

# Ordained Servant

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A Journal  
for  
Church  
Officers

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VOLUME 20, 2011

# *Ordained Servant*

## A Journal for Church Officers

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# Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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*Dedicated to Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.*

## CONTENTS

5 From the Editor

### Servant Tribute

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6 “The Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.:  
*Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus*  
*Westmonasteriensis*,” **Peter A. Lillback**

### Servant Thoughts

---

#### EDITORIALS

16 “On the Matter of Notes in Preaching”  
20 “Seven Lessons for Missionaries from the  
Ministry of John Paton”  
24 “John, the Media Ecologist: Why I Am a  
Media Ecologist”

### Servant Interview

---

29 “Harold Leonard Dorman, Spokesman for  
Almighty God,” an interview by **Gregory E.**  
**Reynolds**

### Servant Word

---

35 “Without a Manuscript?” **F. Allan Story, Jr.**  
38 “A Brief Defense of Manuscript Preaching,”  
**Matthew Cotta**  
41 “The King James Version in the Church:  
Past, Present, and Future,” **Leland Ryken**

### Servant Worship

---

47 “Baptism and Church Membership: A  
Plea for Confessional Fidelity,” **Bryan D.**  
**Holstrom**  
51 “Wine or Grape Juice: Theological and  
Pastoral Reflections on the Fruit of the Vine  
in Communion,” **John W. Mahaffy**

### Servant Work

---

56 “John Bunyan as a Youth Pastor,” **Robert J.**  
**McKelvey**  
60 “A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief,”  
**Gordon H. Cook, Jr.**  
65 “The Danger of Excessive Grief,” **Stephen J.**  
**Tracey**

### Servant Technology

---

68 “Why Are Technophiles So Hysterical?”  
**T. David Gordon**

### Servant Living

---

72 “What Should I Do? Making Decisions  
Biblically,” **Shane Lems**

### Servant Truth

---

76 “Psalm 1: The Pursuit of Happiness,” **Larry**  
**Wilson**  
80 “Christ’s Test of Our Orthodoxy,” **Jack W.**  
**Sawyer**

## ServantHistory

---

- 85 “Who Narrates the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? The Church and Its Historians,” **John R. Muether**
- 92 “Is the OPC the Church for Which Calvinists Have Been Waiting?” **Darryl G. Hart**

## ServantHumor

---

From the Back Pew

- 99 “The Unlikely Case for Standing in Corporate Prayer,” **Eutyclus II**

## ServantReading

---

BOOK REVIEWS

- 101 *Souls in Transition* by Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, **John R. Muether**
- 103 *The Church of God* by Stuart Robinson, **John R. Muether**
- 104 *The Shepherd Leader* by Timothy Z. Witmer, **William Shishko**
- 106 *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, **William Shishko**
- 107 *Wired for Intimacy* by William M. Struthers, **William Shishko**
- 109 *The Whole Counsel of God, vol. 1* by Richard C. Gamble, **Stephen J. Tracey**
- 110 *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns* by T. David Gordon, **Stephen J. Tracey**
- 112 *Living by God's Promises* by Joel R. Beeke and James A. La Belle, **Kevin M. Kisler**
- 114 *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ* by Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson, **John W. Mallin**

## ServantReading

---

BOOK NOTES

- 117 “The Life and Thought of Augustine,” **Gregory E. Reynolds**

## ServantReading

---

REVIEW ARTICLES

- 120 “Weighing the Weight of Glory,” review of *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn, **Stephen Migotsky**
- 123 “Crowd Control: Managing Electronic Distraction,” review of *Hamlet's Blackberry* by William Powers and *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 129 “The Culture War Is Over,” review of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* by David VanDrunen, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 133 “Christ the Transformer?” review of *Christianity and Politics* by C. C. Pecknold, *Republicrat* by Carl R. Trueman, and *Calvin and Culture* edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett, **Richard M. Gamble**
- 138 “Qohelet: Evangelist or Pastor?” review of *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* by Sidney Greidanus, **Meredith M. Kline**
- 143 “Flying with Wax Wings: The Secular Quest for Happiness,” review of *Perpetual Euphoria* by Pascal Bruckner and *Exploring Happiness* by Sissela Bok, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 149 “To Render unto Caesar or Baptize Him: Is That the Question?” review of *Politics according to the Bible* by Wayne Grudem and *Defending Constantine* by Peter J. Leithart, **Darryl G. Hart**
- 152 “KJV 400: An Enduring Influence,” review of *The Holy Bible: Quatercentenary Edition ... of the King James Version ... Published in 1611; Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011* by Gordon Campbell; *The Legacy of the King James Bible* by Leland Ryken; and *A Visual History of the King James Bible* by Donald L. Brake with Shelly Beach, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 159 “Inspired with Errors: An Oxymoron,” review of *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture* by Andrew T. B. McGowan, **Sidney D. Dyer**
- 162 “Between the Times,” review of *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990* by D. G. Hart, **Donald J. Duff**
- 165 “Fractured Light 日本画,” review of *River Grace and Refractions* by Makoto Fujimura, **Gregory E. Reynolds**
- 168 “McLuhan 100: A McLuhanesque Biography,” review of *Marshall McLuhan* by Douglas Coupland, **Gregory E. Reynolds**

# ✦ From the Editor



This is the sixth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant* as we enter the twenty-first year of publication.

I have dedicated this annual edition to one of my favorite professors, and an expert in Pauline theology, Richard Gaffin, Jr. His meticulous exegesis of God's Word and his commitment to Reformed theology and the visible church, have left a mark on a generation of ministers.

The cover photo is of the Congregational Church on the famous commons in Lexington, Massachusetts. Noted for the political liberty spawned at this site, the steeple points to a far more profound liberty in the declaration of heaven's God to all repentant sinners of amnesty—freedom, through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, from sin and death.

This year I have, for the first time, been able to print everything published online, because I have been stricter about article length. I would like to thank the many fine writers who have worked with me to revise articles in order to stay within the prescribed limits.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Paul MacDonald, for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, Andrew Moody, and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. Finally, I want to thank Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work, and Jim Scott for his excellent formatting of the printed volume.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds  
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church  
Manchester, New Hampshire

# ✦ Servant Tribute

## The Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.: *Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus Westmonasteriensis*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2011<sup>1</sup>

by Peter A. Lillback

While Scripture forbids us to venerate any mere mortal (Rev. 19:10), Paul in Romans 12:7 declares, “Pay to all what is owed to them...respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” There are many reasons that warrant a tribute to the Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. in 2011, the seventy-fifth year of his fruitful life. These reasons include his godly and gentlemanly character, his extensive academic contributions, his faithful and scholarly churchmanship, and his gracious humility that permeates his productive writing. Here we honor Dr. Gaffin in the spirit of Hebrews 13:7, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

### **A Summary of the Impact of the Ministry of Dr. Gaffin**

Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.’s ministry is interwoven with Westminster Theological Seminary<sup>2</sup>

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=273&issue\\_id=68](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=273&issue_id=68).

2 For a brief survey of the history of Westminster Theological Seminary, see *The Orthodox Presbyterian Church 1936–1986* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Pres-

byterian Church, 1986), 321–24.

3 For a summary of the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see *ibid.*, 7–16.

4 Marsden writes, “Machen died of pneumonia in the winter of 1937 while singlehandedly attempting to rally handfuls of supporters in the Dakotas—an ironic end to a life dedicated to bringing Christianity to the centers of culture.” George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 192.

