are affirmed later in other passages:

in my name they will cast out demons;
they will speak in new tongues;
they will pick up serpents with their hands;
and if they drink any deadly poison, it will
not hurt them;
they will lay their hands on the sick, and
they will recover.

Acts 5:16 The people also gathered . . . ,
bringing the sick and those afflicted with
unclean spirits, and they were all healed.
(also 8:7, 19:12)
Pentecost
Acts 28:3, 5 . . . a viper came out because of
the heat and fastened on his hand. . . . He,
however, shook off the creature into the fire
and suffered no harm.

Similarly, there is nothing in the disputed variant in John 7:53–8:11, properly understood, that would add anything to what is taught elsewhere. Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus did not encourage moral relativism but especially told the woman, “from now on, *sin no more*” (emphasis added). Nor did he, as people often think, use the expression “cast the first stone” metaphorically to mean something like “he who is without sin may evaluate life ethically.” Adultery was a capital crime in the Mosaic law, and Jesus knew that those who would have her stoned were probably guilty of similar sins themselves (and may have written their offenses on the ground) and were therefore precluded, by the Mosaic law, from participating in the trial. Stoning a person to death is not the same as respectfully differing on an ethical question.

Even in these two lengthiest variants in the Greek New Testament, nothing is added to or deleted from the teaching of the New Testament by including or excluding either passage (properly understood). “What man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man” (WSC 3) is unscathed by the inclusion or exclusion of either variant. In my judgment, little is at stake in resolving the text-critical issues. However, out of our high regard for God’s Word, we officers—especially pastors—do our “due diligence,” as it were, and attempt, whenever variants might influence interpretation, to do our best to resolve them.

Received Text v. Majority Text v. Eclectic/Critical Text: A Little History

Most church officers know what many laypeople have never even thought about: We do not have the original manuscripts of any part of the Bible. What we have is thousands (including the fragmentary evidence, about seven thousand) of manuscripts that contain all or portions of the Greek New Testament. Unsurprisingly, no two of those hand-copied

manuscripts is identical to another; on the other hand, there are not seven thousand different variants for each variation. There is widespread agreement among students of the Greek New Testament that there are three (possibly four) different “families” of textual variations. Within these families (Byzantine, Western, Alexandrian, and some recognize a Caesarean), most of the readings are the same. In any given passage, then, it is rare to have more than two or three minor variants, though there may well be thousands of particular manuscripts that represent one or another of the variants.

When people undertake a translation, they must first decide whether to regard some family variants to be the default or not. Do the translators work from representative manuscripts of the Byzantine family of texts, the Western texts, or the Alexandrian texts (or from an eclectic/critical text)? Obviously, a translation committee cannot re-argue such a basic matter every day; to the contrary, most translation committees have made their decision beforehand and agree to work one way or another, and their translations later reflect that choice. Here are the three options ordinarily considered.

The Received Text (*Textus Receptus*)

Desiderius Erasmus (1467?–1536) of Rotterdam published his *magnum opus* (1516), the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament (in contrast to handwritten manuscripts). He consulted Lorenzo Valla’s annotations on the New Testament, and he also consulted the biblical commentaries of the Church Fathers and published four editions of his Greek New Testament.⁵ Erasmus was a skilled and dedicated Renaissance humanist, but he had very few manuscripts to work from, as Bruce Metzger said,

For the book of Revelation he had but one manuscript, dating from the twelfth century, which he had borrowed from his friend Reuchlin. As it happened, this copy lacked the final leaf, which had contained the last six verses of the book. For these verses Erasmus depended upon Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, translating this version into Greek.⁶

Several decades later, Robert Estienne (*Stephanus*) published editions of the Greek text in 1546, 1549, 1550, and 1551, revising the earlier edition of Erasmus, which had been printed from 1516–1535. Stephanus used fourteen other Greek Byzantine manuscripts along with the Complutensian Polyglot in his 1550 edition, and even two other Alexandrian Codices, which were given/loaned to him by Italian friends. These Byzantine manuscripts, not surprisingly, concurred with the edition of Erasmus, and the Stephanus edition is nearly identical to that of Erasmus. These printed manuscripts became the basis of nearly all of the European translations of the Reformation era (and the immediate post-Reformation, with such as the King James Version).

Not too much later, The Elziver brothers (Leiden, 1633) printed their second edition of a Greek text, nearly identical to the texts of Erasmus and Stephanus, and the preface contained this: “*Textum ergo habes nunc ab omnibus receptum in quo nihil immutatum*

⁵ The primary manuscript he worked from, *Codex Basiliensis* A. N. IV. 1, known as *Minuscule 2*, resides today at the University of Basel.

⁶ Metzger, *TCGNT*, xxi.

aut corruptum damus” (Therefore you now have the text received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted). From this preface, the expression “textus receptus” came, and from the Elziver brothers (borrowing nearly entirely the work of Erasmus and Stephanus) came the Greek text used for nearly all translations until the nineteenth century.

A small misnomer exists here, because, in fact, the so-called “received text” is no longer “received” by all individuals or traditions as sacrosanct; it ordinarily refers to the Stephanus/Erasmus text, which, we all know, was not based on a complete Greek manuscript. The concept of a “received text,” however, is somewhat commendable, because, regarding textual matters, it is similar to the “Vincentian canon” (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*, “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all”). Perhaps this is what Robert Lewis Dabney meant when he said:

Let it be that the received text has usurped the position by accident, or been assigned to it by providence, the all-important fact is, that it holds it. It is far better for the interests of truth, that Christendom should recognize, as a commonly received Bible, a less accurate text, than that it should recognize none.⁷

To be sure, not every individual would agree with Dabney that a less-accurate text, approved by consensus, would be preferable to a more-accurate text, but his point is at least judicious. What should not be overlooked, however, is that Erasmus’s text actually was an eclectic/critical text, even though he had many fewer manuscripts to work from than others (later) did.

The “Majority Text”

The Majority Text avoids the obvious problem that the Textus Receptus has, that Erasmus conceded that a portion of Revelation was missing from his primary manuscript, and he provided his own free translation from the Latin Vulgate. Majority Text advocates are not enslaved (or even beholden) to the Erasmus text. They do, however, show great deference to the “majority” of manuscripts, and the majority of manuscripts available today are from the Byzantine tradition. Most of those manuscripts are fairly late; manuscripts degrade over time, and, of course, we have more of the more-recent manuscripts than we do of the less-recent manuscripts.

Some (not all) advocates of the Majority Text argue providentially, that these are the manuscripts preserved in greater number than other types of text, and they were in fact the manuscript tradition from which the first Protestant translations were made (Dabney’s “ecclesiastical” argument, mentioned earlier). Other advocates argue empirically that the “majority” of available manuscripts today happen to be Byzantine.⁸

⁷ Robert Lewis Dabney, *Doctrinal Various Readings*, 199.

⁸ I honestly do not know what would happen to this view if, say, in a calendar year, throughout the globe, archaeologists found hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Alexandrian manuscripts. Would Majority Text advocates propose new translations based on the new majority? One advantage of the eclectic/critical theory is that it welcomes new manuscript discoveries and need not abandon its principles upon their discovery. By any orthodox theory of divine providence, it did not cease in the early sixteenth century.

Eclectic/Critical Text

Many (probably most) academic scholars of the Bible adopt what is called an “eclectic” or “critical” text, basing their translations on a consultation of all the available manuscripts (including early versions and patristic sources), attempting to account for the variants. What kinds of mistakes did scribes typically make? What “families” of texts appear to be more reliable than others? Which variants appear in several “families” of texts? Printed editions of the Greek New Testament by the major Bible societies in the United States and Germany contain marginal information about the alternative readings and the manuscripts in which they are found, so that translators may make their own decision, or at least understand why the translators made theirs.