5 Machen’s entry into theological conflict with “liberalism” or “modern theology” began with his address on November 3, 1921, to the Ruling Elders’ Association of Chester Presbytery which was published by *Princeton Theological Review* 20 (1922): 93–117, entitled “Liberalism or Christianity.” Machen explains in his preface to his subsequent book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, “The interest with which the published address was received has encouraged the author to undertake a more extensive presentation of the same subject.” Westminster Theological Seminary Dean Carl Trueman writes in his foreword to the New Edition of *Christianity and Liberalism*, “Machen summed up his thesis in a letter to *The British Weekly*, September 11, 1924: ‘The truth is that the manifold religious life of the present day, despite interlocking of the branches and much interaction, does not spring from one root but from two. One root is Christianity; the other is a naturalistic or agnostic modernism which, despite Christian influences in detail, is fundamentally hostile to the Christian faith.’” J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), ix. Also see D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

6 See Robert K. Churchill, *Lest We Forget: A Personal Reflection of the Formation of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1987).

7 The Independent Board of Foreign Missions was the issue that ultimately forced the break between Dr. Machen and the Presbyterian Church. See Churchill, *Lest We Forget*, 73ff.; D. G.

and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, 2011 is the seventy-fifth birthday of both the OPC and Dr. Gaffin. Further, 1965 was the year of Dr. Gaffin’s ordination in the OPC as well as his first teaching year at Westminster. And January 1, 2012 is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the death of J. Gresham Machen,<sup>4</sup> the founder of Westminster<sup>5</sup> and the moving force for the establishment of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Gaffin was born in 1936 in Peiping, China, modern day Beijing, to parents serving as missionaries with the Independent Board of Foreign Missions and soon thereafter until their retirement with the Committee on Foreign Missions of the newly formed Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>7</sup>

byterian Church, 1986), 321–24.

3 For a summary of the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see *ibid.*, 7–16.

4 Marsden writes, “Machen died of pneumonia in the winter of 1937 while singlehandedly attempting to rally handfuls of supporters in the Dakotas—an ironic end to a life dedicated to bringing Christianity to the centers of culture.” George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 192.

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6 See Robert K. Churchill, *Lest We Forget: A Personal Reflection of the Formation of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1987).

7 The Independent Board of Foreign Missions was the issue that ultimately forced the break between Dr. Machen and the Presbyterian Church. See Churchill, *Lest We Forget*, 73ff.; D. G.



His father-in-law was the accomplished Westminster Old Testament professor Dr. E. J. Young.<sup>8</sup> As a Westminster Seminary student and the twenty-second professor to have signed the faculty book at Westminster, he knew five of the original faculty: Cornelius Van Til, R. B. Kuiper, Ned Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, and John Murray.<sup>9</sup> Robert Dick Wilson and Machen had died; Allan MacRae and Oswald T. Allis had resigned. Gaffin knew Kuiper when he was a student at Calvin College and Kuiper was President of Calvin Seminary. The young Richard Gaffin also encountered Westminster's other early faculty members that preceded him (E. J. Young, John Skilton, Meredith G. Kline, Edmund Clowney, Robert Knudsen, Norman Shepherd, Jay Adams, Daniel Clair Davis, Leslie Sloat). Beyond these, he has known all of the fifty-four professors whose signatures follow his.<sup>10</sup>

His focus on biblical theology has enabled him to excel in New Testament biblical exegesis as well as systematic theology. He occupied the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology until his retirement. His forty-five years

of teaching at Westminster have impacted some 3,000 students. He has been honored as an emeritus professor by the Richard B. Gaffin Lectures on Theology, Culture, and Missions that have been endowed in perpetuity. His teaching has taken him around the globe to numerous academic institutions and missionary centers. His students, friends, and colleagues have honored his vast and important contributions to their lives and to Reformed theology with the publication of a Festschrift, *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*.<sup>11</sup>

His service as presbyter in the OPC has been faithful, extensive, and marked by high standards of quality, setting a record in length of committee service that will not soon be matched. He was elected as moderator of the Fifty-first General Assembly of the OPC in 1984 and has served well over twenty times as a commissioner. He has been a long-standing member of both the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions and its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Gaffin has written over one hundred published articles and written or edited ten books.<sup>13</sup> His teaching and writing have been marked by an extensive integration of orthodoxy and Reformed

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Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 198–202; Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 151–57, 163–64; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 192; Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 482ff., 497ff.

8 “Dr. E. J. Young [was] professor of Old Testament from 1936 until his death in 1968. He had a command of more than thirty languages and wrote a three-volume commentary on Isaiah. His *Thy Word Is Truth* (1957) was perhaps the most significant book upholding the inerrancy of Scripture to that date because he insisted that Scripture define its own character. He believed we have in the Bible a history of the work of redemption, a single, ever-unfolding story, and all passages in all books of the Bible must be understood in light of this fact.” From *Westminster Theological Seminary: The Whole Counsel of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2006), xii.

9 For the beginnings of Westminster Seminary, see *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 446–68.

10 The Westminster Seminary Faculty Signature Book is signed by each new faculty member at the Board of Trustees Meeting at which the member is elected to the faculty. A facsimile was recently printed for Seminary use. For an introduction to some of the early faculty of Westminster Seminary, see *Westminster Theological Seminary: The Whole Counsel of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2006). While many faculty members of Westminster are named in this article, it is not possible to include them all. No slight is intended thereby.

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11 *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008).

12 Cf. “Introduction: A Tribute to Richard B. Gaffin Jr.” in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, xi–xii.

13 For a comprehensive bibliography of Dr. Gaffin's writings, see *Resurrection and Eschatology*, 577–86. Included in this count is the forthcoming book coedited by Richard B. Gaffin Jr. and Peter A. Lillback, *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Westminster Seminary's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Context*, to be published by P&R. Derek W. H. Thomas's endorsement of the Festschrift for Dr. Gaffin is relevant here. He writes, “These chapters reveal the esteem with which Dr. Gaffin is held. Those of us in the Reformed community, particularly ‘professional’ theologians like myself, are indebted to Dr. Gaffin in ways that would probably embarrass him. It hasn't been his written output so much (though crucial and indispensable, this has been relatively small); rather, it has been his quiet, resolute defense of orthodoxy rooted in enviable exegetical skills that continues to challenge us. He is a quiet giant in a theologically Lilliputian world to whom we owe an immense amount of gratitude and respect. Without him we would be immeasurably the poorer.” This article and its listing of the many writings of Dr. Gaffin do not reference the reports that he may have authored as a member of the ecclesiastical committees on which he served.



confessionalism with a thoroughgoing biblical theology and rigorous exegesis. His appreciation for the importance of historical theology is seen in his studies of Calvin and the Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Herman Ridderbos, and Geerhardus Vos. He has been a perceptive critic of liberal theology in the arenas of hermeneutics, Gospels and Paul studies, systematic theology, biblical theology, and New Testament introduction. His theological contributions have touched a wide range of theological concerns including union with Christ, justification, the Holy Spirit, the Sabbath, resurrection, and eschatology. He has sought to apply biblical theology and Reformed theology to the Christian life, to the church, and to missions. He has been a vigorous participant in the theological debates that have made an impact on Westminster, including the controversies over the doctrine of justification, theonomy, and the doctrine of Scripture.

### The Ministry of Dr. Gaffin in the Context of Westminster Seminary

There are ten distinct phases of Dr. Gaffin's career at Westminster Theological Seminary from his student days to his retirement. Each of these will be briefly considered.

#### 1. Student Years at Westminster, 1958–61

In 1958, Gaffin arrived on Westminster's campus just as the faculty's writings had begun to add to Machen's substantial legacy.<sup>14</sup> Stonehouse in 1941 had written the *Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* emphasizing the inseparable authority of Christ with the authority of the Gospels themselves.<sup>15</sup> Woolley and Stonehouse had edited

14 "A climactic event in Machen's earlier career—occurring not long after the fortieth anniversary of his birth—was the publication of his brilliant book on *The Origin of Paul's Religion* in the year 1921. Though the designation *opus magnum* has to be reserved for *The Virgin Birth of Christ* published in 1930, the book on Paul, in the judgment of the biographer, excels in some respects even that volume whose preparation was a principal concern for about twenty-five years." Stonehouse, *Machen*, 315.

15 "For good or ill the momentous issue of the authority of Jesus Christ is bound up with the decisions which are reached regarding the authority and truth of the canonical gospels. Although

the *Infallible Word* in 1946. Van Til had written *Why I believe in God* in 1948. Young's *Old Testament Introduction* had appeared in 1949. The scholarly works continued to flow: Murray's *Baptism* (1952) and *Divorce* (1953), Stonehouse's *Biographical Memoir of Machen* (1954), Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (1955), Van Til's *Defense of the Faith* (1955), Murray's *Principles of Conduct* (1957), and Young's *Thy Word is Truth* (1957). Also in 1958, the young Gaffin married Jean, Professor E. J. Young's daughter. By 1961, Gaffin had completed his Bachelor of Divinity.

But central for the young Gaffin was the theological impact of Geerhardus Vos, the Princeton professor who had taught both Murray and Stonehouse. Vos did not join the new seminary, but retired from Princeton in 1932, two years after Murray left Princeton to join the newly formed Westminster faculty. Vos's relationship with Westminster deepened through the years. When Vos died in 1949, Westminster apologetics professor Cornelius Van Til preached at the graveside gathering.<sup>16</sup> Vos defined biblical theology as the history of revelation or the history of redemption that was to be expressed through careful biblical exegesis.<sup>17</sup> This became the hallmark of Murray as he

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many efforts have been put forth to discover a Jesus other than the divine Christ of the gospels to whom men might pledge fealty, the history of that search appears more and more clearly to have demonstrated its futility." Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), xiii.

16 John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 131.

17 "The first feature characteristic of supernatural revelation is its *historical progress*. God has not communicated to us the knowledge of the truth as it appears in the calm light of eternity to His own timeless vision. He has not given it in the form of abstract propositions logically correlated and systematized. The simple fact that it is the task of Systematic Theology to reproduce revealed truth in such form, shows that it does not possess this form from the beginning. The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages, proceeding in a sequence of revealing words and acts, appearing in a long perspective of time. The truth comes in the form of growing truth, not truth at rest.... As soon as we realize that revelation is at almost every point interwoven with and conditioned by the redeeming activity of God in its wider sense, and together with the latter connected with the natural development of the present world, its historic character becomes perfectly intelligible and ceases to cause surprise." Geerhardus

developed the Vosian perspective.<sup>18</sup> It became the methodological commitment of Gaffin as well.<sup>19</sup> In 1962, shaped by the theological perspectives of Vos, Murray, and Stonehouse, Gaffin completed his Th.M. thesis, “Calvin and the Sabbath.”

In 1962–63, Gaffin went to study at Georg-August Universität in Göttingen. Gaffin’s years at Göttingen solidified his agreement with Van Til’s critical assessment of liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup> Professor Stonehouse died suddenly in 1962 creating a position for a New Testament scholar that the young Gaffin would eventually fill. In 1963, Gaffin’s lifelong friend and many year Westminister colleague, Professor Norman Shepherd joined the faculty at Westminister. Gaffin also published his first scholarly piece.<sup>21</sup>

In 1964, Professor Edmund Clowney’s *Called to Ministry* was published. It was also the year when Meredith Kline resigned as a voting faculty member, although Kline continued to teach a

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Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1980), 7–8.

18 John Murray wrote, “Systematic theology is tied to exegesis. It coordinates and synthesizes the whole witness of Scripture on the various topics with which it deals. But systematic theology will fail of its task to the extent to which it discards its rootage in biblical theology as properly conceived and developed . . . . The fact is that only when systematic theology is rooted in biblical theology does it exemplify its true function and achieve its purpose.” “Systematic Theology. Second Article,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 26 (November, 1963): 44ff.

19 “If it is fair to view Geerhardus Vos as the father of Reformed biblical theology, then we are now at a point several generations later where we can begin assessing something of the lasting impact of that theology . . . . Among pastors, teachers and other interested persons more or less conversant with Vosian biblical theology, it’s fair to say, a fairly sharp difference of opinion presently exists. On the one side are those enthusiastic about biblical theology (or redemptive-historical interpretation of Scripture) and who see themselves in their own work as building on the insights of Vos and others (like Meredith Kline and Herman Ridderbos). Others, however, question the value of biblical theology, if they have not already concluded that it has introduced novelties detrimental to the well-being of the church. . . . I would certainly include myself among the first group just mentioned, the ‘enthusiasts’ . . . .” In Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 425.

20 Cornelius Van Til: *Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, 135.

21 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Review of *The Work of Christ*, by R. S. Franks, *WTJ* 25 (May 1963): 231–35.

course or two each academic year as a visiting faculty member until 1977. And the young Gaffin published his first study on the doctrine of Scripture, an area of lifelong theological concern, entitled Review of *The Inspiration of Scripture*, by D. M. Beegle (*Westminster Theological Journal* 26 (May 1964): 230–38). Gaffin began his career as a teaching fellow in New Testament the following year.

## 2. Teaching Fellow, 1965

The year 1965 brought two important first steps for Gaffin, his ordination in the OPC and the beginning of his teaching at Westminister, as a teaching fellow. This year also saw the formation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod. Teaching Fellow Gaffin continued to publish, authoring two reviews: Review of *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, by Rudolf Bultmann. (*WTJ* 27 (May 1965): 172–77); and Review of *Between Heaven and Earth*, by Helmut Thielicke. (*WTJ* 28 (Nov. 1965): 99–105).

## 3. Instructor of New Testament, 1966–68

The early years of Gaffin’s teaching saw several generational shifts in the Westminister context. For thirty-seven years Westminister had followed a faculty governance model and operated without a president. As Edmund P. Clowney became Westminister’s first president in 1966, the legacy of faculty leadership as had been provided by Machen and Van Til gave way to a shared faculty and administration governance under the guidance of a president. President Clowney led the seminary, and thus Instructor/Professor Richard B. Gaffin Jr. from 1966 to 1982.

There were other dramatic changes as well that shaped and made an impact on Gaffin’s experiences at Westminister. During these early years, R. B. Kuiper died, Clair Davis became a faculty member, and C. John Miller began teaching at Westminister. The year 1967 saw the retirement of Gaffin’s exegetical and theological mentor John Murray. In 1968, Swiss theologian Karl Barth died, and faculty members and teachers Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Norman Shepherd, and Dick

Gaffin attended his memorial service at Princeton.<sup>22</sup> But more personally, 1968 saw the sudden passing of Gaffin's father-in-law, E. J. Young, stalwart Old Testament professor and defender of the inerrancy of the Scriptures.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Assistant Professor, New Testament, 1968–72

Dr. Gaffin signed the Westminster Faculty Signature Book in 1968, becoming an assistant professor of New Testament. In 1969, he earned his Th.D. from Westminster with his dissertation entitled “Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Eschatology.” During these years, he also published articles on topics that would become key emphases of his scholarly work: hermeneutics, Paul, New Testament theology, and the Sabbath.<sup>24</sup> And noteworthy is his first study of his guiding theologian: “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul.”<sup>25</sup>

During these years, Gaffin encountered several major changes in relation to his faculty colleagues. Thus, immediately following his signature in the Faculty Book are Cecil John Miller, Robert B. Strimple, and John M. Frame. In 1971, Ray Dillard came to Westminster. In 1972, a faculty

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22 Cornelius Van Til: *Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, 191.

23 E. J. Young wrote, “The Church is indeed at the crossroads. Shall she listen to God or to man? Will she receive what the Spirit says concerning inspiration, or, turning her back upon Him, will she cleave unto man? This is the choice to be made. Sad is it, however, that many do not realize the necessity for making a choice. Having their vision obscured by the dense fog that modern theology is casting over the way, many do not realize that there is a crossroad. They are not aware that they must decide which road they will follow. Unless something is done, they will travel on, taking the wrong turning, until the road leads them at last into the valley of lost hope and eternal death.” Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 35.