Advocates of the eclectic/critical approach may (or may not) have their own version of a providential argument, to wit: in God’s infallible providence, these are the kinds of errors that fallible humans make, and if God’s providence preserves some very ancient manuscripts, in which there is a lesser likelihood of numerous generations of copying errors, we should avail ourselves of that providential reality. Advocates of this approach make the same kinds of assessments of biblical manuscripts that students of the Greek classical literature make of Aristotle or Plato.

Advocates of the eclectic/critical approach also recall that the Received Text and the Majority Text are themselves eclectic/critical; Erasmus consulted the Vulgate (and himself, when he freely translated the Latin into Greek at the end of Revelation), and Stephanus consulted over a dozen Greek texts. Therefore, the difference in the three approaches is actually on a spectrum: The Received Text tradition consults very few manuscripts (possibly only one); The Majority Text (by definition) consults many texts (with a tendency to prefer the Byzantine manuscripts, since they are more numerous than the Western or Alexandrian manuscripts), and the Eclectic/Critical text consults any text it can find (as I put it: I consult any manuscript God’s providence makes available).

Readers of *Ordained Servant* will be interested in knowing how or whether our confessional standards address the matter, and especially the first portion of Confession of Faith 1:8, which reads:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them. (parentheses theirs)

Some portions of this are quite straightforward, especially the result clause at the end, “so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.” This clause precludes the possibility of any given translation of the Bible having privileged status and was likely an implicit denial of the Roman Catholic Church’s adoption of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate as its authoritative Bible. Two other parts of the Confession’s statement require a little more work to determine their meaning: “singular” and “kept pure.”

“*Singular* care and providence” (emphasis added) is one of several quaint expressions found in the Westminster documents, and its quaintness assists in making it memorable.

Consulting *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, one finds a movement from the absolute to the comparative sense of “singular.” The absolute definitions of the adjective employ the term in an almost-mathematical sense: “Alone; solitary. One only; one and no more; single. Exclusive, sole. Forming the only one of the kind; unique. Separate; individual; single.” Note, then, the more-comparative uses:

Separate from others by reason of superiority or pre-eminence. Above the ordinary in amount, extent, worth, or value; special (“Common from 1550–1650, now rare”). Remarkable, extraordinary, unusual, uncommon. Hence rare, precious. Especially, particularly.

Westminster certainly did not employ “singular” in the absolute sense, because they affirmed at Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 5:1 God’s ordering of all things: “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern *all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least*, by his most wise and holy providence . . .” (emphasis added). We may safely assume that the Assembly used the term in its comparative sense of “special, extraordinary, unusual, uncommon.”

Presumably, for instance, God’s providence also superintended the preservation of the writings of Plato and Aristotle, but the manuscript evidence for their writings is extremely scant, compared to the manuscript evidence for biblical texts. In the 1930 Loeb edition of Plato’s *Republic*, for instance, edited by Jeffrey Henderson, he lists only thirteen manuscripts available. Similarly, in Harris Rackham’s 1926 introduction to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in the Loeb series, he lists only six manuscripts and says, “Other mss. have been collated by other scholars, but *none has any authority*. . . . Another witness, ranking *in importance next to the best mss.*, is the thirteenth-century Latin translation attributed to William of Moerbeke” (emphasis added).⁹ Rackham had only two reliable Greek manuscripts for the *Ethics*, and his next-most-reliable witness was a thirteenth-century *Latin* text. The Assembly would not have known of how great the discrepancy was between manuscript evidence for the Bible compared to other ancient works, but they correctly knew God had a special/singular interest in the Scriptures, an interest so “singular” that we now know that the Assembly underestimated how “singular” God’s providence for the Scriptures was.

The Assembly’s “kept pure in all ages” is also mildly challenging to interpret. *OED* expends three pages (861–63) to list the varying uses of “pure.” To begin, we may rule out what the Assembly did *not* mean: They did not mean that there were no spelling, punctuation, accenting, or simple copying errors in the manuscripts of the Bible. Many (if not all) members of the Assembly would have been aware of the previous century’s text-critical activity, and they would have been aware of the publication of *The Complutensian Polyglot* in 1517. They probably intended one or more of these *OED* usages:

not having in or upon it, anything that defiles, corrupts, or impairs . . . Intact, unbroken, perfect, entire . . . without foreign or extraneous admixture; free from

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), xxvi.

anything not properly pertaining to it . . . free from corruption or defilement . . . the genuine article, the real thing.

The Assembly probably meant that, despite the routine copying errors, nothing of substance has been lost or added to the biblical manuscripts. Some manuscripts contain only the gospels, and others contain only the epistles, but all sixty-six canonical books are there, in multiple copies, without “corruption or defilement” as to their substance.

Especially pertinent to our conversation is that the Assembly’s language was about the “Scriptures” in their entirety, as attested by several/many manuscripts; the Assembly did not refer to or endorse any particular *manuscript* (or group of manuscripts) of the Scriptures. They referred to “the Old Testament in Hebrew” and “the New Testament in Greek” but not to any specific manuscript of either. They made no claim similar to that later made by Joseph Smith, that he had the actual manuscripts of divine revelation, akin to the tablets Moses brought from the mountain at Sinai.

My preference for the Eclectic/Critical text is motivated by two things: First, since I believe God’s providence orders “all things,” said providence somehow includes the variety we find in different manuscripts (or in different manuscript traditions). Second, the Eclectic text is inclusive; the Textus Receptus and Majority Text are exclusive. An individual such as myself, working from an eclectic text (whether United Bible Society 4 or Nestle Aland 28), could, in each case, decide that the TR or MT is the preferred reading. Indeed, these two major eclectic texts print all of the significant (and some of the insignificant) variants in the margins. By contrast, one who is committed to the TR or even the MT is committed thereby to blinding his vision from even considering some of the oldest extant manuscripts available to us. I at least have all fifty-two cards on the table, even if I only or ordinarily selected the Byzantine cards. The alternative approaches remove some cards from the deck (a deck, I remind, that is here due to God’s “singular care and providence”).

Counsel to Church Officers

Whichever translation of whichever text is read from the pulpit or the pew, a conscientious reader will occasionally correct the translation. Even if we adopt/employ the “right” text (or group of texts), no one suggests that a given *translation* is inerrant (though some defenders of the Authorized Version [KJV] come very close to affirming such). Whichever English translation we adopt (on whatever grounds), there will be occasions where we will disagree with it. I use the ESV in the pulpit, but there are times where I correct it. Its translation of Romans 12:2 reads, “. . . that *by testing you may discern* what is the will of God . . .” (emphasis added), which is an ungainly mouthful; the RSV is simply (and correctly), “. . . that *you may prove* what is the will of God . . .” (emphasis added), which is a perfectly good way of translating the infinitive δοκιμάζειν (*dokimazein*).

As another example, Westminster questionably cited John 5:39 on two occasions. At WCF 1:8, they referred to “the people,” who “are *commanded*, in the fear of God, to read and search them (the Scriptures)” (emphasis added), and again at Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 156, which says, “all sorts of people are *bound* to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy Scriptures are to be translated

out of the original into vulgar languages” (emphasis added). In each case, Westminster proof-texted the KJV (based on the Textus Receptus) of John 5:39: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life . . .”. Every first-year Greek student, however, knows that the present active indicative and the present active imperative of the second person plural is spelled in identical fashion: ἐραυνᾶτε (*eraunate*). It is, of course, textually and grammatically possible that the verb is an imperative; it is equally possible, however, that the verb is a mere indicative, meaning something like, “although you search the Scriptures that testify about me, you refuse to come to me,” an irony very characteristic of John’s Gospel. The “you” in the passage is plural, retained nicely by the KJV “ye,” but Westminster understands the passage to teach that the “people,” *individually* understood, are required to read the Scriptures privately and in their families, which would have been impossible prior to the invention of the printing press and is impossible still today among the many smaller indigenous groups who are not literate or have no Bible in their language. So, even though the KJV used the “right” text, and Westminster employed the “right” translation of the “right” text, Westminster erred in both of its citations of the text.¹⁰

Ministers (and other interpreters) should be very cautious about making homiletical mountains out of text-critical molehills. Jesus had little good to say about religious leaders who abused their authority, especially when, in doing so, they made life difficult for those they ought to have served: “The scribes and the Pharisees . . . tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (Matt. 23:2–4). A robust understanding of divine providence includes the reality that we have more evidence for some ideas than we do for others, and there is nothing wrong with saying about some matters, “We do not have a compelling case.”

Pastors and elders of growing congregations face the occasional challenge of purchasing more hymnals or more pew Bibles: Should we purchase fifty more of what we now have, or should we purchase one hundred of an alternate? Sometimes, the question is fairly easily answered, because the session may have already noticed defects in the current hymnals or pew Bibles for some time. The 1990 *The Revised Trinity Hymnal*, for instance, was superior, overall, to the one it replaced; many tunes were set in a lower key signature, to make them easier to sing, thus encouraging congregational singing. Similarly, both the notes and lyrics were printed in a larger, more-legible font. I would probably be far less likely to adopt a new pew Bible, unless it were one known to be more readable (NKJV, NASB, and several other good, accurate translations are extremely difficult to read aloud). Considering the expense involved in making such a switch, in

¹⁰ I have always commended private and family reading of the Scriptures, because I believe there are many benefits to doing so. There is an important difference, however, between commending and commanding. Westminster commanded what is merely commendable and, in this case, commanded something that would have been impossible to have fulfilled for three-quarters of the church’s history (prior to the printing press). In defense of the Westminster Assembly, I should remind that a smaller sub-committee provided the proof-texts, and that, ordinarily, they did very fine work; and the proof-texts were not regarded as having any binding authority on anyone, lay or ordained, but were designed for whatever assistance might be derived therefrom. In these two particular cases, however, the Assembly did adopt, in the text of the Confession and Larger Catechism, language that imposed a binding duty where they did not have biblical authority to do so. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church revised the proof texts for the Confession and Catechisms (Confession of Faith, 1956; Shorter Catechism, 1978; Larger Catechism, 2001; all together in 2005).

most circumstances it would be better for the minister simply to “correct” the version as part of the sermon, as I routinely do if discussing (for example) the ESV rendering of Romans 12:2 (see above). Contemporary versions based on an eclectic text (e.g., NIV, ESV) routinely have marginal notes explaining the differences in the manuscripts, and a thoughtful expositor could easily give his reasons for adopting the alternate in the sermon. Unfortunately, the alternative is not true; the translations based on the Textus Receptus (KJV, NKJV) will not ordinarily include the alternative readings (and the Majority Text has not yet been entirely translated into English).

Robert Lewis Dabney was neither the first nor the last to desire some common text or translation that would foster and preserve church unity, and such a desire is surely commendable. Church officers, therefore, should be alert to whether their denomination or denominational agencies (such as Great Commissions Publications for the OPC and PCA) employ a given translation for their publications. In most circumstances, church unity would be fostered by conforming to such practices at the local level.

We face an irony here, as we often do in a world precariously poised between divine grace and divine judgment: *deference* for the commonly known/received manuscript of the sixteenth century (the Textus Receptus), on the ground that it was the common version of the churches (an aspect of Dabney’s argument), has the effect of demonstrating a *lack of deference* for the commonly known or received manuscript tradition in the twenty-first century (the Eclectic text). Respect for the entire church—both then and now—might motivate us to prefer the Eclectic text, which always includes the Byzantine readings of the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text.

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Servant Standards

Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter VI Censure and Restoration

A. Censure

1. In judicial discipline there are five degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. Censures shall be pronounced in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an act of the whole church, by the moderator on behalf of the trial judicatory.

Comment: Now we come in the BD to what is to be done in the case(s) of a party that has pled or been adjudged guilty at trial, has come as his own accuser, or is subject to the summary judgment described in BD 3.6. Different books of church order designate censures in various ways. The OPC designates five censures—admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. These censures, whether pronounced by a session or presbytery, are pronounced in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, in keeping with Matthew 16 and 18. All valid church power is only and entirely a ministerial and declarative act (FG 3.3), based on the Lordship of Christ, and of his calling and committing such power to ministers and elders in the joint governance of the church. The church has no inherent or unqualified power; it has only the power that Christ has given it (which is moral and suasive, not legal and coercive). This power is to be exercised in the way that Christ calls for it to be exercised as the one who is gentle and lowly in dealing with sinners, firm and decisive in dealing with sin.

It should also be noted that this act is an act of the whole church. It is not merely an act of a local session or a particular presbytery. It is pronounced as an act of the whole church, either because it was not appealed, or, if appealed, it was upheld as a censure on appeal. To be sure, censures are always first proposed and reported to the guilty party. This gives an opportunity for such a party to appeal the proposed censure (as well as the verdict, if he chooses). If the censure is overturned or modified, what was proposed as an act of the whole church is not such an act; if overturned, this is not the position of the whole church, or if modified, some lesser censure is the position of the whole church. In this way, then, every censure, either because not appealed or upheld on appeal, is properly said to be a censure of the whole church. It ought to be regarded by the whole church as such (by other sessions and presbyteries) and by those churches with which the OPC enjoys fraternal ecclesiastical relationships.

The first two censures conclude a case, i.e., if a judicatory admonishes or rebukes a guilty party, no further censure may be had without further judicial process. For example,

if someone comes before a judicatory as his own accuser, and, based on that, a session determines to propose a censure of rebuke, that censure, when pronounced, concludes the case. The judicatory cannot proceed to suspension or excommunication after the censures of admonition, rebuke, or definite suspension without further judicial process. Some churches regard these lesser censures as graduated, so that they begin with admonition/rebuke (or their equivalent in that church order) and proceed, without further process, to more serious censures if those lesser censures are deemed insufficient or ineffective for the case. This is not the way that we have agreed together, which is what the Book of Church Order is, to operate when proposing and pronouncing censures.

Rather, if someone is rebuked for sin X in keeping with the OPC BD, then the judicatory should be as sure as it can be that he is repentant of the particular sin, since that rebuke concludes the case, and any further censure will require some sort of further judicial process (trial or coming as one's own accuser). This is why judicatories that are uncertain, especially in the cases of more serious sin, of the repentance of a censurable party might wish to consider indefinite suspension, which is generally the proper censure in cases in which the judicatory either sees clear impenitence or remains unsure about clear repentance.

2. If a person who has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present himself for censure at the time appointed, the trial judicatory shall cite him to appear at another time. If he does not appear after this citation, the censure shall be pronounced in his absence.

Comment: Similar to proceeding with judicial process in the case of someone who refuses to appear for trial, a judicatory may also proceed to censure in the case of one who fails, or refuses, to appear to hear his censure pronounced. The judicatory is to follow this procedure: cite the person adjudged guilty to present himself for censure at the time appointed; if he refuses or fails to appear at the appointed time, cite him to appear again at another time. If the party does not appear when cited a second time, the judicatory should proceed and pronounce the censure in his absence.