24 “Contemporary Hermeneutics and the Study of the New Testament” *WTJ* 31 (May 1969): 129–44; “Paul as Theologian [review article]” *WTJ* 30 (May 1968): 204–32; Review of *Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, by H. Conzelmann. *WTJ* 32 (May 1970): 220–28; and “The Sabbath: A Creation Ordinance and Sign of the Christian Hope” *Presbyterian Guardian* 40 (March 1971): 40–42.

25 In *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 228–37.

sea change in terms of personality occurred in that founding faculty member and *de facto* seminary leader Cornelius Van Til retired and the energetic Harvie Conn fresh from the Korean mission field became a member of the Westminster faculty.

During this period, Dr. Gaffin's leadership as a presbyter manifested itself. As a current Westminster professor, OPC minister, and successor of Dr. Gaffin to the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Dr. Lane Tipton explains, “Dr. Gaffin is, first and foremost, a churchman. His service to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is astounding, especially in light of his numerous seminary responsibilities. He has the longest continuous presidency of a standing committee in OPC history (Committee on Foreign Missions, 1969–present; president 1971–76, 1981–present).”<sup>26</sup> During these years, Dr. Gaffin began his service on various OPC special study committees as well.<sup>27</sup>

#### 5. Associate Professor, New Testament, 1972–78

In 1972, Assistant Professor Gaffin was promoted to associate professor. The following year, founding faculty member Oswald T. Allis died, and the Presbyterian Church in America began. In 1975, Gaffin's friend and theological mentor John Murray died in Scotland, and C. John Miller left the faculty. It was also the year that the Shepherd controversy erupted over the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith. The controversy that engulfed the seminary and the OPC attracted the interest of many theologians. The controversy lasted in the Westminster context until 1982.<sup>28</sup>

In 1976, Vern Poythress joined Westmin-

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26 “Introduction: A Tribute to Richard B. Gaffin Jr.” in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, xi–xii.

27 Committee on Sabbath Matters (1969–72); Committee on Scripture and Inspiration (1969–72; chairman); Committee on Proof Texts for the Shorter Catechism (1971–78).

28 For discussions of the Shepherd Controversy, see Muether, *Van Til*, 221–23; A. Donald MacCleod, *W. Stanford Reid, An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 257ff.; Ian Hewitson, *Trust and Obey—Norman Shepherd and the Justification Controversy at Westminster Seminary* (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2011).

ster's faculty, teaching New Testament alongside Dr. Gaffin. The year 1977 saw the retirement of founding Professor Paul Woolley. Gaffin wrote five articles in this period, one of which was his contribution to the definition of the relationship between systematic and biblical theology.<sup>29</sup> He also wrote "The Holy Spirit and Charismatic Gifts."<sup>30</sup> This was the first of what would total by the end of his career some twenty-two articles and books on the theme of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Gaffin continued to provide his scholarly insights to the OPC on these same topics, as he also served on the Committee on Baptism of the Holy Spirit (1975–76) and the Committee on Baptism and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1977). During this period, Gaffin also began his service on the OPC Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters (1973–87; chairman, 1986).

## 6. Professor, New Testament, 1978–86

In 1978, Dr. Gaffin was promoted to full professor. The years of 1978–86 may well have been his most prolific period. In 1978, he published his first book, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*.<sup>31</sup> The following year, he published *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in the New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>32</sup> In 1980, Gaffin published *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*.<sup>33</sup> In 1982 and 1983, he published his two-part influential articles entitled "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?"<sup>34</sup>

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29 "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology" in *WTJ* 38 (Spring 1976): 281–99.

30 In *The Holy Spirit Down to Earth* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1977), 3–25.

31 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

32 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in the New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).

33 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

34 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?—I," *WTJ* 44 (Fall 1982): 250–89. "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?—II," *WTJ* 45 (Fall 1983): 219–72.

This epoch of Dr. Gaffin's career also had several dramatic changes in faculty relationships that each in differing ways impacted his ministry and his teaching. In 1979, Dr. Samuel Logan joined the Westminster faculty, and Dr. Strimple departed to California as Westminster California opened. Dr. W. Robert Godfrey and Professor John Frame also shortly thereafter joined the new faculty in California.

In 1980, in spite of the theological support and friendship provided by Dr. Gaffin and several other members of the Westminster faculty, Norman Shepherd was removed as a professor by the Westminster Board of Trustees as the controversy raged over faith and works in the Reformed doctrine of justification. A number of the Westminster faculty and staff supported the termination of Professor Shepherd's position, including board member/Adjunct Professor W. Stanford Reid, Professor Robert Godfrey, Professor O. Palmer Robertson, and seminary librarian Arthur Kuschke. Shortly thereafter Professor Shepherd transferred his credentials from the OPC to the Christian Reformed Church. Despite theological differences between them that subsequently emerged, Gaffin and Shepherd have remained in conversation through the years.

In 1981, Leslie Sloat retired, Dr. Moisés Silva joined the faculty to teach New Testament, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church began. The year 1982 was the last of Dr. Clowney's service as Westminster's president and the beginning of George Fuller's service as president. President Fuller's years of leadership were 1982–91. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson joined the faculty in 1982 and served until 1998. The beginning of the PC (USA), the arrival of Dr. Dan McCartney to teach New Testament, and the departure of Professor Jay Adams from Westminster all occurred in 1983. Dr. Clowney left Dr. Gaffin's beloved OPC for the PCA in 1984, which was also the year when founding Westminster faculty member and OPC minister Paul Woolley died. In 1985, Old Testament professor Dr. Bruce Waltke joined the Westminster faculty.

In spite of the theological controversy, the many faculty changes and his extensive publica-

tions, Dr. Gaffin remained steady in his service to the OPC. During this period, he served on the Committee on Principles of Diaconal Ministry (1980); the Committee to Study the History and Development of the OPC (1982); the Committee on Hermeneutics (1984); the Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Office (1985–87). He also moderated the Fifty-first OPC General Assembly in 1984.

### 7. Professor, Systematic Theology, 1986–90

In 1986, Dr. Gaffin changed field committees at the seminary, moving from New Testament to systematic theology. If one keeps in mind his interest in biblical theology as a discipline, this is an understandable transition. Moreover, the departure of Norman Shepherd from the systematics department and Gaffin's recent intense reflection on justification, union with Christ, the history of salvation, and the *ordo salutis* emerging from his biblical-theological engagement with the scriptural teaching on justification by faith made this move reasonable. During this period, he had some twenty publications, including the republication of *The Centrality of the Resurrection as Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987.

Significant faculty changes again occurred during this time. In 1987, Dr. Gaffin's deeply respected teacher and friend Cornelius Van Til died. Dr. Gaffin preached the memorial service at the seminary. His sermon was entitled "The Scandal of the Cross" from 1 Corinthians 1:18–25.<sup>35</sup> Dr. William Barker joined the faculty in 1987 to teach church history and later to serve as dean, and in 1989, Dr. William Edgar joined the faculty to

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35 Reflecting on what seemed to be Dr. Van Til's penchant to go it alone, Dr. Gaffin explained, "But we should not miss his intention. His desire is not to turn the Reformed tradition into a sect, nor a ghetto mentality that wants to cut off Reformed believers from other believers and churches. The point is not that the Reformed tradition has found some kind of perfection and can no longer grow. Nor that Reformed Christians have nothing to learn from other Christians and other traditions. Rather, he is concerned for what by God's grace the reformed tradition has received, and the burden and the responsibility that it places upon us." *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*, 227.

teach apologetics and to carry on the extraordinary legacy of founding faculty member Cornelius Van Til.

Dr. Gaffin's remarkable service to the OPC was evident again in this period as he served on the Committee to Study the Involvement of Men and Women in Places of Leadership in Worship Services (1988–89); and the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church (1990–91). He also resumed service on the OPC's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (1989–2004).