B. Degrees of Censure

1. Admonition

Admonition consists in tenderly and solemnly confronting the offender with his sin, warning him of his danger, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Comment: This is the lowest degree censure. As discussed above, it concludes a case. An admonition seems most fitting when someone has come as his own accuser, is clearly penitent, and the judicatory wishes to speak firmly yet gently to the penitent sinner. The sinner is to be tenderly and solemnly (this is a judicial censure, after all) confronted with the particular sin(s), warned of the danger in living and walking this way (of impenitence and repeat offense), and exhorted to repent (repentance is something that grows; true repentance does not repudiate itself on subsequent reflection but intensifies, seeing the sin as more and more heinous) and to walk with Christ with greater faithfulness.

2. Rebuke

Rebuke is a form of censure more severe than admonition. It consists in setting forth the serious character of the offense, reproving the offender, and exhorting him to repentance and to more perfect fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Comment: Rebuke is more severe than admonition, though it too, as noted above, concludes a case. It sets forth in its expression to the guilty party the serious character of the offense, confronting him with the heinousness of the sin and reproving/rebuking the offender. The offender is to be further exhorted to repentance (perhaps this is a sin for which he came as his own accuser but is deemed more serious, or the circumstances make it such, as the sin in view for admonition) and to a fuller and more mature faithfulness with respect to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Suspension

a. Suspension is a form of censure by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church, of office, or of both. It may be for a definite or an indefinite time. Suspension of an officer from the privileges of membership shall always be accompanied by suspension from office, but the latter does not necessarily involve the former.

b. An officer or other member of the church, while under suspension, shall be the object of deep solicitude and earnest dealing to the end that he may be restored. When the judicatory which pronounced the censure is satisfied of the penitence of the offender, or when the time of suspension has expired, the censure shall be removed and the offender shall be restored. This restoration shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition. Restoration to the privileges of membership may take place without restoration to those of office.

c. When a minister has been indefinitely suspended, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.

Comment: Whereas admonition and rebuke conclude a case—nothing further can be done in such cases without further trial or the equivalent—suspension may or may not do so. In the case of a definite suspension, no additional censure may be added without further trial (or coming as one's own accuser). This is why when there is not repentance or repentance is unclear (perhaps requiring a better manifestation), indefinite suspension is customarily what the judicatory adopts; otherwise, the judicatory, in cases of definite suspension, will have to engage in further trial to increase censure. In any and all cases, suspension (definite and indefinite) involves a higher degree of censure than admonition or rebuke: when suspended one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church, or of office in the church, or both.

Suspension from the privileges of membership would mean that during the time of suspension—whether for a definite period, say six months, or indefinitely, until one clearly repents—the member cannot partake of the Lord's Supper, vote in congregational meetings, teach Sunday School, or engage in anything that requires active membership in the local church. They may certainly attend church and should be encouraged to do so, even the local church that has suspended them, if they properly behave themselves and are not a threat to any of the members of the local church. There are circumstances that warrant their attending another church (such as the presence of parties in their home church that they have abused or otherwise sinned against in a threatening way) or not attending at all if they are determined to disrupt the public worship of the church (sometimes people become disruptive who are under suspension or have been

excommunicated, and they must not be allowed to disturb other worshippers). Suspension for a definite time may be the censure for someone who has committed a grave sin but appears repentant, and the session thinks that a consequence for sin greater than rebuke is needed. Suspension from office means that the one suspended neither possesses the privileges nor performs the duties of office during the time of his suspension.

The last sentence of 3.a. is quite important. One who is an officer may never be suspended from membership without first being suspended from office. In other words, the membership of an officer should never be touched without first touching his office-bearing. So, if an officer is to be suspended definitely or indefinitely from membership, he must first be suspended correspondingly from office. It is the case that proper censure in judicatories sometimes misfires at this point. For instance, a minister may commit a sin or sins deemed worthy of censure, but the presbytery only touches his office (by way of suspension or deposition), failing to touch his membership. The same may happen at the sessional level with the elder or deacon. This is particularly egregious when the sin committed would, in the case of a member, have received, at least, the censure of suspension from membership.

An officer should not have only his office touched and not his membership in cases in which the membership of the member would have resulted in censures like suspension from the privileges of membership. Suspension or removal from office may involve not touching the officer's church membership when the reason for such has to do strictly with his performance of office (perhaps he departs from the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the church in a way that unfits him for office, but he refuses to leave office). An officer being disciplined, though, for something that would result in censure for the member should be censured in both his office and his membership. Otherwise, it may appear to the membership that office-bearing inures one from proper discipline as a member, and this must not be the case. Officers must be disciplined in both their office and their membership when such is warranted.

When an officer, or member, is under suspension, he shall be "the object of deep solicitude and earnest dealing" with the goal of full restoration to office and/or membership. This BD directive means not only that the judicatory should be much in prayer for the one suspended from office or membership, seeking to deal sincerely with him, urging repentance and hoping for restoration, but that the membership of the broader church, as appropriate, should likewise pray for and labor with the suspended party as circumstances allow with a view to his restoration. This next clause is crucial: "when the trial judicatory which pronounced the censure is satisfied of the penitence of the offender," in the case of indefinite suspension, "the censure shall be removed, and the offender shall be restored." It is not in the discretion of the offender, or even of those against whom he has sinned, that the determination of his penitence resides; it is in the determination of the judicatory that pronounced the censure.

Restoration both to membership and to office is to take place accompanied by a solemn admonition. This admonition is along the lines of the admonition that forms the lowest degree of censure, in which the now penitent sinner is to be exhorted to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ. Such restoration takes place, in the case of definite suspension, at the end of the time determined for such, even as it does for indefinite suspension, upon the determination of the trial judicatory that repentance has occurred. One may, of course, be restored to the privileges of membership without being restored to

the privileges of office, although the reverse is never the case. Whenever a minister is indefinitely suspended from office, his presbytery, as the judicatory that took such action, shall notify all the presbyteries of the OPC of its action in thus censuring one of its ministerial members.

4. Deposition

a. Deposition is a form of censure more severe than suspension. It consists in a solemn declaration by the trial judicatory that the offender is no longer an officer in the church.

b. When a minister is deposed from his office, the presbytery shall erase his name from the roll of the ministerial members of the presbytery and dismiss him to a particular church or enroll him as a member of the regional church without membership in a particular church.

c. Deposition of a pastor or his suspension for an indefinite time involves the dissolution of the pastoral tie. The sentence of deposition or suspension shall be read before the congregation, and the pulpit shall be declared vacant. In case of suspension for a definite period the presbytery, after giving the session an opportunity to be heard, shall decide whether the pastoral relation shall be dissolved.

d. When a minister has been deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.

Comment: Deposition is the action that a session takes to remove one of its local officers (deacon or ruling elder) or that a presbytery takes to remove one of its ministerial members. This is a form of censure more severe than suspension, because it involves the complete removal from office of one who is a minister, ruling elder, or deacon. It occurs upon the conclusion of a judicatory that the officer should no longer hold church office because of some error in doctrine or sin in life that merits removal from office. The judicatory coming to such a determination solemnly declares that the guilty party is no longer an officer in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When a minister is thus deposed, or removed, from his office, the presbytery of which he has been a ministerial member shall erase his name from its roll of ministerial members. When his name is removed from that roll, it is to be placed on some other: either the roll of some particular church, in that or another presbytery, or on the roll of the regional church without membership in a particular church; in either case, it should be with the agreement of all the proper parties. The deposition, or indefinite suspension, of a minister who is pastor of a particular church, involves the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

When a pastor is deposed or indefinitely suspended, the sentence of such shall be read before the congregation, and the pulpit shall be declared vacant. If the judicial censure of a pastor is definite suspension, the presbytery, after giving the session an opportunity to be heard in the matter, shall determine whether the pastoral relation shall be dissolved. When a minister is deposed, as when he is indefinitely suspended, the clerk of the judicatory taking such action shall immediately notify all the other presbyteries of the OPC.

5. Excommunication

Excommunication is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration by an

ecclesiastical judicatory that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ.

Comment: Excommunication is the most severe form of censure available to the church. Even as a suspension from all the privileges of membership entails that one may not receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, vote in congregational meetings, etc., so excommunication involves the extension of such a censure, rendering what was definite or indefinite, in the case of suspension, permanent in the case of excommunication. This does not mean that one cannot repent and be restored to full communion in the church. This, in fact, is the goal and desire of excommunication, part of which involves the reclamation of the offender (as well as the promotion of the glory of Christ and the purity of the church).

It does mean that one is outside the visible church, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, until the church readmits one into its communion. The church is to resort to this censure only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence, suggesting that it is not the first censure to be resorted to, even in the cases of serious sin; rather, a record of impenitence should be in view for the one to be excommunicated. This is because the judicatory, in such cases, solemnly declares that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ, the most fearful declaration that can be made on this earth, even more so than any declaration of a civil court.

C. Procedural Considerations

1. Pronouncement of Censure

The indefinite suspension, deposition, or excommunication of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which the officer holds office, or in which the member holds membership. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God that he may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

Comment: If a member or an officer is indefinitely suspended, an officer deposed, or a member excommunicated, such censure(s) shall be announced to the church in which the officer holds office or in which the member holds membership. This assumes, it should be noted, that all appeals have been exhausted or not resorted to, as in all cases of proposed censures. The relevant bodies should have this information both for the purpose of knowing the status of such parties (and to know how to treat them as those under such censure—solicitously and earnestly, laboring with and for them for their restoration) and especially for the purpose of knowing how to pray for them. Such announcements of censure should always be accompanied by prayer, asking God to graciously use the discipline for the three-fold purpose of discipline: the restoration of the offender, the purity and building up of the church, and the glory of Christ.

2. Review of Suspension

a. In case of indefinite suspension, the judicatory of original jurisdiction shall review the suspension, not later than twelve months after imposition of censure, to determine whether or not the offender has shown repentance and may be restored.

b. When, in its review of suspension, the judicatory of original jurisdiction is not satisfied that the offender has shown repentance, the judicatory shall determine whether

the suspension should be continued or increased to deposition or to excommunication or to both.

c. Continued suspension for an indefinite time shall be reviewed again within twelve months of the conclusion of the previous review.

Comment: In the case of indefinite suspension, there shall be a review by the judicatory of original jurisdiction of the censure no later than a year after its imposition. Review may take place any time short of a year (at say, three, six, or ninth months), but it must take place at a year if such suspension is still in place. The review shall be to determine the spiritual state of the one under suspension, particularly to ascertain whether or not the offender has shown repentance and may be restored. If, upon review, whether at a set time or because the offended party has made their penitence clear, the judicatory judges that repentance has occurred, the judicatory shall solemnly restore from suspension such a one to membership or office or both.

When, on the other hand, in its review of suspension, the judicatory of original jurisdiction is not satisfied that the offender has shown repentance, the judicatory shall determine whether to continue the censure of suspension from office or membership, or to increase the censure to deposition or to excommunication, or to both, as the cases may suggest or warrant. The point here is that with indefinite suspension it remains in the discretion of the judicatory as to whether the suspended party is repentant and whether or not they should be restored to all the privileges of office or membership. If the suspension is continued and not increased to excommunication or to deposition or to both, another review shall be held no later than twelve months after the last review.

3. Increase of Censure

a. No further trial is necessary to increase the censure of indefinite suspension from office to deposition or the censure of indefinite suspension from the privileges of church membership to excommunication.

b. If increase of censure is imposed, without further trial, it shall be the duty of the judicatory so acting to record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. The judgment to increase censure shall in any case be subject to appeal.

Comment: If the judicatory of original jurisdiction, having determined that the indefinitely suspended member remains impenitent, desires to increase the censure of indefinite suspension from the privileges of church membership to excommunication, it may do so without further trial. Further trial is also not necessary to increase censure in the case of the officer: the judicatory may go from indefinite suspension from office to deposition from office if and when it judges that to be appropriate. If the judicatory increases censure under this rubric (without further trial), it shall be the duty of the judicatory to record the circumstances of such increase in its minutes. In any and all cases, the judgment of the judicatory to increase censure shall be subject to appeal.

D. Restoration

1. An officer deposed because of a commonly known offense shall be restored only after the judicatory has assured itself that the restoration will not be attended by injury to the cause of the gospel.

Comment: When an officer is deposed because of scandalous sin (as put here, a commonly known offense), he shall be restored only after a judicatory contemplating such has assured itself that his restoration will not also involve injury to the cause of the gospel. Such restoration is in the sole discretion of the judicatory contemplating such, not that of the formerly deposed or his friends. The judicatory must assure itself that any such restoration would not in any way harm the cause of the gospel. When such a determination is made, usually only after the passage of some time, it is often made by a judicatory in a location away from the place of the original offense. This is because, at least in part, it is often quite difficult to restore an officer, even when such may be thought proper, in the place where his offense occurred. Thus, restoration often occurs away from the time and space of the offense(s) that prompted removal from office. In any and all such cases, the judicatory should be quite certain of what it proposes to do and should do so only with great and evident support for the restoration of the one earlier deposed.

2. An officer who has been deposed cannot resume his former office without again being ordained.

Comment: When the restoration of a deposed officer is contemplated, such resumption of his former office can take place only by his being once again ordained, as if he had never before been ordained. There is no way to restore him after the fashion of an excommunicant, who upon manifest repentance is restored to all the privileges of membership; rather, the prospective officer who is to be restored must go through the process of ordination again, according to the discretion of the judicatory that contemplates his resuming his former office.

3. Restoration shall always be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his redeeming grace.

[Suggested forms to use for the public imposition and removal of censures can be found on pages 176-80.]

Comment: Restoration to membership in Christ's church, as well as to church office, is always to be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his great and matchless redeeming grace. It is grace and grace alone that fits for membership and for office. It is grace alone that permits us to continue in either or both, and it is only the grace of God that restores us to such after a fall. All glory be to God alone. We are also here directed to the forms at the back of the book that may be used in imposing and removing ecclesiastical censures.

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Servant Work

Discouragement and the Ruling Elder

Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 7

By An Older Elder

Dear James,

Thank you for sending that very thoughtful get-well card a couple weeks ago and for the letter that I just received this morning. To answer your question, I feel a bit better. My doctor saw something when examining me and wants to run a few more tests. Doctors love their tests. But then, I suppose, so does our Lord. The difference is that we already know the outcome of God's testing (James 1:3).

If I am not mistaken (forgive me if I am wrong), I picked up just a small note of discouragement in your comments about a certain irregularly attending member. You asked me how to handle that situation, and I can tell it is weighing on your mind. I will give some advice. But first, if you do not mind, I would like to say a few words in general about a very important subject; namely, *discouragement and the calling of a ruling elder*. While much has been written, and rightly so, on the discouragements of pastoral ministry, not as much has been said on dealing with the heavy heart of a ruling elder.

If you are a sufficiently sensitive ruling elder, and I know that you are, you will likely encounter episodes of a *heavy, discouraged heart*. Hard, dry sponges are not heavy, and neither are hard, dry hearts. But a soft and tender heart, the type of heart you need for this work, will absorb many sorrows and disappointments. Do not be surprised by this. I will share with you, from my own experience, some of the common causes and some helps.