### 8. Professor, Biblical and Systematic Theology, 1990–99

In 1990, Dr. Gaffin's title changed from Professor of Systematic Theology to Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology. The change in title only made explicit what was the reality. During this time, Dr. Gaffin published over twenty articles as well as the book *Calvin and the Sabbath*, released in 1998.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Gaffin again saw important changes in the Westminster community that he had now served for thirty-five years. In 1990, Dr. Scott Oliphant began to teach apologetics. In 1991, Professor Bruce Waltke left the faculty, President George Fuller concluded his leadership, and Samuel T. Logan began his presidency. The Logan years were 1991–2005. In 1992, Dr. Douglas Green joined the Old Testament faculty. In 1993, Old Testament professor Dr. Ray Dillard died. In 1994, Dr. Peter Enns joined the faculty. The year 1995 saw the retirement of Dr. Knudsen. In 1996, Professor Steve Taylor joined the faculty to teach New Testament. In 1997, long serving New Testament professor and model of diaconal service John Skilton retired, and professor of practical theology Dr. Tim Witmer joined the faculty. In 1998, Professor Harvie Conn retired, and Professor John Leonard joined the faculty. In 1998, Dr. Ferguson resigned to return to pastoral ministry in Scotland,

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36 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor), 1998.



although he has continued from time to time to teach courses at the seminary. Dr. Gaffin's scholarly service to the OPC continued as he was elected to the Committee to Study the Method of Admission to the Lord's Supper (1991–93).

### 9. Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, 1999–2008

In 1999, Dr. Gaffin assumed the title of the Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology. The first holder of the Krahe Chair had been Professor of Systematic Theology Sinclair Ferguson. During this final active decade of his service, Dr. Gaffin published over thirty articles and two books. The first book was entitled *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*<sup>37</sup>; and the second, *God's Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture*.<sup>38</sup>

Faculty changes again swirled around Dr. Gaffin whose service would reach forty-five years by the time of his full retirement from the Westminster classroom and faculty meetings. The year 1999 saw the death of Harvie Conn, as well as the arrival to the faculty of Old Testament professor Mike Kelly. Dr. Carl Trueman joined the faculty in 2001 to teach church history with the retirement of Clair Davis after thirty years of teaching at Westminster. In 2002, Professor Moises Silva left the seminary, and Dr. Jeff Jue joined the faculty, as well as Sandy Finlayson who entered the faculty as the seminary's librarian. In 2003, Dr. Lane Tipton was added to the faculty in systematics, as the successor to Dr. Gaffin in the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology. In 2005, the seminary's first president, Dr. Clowney, died. This same year, Dr. Sam Logan's presidency concluded, and Dr. Peter Lillback became president. Lillback's leadership years have been 2005 to the

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37 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006).

38 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *God's Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic, 2008).

present. In 2007, David Garner joined the faculty in systematic theology. In 2008, Professor Steve Taylor departed the seminary.

During 2006–8, controversy again broke out, centered on the writings of Old Testament Professor Peter Enns. Once again, Dr. Gaffin, Westminster's historic and stalwart defender of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, took a leading part in the controversy that centered on Professor Enns's approach to hermeneutics and doctrine of Scripture. After lengthy discussions, debates, and board and faculty votes, Professor Enns resigned in 2008. As a means of clarifying where Westminster Seminary and its board of trustees stand on the hermeneutical and doctrinal issues that emerged from this controversy, the "Affirmations and Denials" on the doctrine of Scripture were composed, debated, and adopted by board and faculty.<sup>39</sup> This document was proposed by President Lillback and written by Professors Gaffin and Poythress. It was engaged by the board and faculty and edited at length and ultimately adopted by the Westminster faculty and board. Thus, even during his final year of full-time service, Professor Gaffin played a pivotal role in the life of the seminary.

His service for the OPC continued as he labored on the Committee on the Doctrine of Justification (2004–6).

### 10. Professor Emeritus, Biblical and Systematic Theology, 2008–Present

As Dr. Gaffin became Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Systematic Theology in 2008, he continued to teach part-time, offering his much beloved course, Acts and Paul. So although retired, he was still not retired. Dare we say he was already retired, but not yet?

In 2009, the Westminster faculty saw the departure of New Testament professor Dan McCartney and the arrival of the accomplished biblical scholar and biblical theologian Dr. Greg Beale. And in 2011, the seventy-sixth name was added

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39 The Affirmations and Denials can be found on the Westminster Theological Seminary webpage at <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/affirmationsanddenials.html>.

to the Faculty Signature book when Dr. Brandon Crowe joined the faculty. Both Dr. Beale and Dr. Crowe join Dr. Poythress in the area of New Testament studies. The biblical theology and systematic courses taught by Dr. Gaffin continue to be carried by Dr. Oliphint, Dr. Garner, and Dr. Tipton. Thus the Gaffin legacy rests safely in these professors' careful commitment to Scripture and the great Westminster legacy that descends from Vos, Murray, and Gaffin to themselves. Moreover, I am confident that Dr. Gaffin's service to his church and to his seminary will continue until the Lord calls him to glory.

There have been several key emphases in the life work of Dr. Gaffin.<sup>40</sup> These are impossible to explore here. However, a careful reading of Dr. Gaffin's writings mark out twelve primary emphases: 1. The Doctrine of Scripture, 2. Union with Christ, 3. Hermeneutics, 4. Biblical Theology, 5. Salvation and the Work of Christ, 6. The *Ordo Salutis*, 7. The Holy Spirit, 8. Resurrection, 9. Eschatology, 10. Sabbath, 11. Ecclesiology, 12. Christian Ministry. For example, Dr. Gaffin consistently emphasizes the divine origin of Scripture. He writes,

The basic thrust ... is plain: Scripture, like Christ, is both truly human and truly divine. Yet in the case of Scripture, as for Christ, these two factors *are not equally ultimate*; the priority and originating initiative belong to the divine, not the human. Specifically, the Word, in his antecedent identity as the Word, became flesh; and God is the primary author of the Bible, in distinction from the secondary human authors.<sup>41</sup>

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40 In the full version of this paper, which is anticipated to be published subsequently in another context, there is at this point an extensive section that provides selections from Dr. Gaffin's writings to illustrate the primary emphases of his theology. An extensive listing of his published writings is also given along with each of these foci of Dr. Gaffin's writings.

41 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?—I," *WTJ* 44 (1982): 267.

### **Personal Reflections on the Ministry of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus Westmonasteriensis***

I have had the joy previously to celebrate Dr. Gaffin's long and fruitful career, as contributor to his *Festschrift* and as a planner of the endowed Gaffin lectures that actually took him by surprise, thanks to the help of Jean. But having been asked by *Ordained Servant* to write a tribute for Dr. Gaffin, it is my privilege to do so more fully here. I write in honor of Dr. Gaffin with deep personal respect and sincere gratitude for his ministry to the seminary, to the church, to his students, and to me.

On a personal level I am truly grateful for the many ways Dr. Gaffin has aided me in my call to serve our Lord. I've had the privilege to know him as my teacher, as an administrator of a Ph.D. area exam, as a fellow member of a Sunday School class, as a counselor and consoler in the midst of some very tense moments in my Presbytery exams, as a preacher at my ordination, and the first person I recognized at Abington Hospital many years ago on a Sunday in September 1981 who rejoiced with me when my first daughter was born.

I've known Dr. Gaffin as a faculty colleague, as a supporter in the seminary's development efforts, as a moderator of the OPC general assembly, as a fellow seminary representative at the World Reformed Fellowship, as a fellow stranded professor with Dr. Garner and Dr. Jue as we fellow-shipped for a week in the United Kingdom waiting for a volcanic cloud from Iceland to clear.

He has been a wise theologian in the midst of community-shaking theological controversy, an author I've read and from whom I've learned, a coauthor with whom I have labored, as well as a theological conversationalist on some long car rides, not to mention a fellow Phillies fan.