One of the most common causes for discouragement I have found among ruling elders is simply the labor involved. Shepherding can be mentally and spiritually exhausting. You need to pay attention to this for yourself and for others. We often document the vacation time of our pastors. We almost never do for our elders. I believe that is a mistake. Ask about this at your session meetings! I have known hard-working elders who easily put in 40-60 hours a week at their job, and then add to this the church meetings, visiting, teaching, and checking in that many elders do. In Nehemiah we read that "the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing" (Neh. 4:10). Your strength may fail too. If you do not build in breaks, you will quickly get exhausted and discouraged. Remember that our gracious and wise Father put into the very fabric of creation an obligation to rest (Gen. 2:2).

Another cause of discouragement in the work of the ruling elder, one which is rarely ever discussed I am sorry to say, is the problem of loneliness. This may not seem like a real danger right now, but trust me James, *elder work can be lonely work*. A ruling elder may have a busy job, a bustling home, a growing church, and a full session, but still find himself feeling like a lonely man. I have been there. And loneliness is often the door through which discouragement comes. But our Lord does not want us to be lonely. His words in Genesis 2:18 are still true, "It is not good that the man should be alone." As

such, he will hear the cries of a lonely heart, “turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely . . .” (Ps. 25:16). Remember we serve the one who said himself, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

Finally, I will share just one last cause of discouragement in the life of the ruling elder, and I suppose this one is the most common of all, though we have the least reason for it. Our discouragement sometimes arises from the fact that we have *lost sight of God’s love for us in Christ*. We lose sight of his love. Nothing will drain the life out of your work faster than forgetting the love of God. Whenever I found discouragement rising in my heart, I knew I needed a fresh reminder of him “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Remember, as Cowper put it so well, that “behind a frowning Providence, he hides a smiling face.” Jonathan Edwards had a great resolution regarding the love of God which every discouraged ruling elder should consider: “Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.”¹

So much, for now, about my thoughts on discouragement. Now about this inconsistent member. I think your best approach, after prayer, is to get to know him a bit better. Ask him to meet you for a cup of coffee, or to watch a ballgame on Saturday. I have even found a cold beer at a local brewery to be blessed by God as a means of getting to know his sheep. Do let me know how it goes.

Your soul’s well-wisher,
An Older Elder

¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Edward Hickman, ed. vol. 1, (1834 repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), xxi.

ServantReading

Real Differences: The Danger of Radical

Individualism

A Review Article

by T. David Gordon

Generations: The Real Differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future, by Jean M. Twenge. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023, 560 pages, \$32.50.

The 1960–61 Broadway production of the Adams-Strouse play *Bye Bye Birdie* was an enormous success both in the United States and London and spawned off-Broadway versions for many years, including amateur versions by high school and college students. Among its more-memorable musical numbers was “Kids,” memorable for the question: “What’s the matter with kids today?” Generations attempting to understand (and, hopefully, endure) each other is therefore not a new human phenomenon. As the pace of cultural change has accelerated in the third millennium, however, the endeavor may be more pressing than usual.

Into this pressing endeavor strides Dr. Jean M. Twenge (San Diego State University), whose professional life has been devoted to generational questions and has resulted in two previous books on the topic: *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*; and *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—And What That Means for the Rest of Us*. She also co-authored (with W. Keith Campbell) *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*.¹ The present volume reflects a mature analysis of generations informed by decades of labor; Twenge’s knowledge of the subject is only equaled by her nuanced analysis thereof. The passage of time from her first book to this one has equipped her with growing understanding and nuance and has provided ever-increasing knowledge of the subject from many sources. As she herself says, “In these pages, you’ll find the results of generational analyses spanning twenty-four data-sets including thirty-nine million people” (2).

Publishers and reviewers of her earlier books perhaps suggested a toned-down title to this volume; and “Real Differences” is indeed milder than “Miserable,” “Unprepared,” “Entitlement,” or “Narcissism Epidemic,” but Twenge’s evaluation of generational

¹ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Atria, 2006); and *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—And What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2018). She also co-authored (with W. Keith Campbell) *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Atria, 2009).

differences still does not shrink from at least raising evaluative/normative questions. Early on, she rightly distinguishes individualist culture from collectivist cultures:

Individualist cultures such as the U.S. value freedom, independence, and equality, while more collectivistic cultures such as South Korea instead value group harmony and rule-following. Levels of individualism also vary over time. . . . By the 1960s and 1970s the highly individualistic world we know today had begun to emerge. . . . Sacrificing for the greater good was less prized. . . . With so much reliance on the self, it was important that people feel good about themselves, so viewing the self positively received more emphasis. (9)

This distinction is critical to grasping Twenge's evaluations. A recurring theme in each of her books is that unchecked individualism can easily become narcissism, which is a poor foundation for a richly humane society. One constant across the six generations is the increasingly unchecked individualism in each subsequent generation. Twenge's point of view is neither original nor idiosyncratic; within her particular sphere of expertise she joins concerns expressed by culture observers such as Robert N. Bellah, Robert D. Putnam, Christian Smith, Sherry Turkle, and Charles Murray.²

The book consists of eight chapters, the first of which, "The How and Why of Generations," introduces both the topic and the proposed method; the last of which, "The Future," discusses trends and tendencies we may expect, and a chapter each is devoted to the six generations in their chronological order:

Silents (Born 1925–1945)

Boomers (Born 1946–1964)

Generation X (Born 1965–1979)

Millennials (Born 1980–1994)

Generation Z (Born 1995–2012)

Polars (Born 2013–2029)

In the introductory chapter Twenge explains that generations potentially differ from one another for three reasons: cultural changes (e.g., stay-at-home mothers vs. working mothers), major events, and technological changes. Among the major events that have shaped these generations, she discusses World War I, The Great Depression, World War II, the Vietnam War, fears of nuclear war with the Soviet Union, the September 11 attacks, the 2008 Financial Collapse, the Internet, Smartphones, George Floyd (and the following riots), Donald Trump, and the January 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection. However,

² Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, 1985); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001); Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: University Press, 2005); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011) and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015); Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown, 2012). Twenge is familiar with some of these, citing Smith on pages 296–97 and Turkle on page 413.

Twenge believes an exclusive attention to such events is inadequate in studying generations:

The classic theories of generational change focus almost exclusively on just one aspect of cultural change: major events. . . . Major events can certainly shape a generation's worldview. Those who lived through the Great Depression, for example, were often frugal for the rest of their lives. However, this view of generations as shaped by cycles of events misses the rest of cultural change—all the ways in which life today is so different from life twenty years ago, fifty years ago, or one hundred years ago. . . . The average woman born in 1930 ended her education with high school, married at 20, and had two kids by 25, while the average woman born in 1990 went to college and was unmarried with no children at 25. (4, 5)

Having two children at age 25, compared to being unmarried and without children at the same age, is not a “major event” in the ordinary sense of the expression; but being married vs. single, and having children vs. not having children, are profoundly different experiences of life. Twenge's goal is to describe “real differences” between generations, and marital and child-rearing differences are “real differences” indeed.