Finally, I thank God for the way that the Gaffin family has been an encouragement to so many in word and deed through their own personal suffering and grief. A moving witness to the Gaffins' faithful love for our Lord and his church was reported by those who saw Dick and Jean quietly setting up chairs for the congregation on



the first Sunday after the funeral of their daughter. Dr. Gaffin's personal and godly impact has been multiplied thousands of times more through family care, students taught, articles and books published and read, sermons and lectures given and heard, and wise decisions reached and counsel given to church, seminary, and Christians worldwide.

All of this helps us to understand how Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has practiced what he has taught and what he has written:

The pressing and promising task before the church today is to demonstrate unambiguously, in practice as well as proclamation, that at its core the gospel concerns not only the free and full remission of sin but the present reality of a new creation and eschatological life in Christ, the present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety, according to the inner man, and the redirection and reintegration of human life in all its aspects. The gospel is the gospel of the exalted Christ, the life-giving Spirit. This is one perspective on Pentecost the church cannot afford to lose.<sup>42</sup>

Thank you, Dr. Gaffin, for making sure the church has not lost sight of the gospel of Christ's life-giving Spirit on your long and faithful watch at Westminster.

As it is my privilege as the President of Westminster Seminary to confer the graduating students' degrees in Latin, the historic language of theology in the West, I would also like to confer this title upon you: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus Westmonasteriensis*, which translates as Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Westminster's Great Theologian of the Holy Scripture. We all congratulate you on your successful completion of this ministerial program, even if it has taken forty-five years to complete! 🍷

**Peter A. Lillback** serves as *president and professor of historical theology at Westminster Theological*

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<sup>42</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 122.

# ✦ Servant Thoughts

## Editorials

### On the Matter of Notes in Preaching

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2011<sup>1</sup>

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Should I use notes or should I not use notes in preaching? That is the question every preacher struggles with. A prior question will help to determine the answer: What are we seeking to achieve? Are we seeking good oral communication, including eye contact, rhythm, proportion, and passionate proclamation of God's Word? My answer then would be that whatever aid preachers need to achieve those goals, whether it is a full manuscript, full notes, a bare outline, or no notes at all, is what they should practice. There are advantages and disadvantages to each way. In most cases men will benefit from changing their use of notes as they grow in preaching experience. It is no doubt very helpful to begin with the discipline of writing a full manuscript,<sup>2</sup> although I do not think it wise to bring a full manuscript into the pulpit due to the difference between written and oral linguistic

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=236&issue\\_id=61](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=236&issue_id=61).

2 The late John Hills, Jr. recommended that the young preacher discipline himself to write out his sermons in full for the first five years of ministry. I have in my possession a box full of his manuscripts and outlines. Several sermons were written out in full even nine years after his ordination. His outline notes became briefer as the years wore on.

construction. Because each preacher is different in training and disposition, I think dogmatism in this matter is unwarranted. To insist that one cannot preach properly with notes is like saying a conductor cannot conduct properly with his score in front of him. The world's best conductors sometimes use scores and sometimes not.

I continue to use notes because I find that they help me to stick to the point, but I use no more than basic notes so as to remain free in the preaching moment. Messrs. Story and Cotta make excellent cases for the two opposite poles of the discussion: a full manuscript or no manuscript at all. I will present, not so much a compromise, as a third way. A slavish commitment to either extreme is simply unsupportable biblically and practically.

#### Orality and the Use of Manuscripts<sup>3</sup>

Along with the mental discipline of writing well, the preacher must develop the finest oral skills as a herald of the Word. This assumes accurate exegesis of the meaning of the message given by the King. But the church also must not ordain men to preach who have not mastered good public speaking skills.

This is why it is imperative to distinguish between oral and written language. Manuscript preachers tend to blur this distinction. The written is for the eye, while the oral is for the ear.<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle: "English composition for speaking to hearers and English composition for private reading are almost like two different languages, so that sermons that 'preach' well 'read' badly."<sup>5</sup> Transcribed sermons of preachers who use few or no notes read very differently than manuscripts that were first written to be read. Seminary training makes us book, text, and lecture oriented. This indispensable fountain, from which the content of preach-

3 Portions adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 378–83.

4 Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 162.

5 Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 345.

ing flows, however, must not be confused with preaching itself, which occurs only in the preaching moment. Furthermore, whatever aid to the memory the preacher may bring into the pulpit, this is not the sermon. The sermon is the Word proclaimed in the presence of the congregation.

No matter what aid the preacher brings into the pulpit, the results of his study must be put in oral form. Homiletics is the art of translating the meaning of the text, in the context of systematic and biblical theology, into a form designed to transform God's people. It is a truism that the preacher is not to bring the results of his study into the pulpit without organizing them to proclaim to God's people. Contrary to popular misconception, extemporaneous preaching is fully prepared for, but exclusively oral in presentation, not rooted verbatim in a written manuscript. As a scholar of orality, Walter Ong properly asserted that "the written text of the New Testament itself is ordered to . . . oral activity."<sup>6</sup> In his monumental history of the reading and preaching of Scripture, Hughes Oliphant Old makes a convincing case that the entire Bible is essentially a preaching document.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the oral form preceded the written.

Let me suggest some ways in which we can prepare for preaching that will preserve both good order and orality. It may be helpful to view notes, whether referred to in the pulpit or not, like a full calendar of a week's activities. The details of what is to be accomplished are there, but there is space in between events to allow flexibility. So sermon notes should be structured as a set of visual cues, not a manuscript to be read or memorized. It may be useful to use two manuscripts, if necessary: one is a written summary of your exegesis and application put in the order of your sermon; the other is a one page abbreviated form of this for the pulpit.

Near the end of my first decade of ministry,

I had a summer intern who had the latest laptop computer. He had taken all of his seminary notes with this new device. I had just begun using a simple Apple 2C, which was a dinosaur compared to his. Of course, he prepared his sermon notes on his word processor and suggested I try the same. After some resistance, I was prevailed upon by my intern to try word processing my sermons. I did so much to my regret. My practice had been to write my sermons in full five-page outlines with my beloved Mont Blanc fountain pen, highlighting the main points in yellow and red. I had learned early on not to be a slave to my notes, but the notes I brought into the pulpit were very full.

My only experience with word processing had been creating documents to be read, not preached. Book reviews, along with essays, periodical articles and the like, require an attention to grammatical and structural detail which preparation for oral presentation does not. In fact, as I learned through my first painful experience, preparing for preaching with precise writing can be deadly to oral delivery, if that is the manuscript used in the pulpit. That was my approach to my first word-processed sermon. Because I had put so much effort into composition I felt naturally tied to the manuscript. For written productions one must be, because that is the final medium of communication. After one awkward sermon, I vowed never to use the computer again for sermon preparation.

It was not until half a decade later that I made the attempt again. My doctoral work involved reflection on the nature of orality and preaching in connection with the electronic media. Using a much more sophisticated computer, I realized the potential of putting the notes for an entire sermon on one page so that I could avoid turning pages in the pulpit. I began by rewriting old five-page sermons in the one page format. This enabled me to pay attention to the manuscript as a vehicle of oral communication rather than as a written record of a sermon. The highlighting and underlining had saved me from becoming a slave to the paper. Now I reworked the outline with directness and oral impact in mind. Few complete sentences, fewer quotations, highlighting vivid phrases in

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6 Walter Ong, review of *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* by William A. Graham, *America* (Mar. 4, 1989): 204.

7 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 1, The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19–110.

italic bold; everything was aimed at direct communication of God's Word to the congregation. The difference was dramatic. But it really all began with my reflection on my use of media, in this case the printed word, the written word, the word processed word, and the preached word. All of this was inspired by a passion to be a better preacher, a goal to which every preacher should never stop aspiring.