Traditional analyses of generations either focused on the regular family dynamics of infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood/parenting, or on the influence of significant cultural events (such as wars or economic collapse). Twenge acknowledges the value of such but proposes an approach that augments such analyses. Twenge employs a three-pronged approach to generational analysis, but the prongs are not of equal length:

“So what is the root cause of these cultural changes—and thus the root cause of generational changes? . . . The strongest candidate is technology . . . This model—let's call it the Technology Model of Generations—is a new theory of generations for the modern world. . . . there are intervening causes as well. . . . Two of these intervening causes are individualism and a slower life trajectory. (6)

Note, then, that the remainder of her book benefits from the two more-traditional analyses but adds her additional three (individualism, slower life trajectory, technology), with a strong emphasis on technology. I am especially alert to, and appreciative of, her approach to technology as a significant factor in cultural change. She even believes technology profoundly influences those very “major events” that some propose to be the primary influence on generational experience:

Technology also contributes to many of the major events prized in classic generational theories. Consider airplanes, a key technological development of the 20th century. Airplanes played a role in at least four major events of the last one hundred years: World War II (where planes were used in combat, including dropping the first nuclear bomb), 9/11 (where planes were used as weapons), and the AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics (where both viruses spread via airplane travel). (8)

Twenge joins such earlier culture analysts as Lewis Mumford and Elisabeth L. Eisenstein³ in recognizing the culture-shaping influence of technological change. In my final eighteen years of teaching, I taught an introduction to Media Ecology each year and even required Twenge's 2018 book as one of the texts for the class.⁴ I was therefore especially eager to read her current book, and my eagerness was generously rewarded. Cultural change occurs more rapidly now than at any other historical moment, and technological change is one of the most influential dimensions of cultural change.

The breakneck speed of cultural change means that growing up today is a completely different experience from growing up in the 1950s or 1980s—or even the 2000s. . . . In fact, when you were born has a larger effect on your personality and attitudes than the family who raised you does. (2)

Twenge makes thorough use of the concept of “slow life strategy,” especially observing at each generational moment that this life strategy gets increasingly slower. She acknowledges that the pace of life is increasingly rapid, but the life strategy gets slower. It takes longer and longer to move from infancy, through childhood, through adolescence to adulthood, to retirement. Indirectly, technology contributes to this slower life strategy, because technology has decreased the role of manual labor in the American economy, causing many young people to pursue college degrees (and often beyond) in order to be competitive in a market that rewards brains more than brawn. The slowing of the life strategy is one of the consistent traits that distinguish each successive generation from the previous.

People who involve themselves in what I call the “generation wars” will find little fodder in Twenge's work. She candidly concedes that there is some arbitrariness in ascribing dates and/or labels for the various generations,⁵ and she ordinarily works with the consensus, saying of the last generation, e.g., “I call them Polars; some marketers have called them Alphas” (2). Her sub-title explains her motivation, which is to explain “the real differences” that exist between the several generations, not the (often unreal) perceptions they sometimes have of each other. Using such tools as the General Social Survey and the U. S. Census Bureau's findings,⁶ Twenge resists the huffing, flame-throwing, and blaming, to demonstrate that particular generations are often quite different than common conceptions suggest; Millennials, for instance, are actually doing much better financially than the doom-predictors had said. Adjusted for their somewhat slower life strategy, once they have been in the job market for the same amount of time, they do as well as (or better than) their predecessors. Indeed, throughout the book, Twenge displays a “light touch,” as it were, permitting frequent charts and graphs to speak for themselves with no need for exclamation marks. She exhibits the soft-spoken manner of a

³ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (Harcourt Brace, 1990; original 1934); Elisabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴ Twenge, *iGen*.

⁵ Regarding the Polars, she says, “Two aspects of the period form their name: the political polarization that gripped the country beginning in the 2010s that rose to new heights during the pandemic, and the melting polar ice caps that serve as a symbol of global warming. Polars will grapple with these two issues for most of their lives. This generation has also been called Alphas, after the Greek letter A; after Generation Z, this gambit argues, the only way to use letters is to go back to the beginning of the alphabet.” (451)

⁶ I noticed more than sixty references to the U.S. Census and nearly fifty references to the General Social Survey. Twenge also makes good use of the Google Books database, citing it well over a dozen times.

family physician who calmly presents diagnosis, prognosis, and options of proposed treatment. She consistently avoids either canonizing or demonizing each generation and is content to note paradox when it is called for, as when she says, “Polar children are less likely than ever to be injured, but more likely than ever to get little exercise and to be overweight” (459).

Aided by the many surveys available to her, Twenge explains similarities and differences in attitudes and beliefs in many areas: family, human sexuality, the American Republic, patriotism, racism (white females today are more concerned about systemic racism than black Americans are, male or female!), labor, marriage, child-rearing, self-esteem (getting higher), self-harm (also getting higher!), materialism, politics, “cancelling,” the First Amendment, and more. Sometimes the generational differences are small, and sometimes they are very large.

A pleasant surprise amid all the statistics and graphs is the presence of two impressionistic parts of each chapter. Early in the description of each generation, Twenge includes a list of the ten “Most Popular First Names” for males and females in each generation (with asterisks for any first-time appearances on the list); I was surprised to find my half-year-old grandson’s name (“Liam”) was ranked second on the list for the Polars. This list of names is followed, in each chapter, by the names of well-known actors, comedians, and filmmakers in each generation. While neither of these lists has any particular explanatory consequences, the lists personalize the perception of each generation in a whimsical-but-interesting manner.

Readers of this review may be disappointed that it contains no brief, pithy description of each of the six generations; but no perceptive review of Twenge’s book could do so; her analysis of each generation contains many specific traits but no defining trait. This makes for rewarding and interesting reading, but unsatisfying reviewing.

The concluding chapter on “The Future” describes seven trends that are likely to characterize the next decades barring some unusual event:

1. Remote work will be the new norm in the workplace.
2. Safe spaces and speech will likely move from the universities into workplaces.
3. Workplaces will need to adjust to emotionally fragile Gen Z: “That means a transition from optimism to pessimism, entitlement to insecurity, and self-confidence to doubt. Millennials were challenging because they expected praise as a given; Gen Z’ers are challenging because they need praise for reassurance.” (467)
4. Everything will be political. “Gen Z’ers can barely remember a time before the country was so sharply divided politically. Everything is political, and politics has become about morals and values, not just candidates and debates. There is a new feeling that it’s us versus them, and you must take a stand one way or another. . . . Companies will increasingly feel pressure from employees to speak out about political issues, no matter what their business.” (471)
5. Mental health will be recognized as real illness. What was once stigmatized is now expected to be acknowledged openly: “Gen Z knows how to advocate for

their mental health needs and is determined to eliminate any stigma around discussing mental health issues.” (472)

6. Flattening of social roles and relations will continue, and the corporate culture will be more collegial than hierarchical: “Individualism has flattened the authority structure everywhere, with distinctions between managers and employees fading. Relationships are less formal and more casual. . . . The days when managers could tell employees to do something and they would just do it are long gone. Gen Z is, at times, skeptical of the need for leaders at all.” (473)
7. The future will be nonbinary. Gender-neutral bathrooms will become the norm in most public places. “Stating pronouns will become standard practice in businesses. As Gen Z becomes the bulk of new hires, they will request (and possibly demand) it.” (475)

In the concluding chapter, Twenge notes that the birth rate had dropped to barely replacement levels in 2008 (at 2.1), but by 2020, it had dropped to 1.64, the lowest ever in the United States, and it will likely stay that way or decline further, due to the three causes of generational change:

All three of the major causes of generational change point toward birth rates either continuing to decline or stabilizing at low rates. Technology makes birth control possible, so having children becomes a choice. Individualism deemphasizes family and tradition, which leads to fewer people choosing to have children. The slow-life strategy means people wait to have children and have fewer of them. (480)

Policy makers will need to address this population decline. Too recent for Twenge to include is President Macron of France addressing the matter by raising the retirement age to keep people in the workforce longer to provide for state-funded retirement benefits. Other western democracies will need to follow suit or discover another solution.