Everyone interested in extemporaneous preaching should consult Richard S. Storrs's classic, *Preaching without Notes*.<sup>8</sup> Extemporaneous preaching requires as much, if not more, careful preparation as does preaching with a manuscript, just a different kind of preparation. Clyde Fant's *Preaching for Today* (1975) is especially helpful in this department.<sup>9</sup> He deals with some of the unique mechanics of oral preparation. Write like you speak; do not speak like you write. If you have ever read a written transcript of one of your sermons, you will be horrified at how badly it reads. That is as it should be, as I noted above. Listening to your sermons on tape with the manuscript you used is a helpful exercise. This does not mean that poor speech patterns or poor grammar is acceptable orally. While no single method is universally helpful for each preacher, Fant's point is that we must prepare *orally*.

This means that it is useful to prepare sermons "out loud."<sup>10</sup> After exegesis and refinement of the theme of the text, begin communicating it out loud, and then write down the main points of the logic of what you have said. Fant calls this the "rough oral draft." Then go back after more reflection on exegesis and the rough draft and make a "final oral draft." From this, he recommends a final one page "sermon" brief.<sup>11</sup> Those who use limited notes in the pulpit, or only pay attention to highlighted full notes, already practice something like this. Implementing the crucial distinction

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8 Richard S. Storrs, *Preaching without Notes* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875).

9 Fant, *Preaching for Today*, 159–73.

10 *Ibid.*, 165.

11 *Ibid.*, 166–69.

between written and oral will vary from preacher to preacher.

Furthermore, each genre of biblical literature requires a different approach, a varied use of outlines and structure. The recent discovery of the oral structure of ancient texts can be of immeasurable help to the preacher. Especially helpful in this area are the works of Robert Alter and J. P. Fokkeman on the literary structures of biblical narrative and poetry.<sup>12</sup> For example, the systematic announcement of "headings" may be helpful in preaching from the logically argued epistles of Paul, but the narrative of Judges will be better preached by following the story sequence and leaving the logical divisions "invisible" in the preaching moment. The distinction between oral and written logic should not be exaggerated in a way to diminish logic. No one can think, speak, or write, without it. But the logic of narrative and the logic of epistles are quite different. They require different ways of ordering our thoughts. The text itself dictates this. Much more work needs to be done with this area of homiletics.

General preparation is crucial for good preaching. Reading widely on a daily basis will furnish the mind with ideas and the words to express them. With all that we have said about the importance of orality, it needs to be emphasized that private reading, deep reading, broad reading, and constant reading of Scripture is absolutely essential to the development of the mind and spirit of the preacher. As Joel Nederhood counsels, "Be addicted to reading."<sup>13</sup> This does not contradict the need to distinguish between written and oral *in the pulpit*. Being a good writer enhances logical and rhetorical skills in public speech.<sup>14</sup>

One of the best ways to develop oral skill is

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12 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Jan Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999); *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

13 Joel Nederhood, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age," class notes, Westminster Theological Seminary in California, 1990.

14 Storrs, *Preaching without Notes*, 45ff.

to read aloud and pay attention to the best oral presentation outside the pulpit. Baseball radio announcers are an excellent example of vivid speech which engages the listener. In a visual age their skills are tested to the limit. They are well paid to hold attention, with words which stimulate the imagination so that the hearer visualizes the game. These announcers were often English majors in college and former English teachers. “That hard grounder to the short stop ate him up.... He roped one over the head of the second baseman into right field.... He crushed that one and sent it into the stands in center field.... He had a notion, but checked his swing.... A one-two-three inning ending double play.”

The preacher must cultivate a love for the English language, especially the spoken word. Ransack the best dictionaries. Above all *read aloud*. Choose the best poetry and prose and read it aloud. Read the Psalms, George Herbert, Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare, the essays and stories of G. K. Chesterton, Hillaire Belloc, Stephen Leacock, Christopher Morley, *aloud!* The *King James Version* is best suited to the practice of reading Scripture aloud, not because it is a perfect or even the best translation for the modern world, but because it was produced in a golden age of orality, the Elizabethan Age of Shakespeare. In this period, the literary and the oral achieved an almost perfect balance. One thing is certain: the *Authorized Version* was translated to be read aloud in churches as the subtitle indicates: “appointed to be read in churches.” This did not mean silent, private reading.

Advocates of manuscript preaching rightly extol the verbal discipline this regimen exacts from the preacher. Although not advocating manuscript preaching *per se*, I would insist that the discipline of precise, well-ordered, and interesting speech can only be learned through deep reading and careful writing. One of the best aids in this discipline is poetry, one of our God’s favorite literary forms, as we learn from Scripture. So, reading the best English poetry from Geoffrey Chaucer to Robert Frost aloud, with special attention to the Psalms, will imbue the preacher with the best equipment

in thought and speech.

Preachers should let the beauty of the best of the richest language in history sink into their oral memories. Words are the preacher’s tools. He should seek to become a wordsmith in forging his sermons. As Marshall McLuhan said, “language itself is the principal channel and view-maker of experience for men everywhere.”<sup>15</sup> “The spoken word involves all the senses dramatically.”<sup>16</sup> The preached Word is the most powerful “view-maker” of all, as it corrects the idolatrous “view-making” propagated by the electronic media, and inculcates the redemptive “view-making” of the heavenly reality of the incarnate Logos.

English, American or British, is an amazingly versatile language. It is always evolving. The preacher must pay careful attention to the language that people speak every day. The danger, of course, is the temptation to be trendy or vulgar. But one need not compromise grammatical correctness, or good taste, in order to use the people’s English well.

Much of what I have said above about appreciating and cultivating orality may seem to indicate that I see no place for the full manuscript. That is not the case as long as the manuscript is itself a document written in oral form and used in the pulpit in a way that does not impede vital visual connection with the congregation. Something else a manuscript should not restrict is the openness of the preacher in the preaching moment to add or subtract from the manuscript as the moment demands.

On the other hand, one of the great weaknesses of preaching without notes is straying from the theme of the text and expanding minor points in a distracting way. It is all too easy to become so enamored of one’s own facility in speaking without notes that the preacher forgets that his expansion of the sermon may lose or even bore his hearers in

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15 Marshall McLuhan, “Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters,” in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, eds. Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szlarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 154.

16 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 77–78.

the process.

With or without notes, a preacher must not be without the presence of the author of the Word.<sup>17</sup> The preacher must trust the Holy Spirit in the preaching moment. The greatest folly of our age is trusting the means, the techniques of doing things. The means of preaching, unlike any other form of public speaking, is uniquely dependent on God's blessing. Reformed preachers know the folly of trusting the Spirit without preparation; but we need to deal with the equal folly of trusting our preparation without trusting the Spirit, as if the effect of preaching were a merely human production. Preacher, pray for the only power that can make the medium you use effective: the power of God's presence in your preaching through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. ☺

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<sup>17</sup> This paragraph/section is adapted from Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 384–85.

## Seven Lessons for Missionaries from the Ministry of John Paton

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by **Gregory Edward Reynolds**

As I began church planting in the mid-1990s, I was profoundly inspired and instructed by the autobiography of missionary John G. Paton, missionary to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=279&issue\\_id=69](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=279&issue_id=69).

what then were the New Hebrides (Vanuatu).<sup>2</sup> The substance of this article was presented to a local ministerium, made up largely of home missionaries from several different Reformed communions in 1997.

### 1. Have Faith in the Power of the Gospel

John Paton was an ordinary man with extraordinary faith in the power of God and the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born on the farm at Braehead in the parish of Kirkmahoe, Scotland, on May 24, 1824. His father was a stocking manufacturer “in a small way” (3). From about age five, Paton was reared in the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Dumfries (15). The Reformed ministry and preaching of “genuine, solemn, lovable Covenanter” Pastor John McDermid, nurture in the Shorter Catechism, and the example of a pious father—“we were ruled more by love than by fear”—provided the soil in which a deep desire to spread the gospel grew (15–18). After taking a teaching position, he matriculated in the College in Glasgow, but had to leave due to poverty before completing his first year (28).