Readers of *Ordained Servant* will appreciate one aspect of Twenge’s analysis that some readers will not: from 2006 to the present, her writings have consistently, if with increasing sophistication, called attention to untempered individualism, or what we might call “self-centeredness.” Even the word “individualism” occurs nearly two hundred times in the volume, as Twenge adds her voice to the now-chorus of culture observers over the last four decades who express concern that even a culture that promotes individual freedom must not do so at the expense of the well-being of the society as a whole. Self-fulfilment has never been consistent with biblical teaching about self-denial; Twenge’s portrait of the recent six generations describes a slow but inexorable march in the wrong direction. In the midst of that narrative, however, she provides remarkable insights into the distinctive traits of each generation, and I would be pleased if her book were the most-read book this summer. Preachers and teachers will especially find her analysis to be helpful in understanding and serving our generations.

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Big Answers to Big Questions

By William Edgar

The Great Quest, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022, 132 pages, \$11.90, paper; and *Signals of Transcendence*, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2023, 128 pages, \$15.36, paper.

By now Os Guinness is a household name to many Christians. He is a popular speaker, has written scores of books, and is a sought-after public intellectual. While best known for his works of popular theology, such as *The Call* (Nelson, 2003) and *Last Call for Liberty* (IVP, 2018),¹ it must not be forgotten that one of his greatest concerns is to reach outsiders for the Christian faith.

Guinness is co-founder of the Trinity Forum, whose stated mission is “to provide leaders a space and resources to engage life’s greatest questions, in the context of faith.” If this sounds a bit vague, a deeper look shows the concern to bring cultural influencers to the Christian faith. It does this through book launches, quarterly readings, and forums to explore the great ideas, leading to Christian commitment.

No doubt the center of Guinness’s interests is apologetics, the defense and commendation of the Christian faith. Many of his lectures and writings are about persuasion, encouraging people to think through issues and become convinced that the Christian faith is valid. From a family of missionaries to China, he came to robust ways of explicating the truth at L’Abri, the remarkable community in the Swiss Alps, led by Francis Schaeffer, arguably the twentieth century’s very effective evangelists. A turning point came when he went to earn a doctorate at Oxford University, under the guidance of David Martin, the preeminent architect of secularization theory. Guinness’s dissertation examined the implications of sociologist Peter L. Berger’s views for Christian apologetics. We might call this the sociological turn in the art of commending the gospel.

Berger, not exactly an evangelical, stressed the social and psychological dimensions of worldview thinking. While truth and ideas matter, so do what Berger calls “structures of plausibility,” the social conditions for knowledge (known as the sociology of knowledge). Guinness argued for recognizing the wider context for belief and unbelief. Apologetics hitherto had been too limited to logical proofs and attestations. While these may be helpful, most people do not develop convictions solely in abstract fashion.

Signals of Transcendence recognizes this wider view of belief. It is an extraordinary book, based on Berger’s approach to intrusions into a closed world. The book simply lists cases of people who have built worldviews that are secular and then had a divine intervention which has jarred their assurance.

A couple of examples. First, the great poet W. H. Auden had become a typical liberal who believed man was basically good, and that if only we could change people’s circumstances, we could climb out of our problems. Until—he went to a cinema in New York and saw a news report of Hitler invading Warsaw. To his utter astonishment, he

¹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling God’s Purpose For Your Life* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); and *Last Call for Liberty: How America’s Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018)

heard people in the largely German audience shouting, “kill them; kill the Poles!” This profoundly shook his liberalism and forced him to ask how he could be so upset. It drove him to a sovereign God who could define good and evil above human convention.

A second example is G. K. Chesterton in art school. Surrounded by practiced pessimists, he began to feel these fellow artists, who were close to the most beautiful objects, were ungrateful, lacking humility. It was (oddly) the contemplation of the dandelion that changed him from a typical secularist to a theist.

No one except possibly Francis Schaeffer has exploited this kind of tension as well as Berger. In my own conversations with unbelievers, this kind of conflict between a held position and the impossibility of living with it has most often led to an awareness of sin (the law) leading to salvation (grace). These signals are not natural theology, but “revelations,” as J. H. Bavinck would suggest in *The Church Between Temple and Mosque*.²

Very different is Guinness’s second book, *The Great Quest*. It is almost hard to believe it is by the same author as *Signals*. The concern to reach unbelievers is still very much there. But instead of (often somewhat diffident) presentations of various signals, it is a step-by-step argument for faith in Christ. There are four “phases” beginning with questions asked by seekers and ending with the Gospel. I feel conflicted about this. The Calvinist in me says there are no honest seekers. Guinness partly anticipates this by attempting to describe reasons why some people do not seem to care or want to go on the quest. They include being distracted (Pascal’s “diversion”), bargaining (“I’ll get to these things later”), or just noise (obstacles from our problems crowding in).

Still, these do not fully account for the apparent irrelevance of the big question for many people. My father was a decent man, even a good man. He had fought in World War II, survived the Great Depression and married a lovely woman from Wilmington, North Carolina, where I was born. He worked for a multinational corporation and retired comfortably. As I would discover, he was impervious to the big questions. He and my mother developed the fine art of diverting dangerous conversations that might have raised the larger questions, to safer ones: they could turn any exchange to innocuous issues, such as the children, travels, issues with neighbors, and so forth. As I read these two extraordinary books by Guinness, I kept asking myself how they would respond. The answer: with studied indifference.

To be generous, I must acknowledge *The Great Quest* is full of rich illustrations and persuasive arguments meant to unsettle anyone from indifference. Many of them can be found in the readings and discussion questions from The Trinity Forum.³ They are arresting and challenging. But it is hard to get over the fact that so many people simply do not care, and no amount of logical persuasion is likely to get through.

May God use these two books to awaken people to the big questions and then to the big answers.

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² J. H. Bavinck, *The Church Between Temple and Mosque* (Chestnut Hill, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2023).

³ <https://www.ttf.org>.

ServantPoetry

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)

On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
In slender Book his vast Design unfold,
Messiah Crown'd, *God's* Reconcil'd Decree,
Rebelling *Angels*, the Forbidden Tree,
Heav'n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All; the Argument
Held me a while, misdoubting his Intent
That he would ruine (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song,
(So *Sampson* grop'd the Temple's Posts in spite)
The World o'erwhelming to revenge his Sight.

Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,
I lik'd his Project, the success did fear;
Through that wide Field how he his way should find
O'er which lame Faith leads Understanding blind;
Lest he perplex the things he would explain,
And what was easie he should render vain.

Or if a Work so infinite he spann'd,
Jealous I was that some less skilful hand
(Such as disquiet alwayes what is well,
And by ill imitating would excell)
Might hence presume the whole Creations day
To change in Scenes, and show it in a Play.

Pardon me, *mighty* Poet, nor despise
My causeless, yet not impious, surmise.
But I am now convinc'd that none will dare
Within thy Labors to pretend a Share.
Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit,
And all that was improper dost omit:
So that no room is here for Writers left,
But to detect their Ignorance or Theft.

That Majesty which through thy Work doth Reign

Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane.
And things divine thou treatst of in such state
As them preserves, and Thee, inviolate.
At once delight and horrou on us seize,
Thou singst with so much gravity and ease;
And above humane flight dost soar aloft,
With Plume so strong, so equal, and so soft.
The *Bird* named from that *Paradise* you sing
So never Flags, but always keeps on Wing.

Where couldst thou Words of such a compass find?
Whence furnish such a vast expanse of Mind?
Just Heaven Thee, like *Tiresias*, to requite,
Rewards with *Prophecie* the loss of Sight.

Well might thou scorn thy Readers to allure
With tinkling Rhyme, of thine own Sense secure;
While the *Town-Bayes* writes all the while and spells,
And like a Pack-Horse tires without his Bells.
Their Fancies like our bushy Points appear,
The Poets tag them; we for fashion wear.
I too, transported by the *Mode*, offend,
And while I meant to *Praise* thee must Commend.
The verse created like thy *Theme* sublime,
In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not *Rhime*.