After another stint at teaching, Paton began working for the Glasgow City Mission (32). After gaining only seven churchgoers in one year, he was about to be sent by the directors to another district, but he pleaded for six months more because he “had an invincible faith that the good seed sown would soon bear blessed fruit” (34). They agreed, and by the end of the allotted six months, five to six hundred attended regularly. Paton learned early on in his ministry to endure much hardship in the inner city. His central task buoyed his spirit.

The hearty singing of hymns by my Mission Choir gave zest and joy to the whole proceedings. Of other so-called “attractions” we had none, and needed none, save the sincere

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<sup>2</sup> *John G. Paton, D.D., Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography*, edited by his brother, Rev. James Paton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891). This is the edition reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust and is still in print in hardcover, \$24.00. All page numbers refer to this edition. Fleming H. Revell published a two volume set, and two volumes in one.



proclamation of the Good Tidings from God to men. (40)

I was sustained by the lofty aim which burned all these years bright within my soul, namely,—to be qualified as a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, to be owned and used by Him for the salvation of perishing men. (51)

During this period of mission work Paton attended the University of Glasgow, the Reformed Presbyterian Divinity Hall, and medical classes at the Andersonian College, to complete his education. He was also ordained an elder in the church that oversaw the mission (51).

In 1858, at age thirty-four, Paton was sent by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland's Heathen Missionary Committee to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), east northeast of Australia. "The wail and the claims of the Heathen were constantly sounding in my ears" (53). He responded to the call by first going to the island of Tanna from 1858 to 1862. Then, forced to leave under threat of death, he and a fellow missionary couple were rescued by a ship from the London Missionary Society (217–19) and brought safely to the nearby island of Aneityum. From there he was persuaded to go to Australia and Scotland to raise support for the mission.

He was not able to return to the New Hebrides until 1866, when he went with his second wife, Margaret "Maggie" Whitecross, to the neighboring island of Aniwa, where they would remain and eventually enjoy the fruit borne by John's early sufferings. They would witness the profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ by the entire island of Aniwa. They would remain until 1883, when they would move to Victoria, Australia, where Maggie died in 1905, and he in 1907. Further details, which I will only give a sampling of in the remaining topical survey of lessons for missions, will require the reading of this almost 500-page account.

In 1885 (two years after his return from the mission field in 1883), Paton was feted at a garden party by C. H. Spurgeon as "The King of the Cannibals" (435). He also met two U.S. presi-

dents—Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland. But for Paton, all the glory went to his savior. His autobiography closes in 1897 when he was age seventy-three. He died on January 28, 1907, at age eighty-two.

## 2. Imitate Our Crucified Savior

John Paton exhibited the self-denial of the cross of Jesus Christ in his life and ministry in a variety of ways. He was called to endure the slights, opposition, and calumnies of fellow Christians. He was even criticized for leaving Tanna and going to Australia (223–24).

Even before he was sent, the Lord had formed a faithful determination in him. His predecessors John Williams and James Harris were clubbed to death and eaten minutes after landing in 1839 (75). Mr. Dickson, a fellow Christian in Glasgow, warned, "The Cannibals! You will be eaten by Cannibals!" The cannibals not only ate enemies but their own widows (121). Paton responded, "If I can live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms" (56).

He always responded with kindness, but also realistically. In responding to ill treatment Paton records:

Having no means of redress, and feeling ourselves entirely at their mercy, we strove quietly to bear all and to make as little of our trials as possible; indeed, we bore them all gladly for Jesus' sake. All through these sorrows, our assurance deepened rather than faded, that if God only spared us to lead them to love and serve the same Lord Jesus, they would soon learn to treat us as their friends and helpers. That, however, did not do away with the hard facts of my life—being now entirely alone amongst them, opposed by their cruelty at every turn, and deceived by their unfailling lies. (101)

On one occasion the natives told "Missi," as they called Paton, that one of Queen Victoria's men-of-war had sailed into the harbor, and they



feared that the captain was a kind of god and would punish them for stealing Paton's things. Paton agreed, and shortly stolen items began to appear on his door step (101–2).

Unlike the myth of the noble savage, still alive today, Paton found, that though these South Pacific islanders were dressed like Adam and Eve in Eden, they were “exceedingly ignorant, vicious, and bigoted, and almost void of natural affection” (86). But the white men with whom they had regular contact in Port Resolution, instead of improving them made them worse.

The Sandalwood Traders are as a class the most godless of men, whose cruelty and wickedness make us ashamed to own them as our countrymen. By them the poor defenceless Natives are oppressed and robbed on every hand; and if they offer the slightest resistance, they are ruthlessly silenced by the musket or revolver. (86)

Paton experienced many betrayals at the hands of these traders, but worse was the desire for revenge that they instilled in the natives, making his mission work all the more difficult. His commitment to love the natives stood in sharp contrast with the profit motive of the traders (115). Paton proved to be a very different kind of white man.

Paton's response to extreme hardship is truly remarkable. In 1859, shortly after his arrival on Tanna, he lost his wife, Mary Ann Robson, and three month old first born son, Peter, to tropical fever.

Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me; as for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows.... Oh, the vain yet bitter regrets, that my dear wife had not been left on Aneityum till after the unhealthy Rainy Season!... We incurred this risk which never should have been incurred; and I only refer to the matter thus, in the hope that others may take warning.

Stunned by the dreadful loss on entering the

field of labor to which the Lord Himself had so evidently led me, my reason seemed for a time almost to give way.... But I was never altogether forsaken. The ever-merciful Lord sustained me. (79)

Despite overwhelming grief, he carried on under constant threat of his life from native animosity and disease, eventually losing everything and escaping with his life in 1862.

My earthly all [sic] perished, except the Bible and the translation into Tannese.... Often since have I thought that the Lord stripped me thus bare of all these interests, that I might with undistracted mind devote my entire energy to the special work soon to be carved out for me, and of which at this moment neither I or anyone had ever dreamed. At any rate, the loss of my little Earthly All, though doubtless costing me several pangs, was not an abiding sorrow like that which sprang from the thought that the Lord's work was now broken up at both stations, and that the Gospel was for the time driven from Tanna. (220–21)

It is important to note that Paton did not glorify his suffering, only his faithful Savior. He was certainly more like the Apostle Paul than most.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. (Phil. 3:7–8)

Few are called to suffer such loss. None should seek it or glory in it as a kind of martyrdom; but each of us must be willing, should the Lord call us to experience what Paul and Paton did. When criticized for leaving Tanna in 1862, Paton responded:

I regard it as a greater honour to live and work for Jesus, than to be a self-made martyr. God knows that I did not refuse to die; for I stood at the post of duty, amid difficulty and danger,

till all hope had fled, till everything I had was lost, and till God in answer to prayer sent a means of escape. I left with a clear conscience, knowing that in doing so I was following God's leading, and serving the Mission too. To have remained longer would have been to incur the guilt of self-murder in the sight of God. (223)

### **3. Be Steadfast in the Ordinary Duties of Ministry**

John Paton was steadfast in the ordinary duties of his ministry. He preached and taught the Word everywhere he went. He steadfastly kept the Sabbath, promoted the means of grace, and taught the Bible and catechisms.

Paton also learned several native languages from scratch and translated the Bible into them. During the four years that Paton was away from the New Hebrides, he tirelessly raised funds for the mission, often against strong opposition.

### **4. Exercise Patience since the Fruits of Ministry Often Take Time to Appear**

The fruits of John Paton's ministry came slowly at first, but eventually became a great harvest.

One of the early fruits of the New Hebrides Mission was Abraham, a converted cannibal of Aneityum, faithful unto death (106–7, 151, 171). The reality of his conversion was demonstrated in many ways. When circumstances became dangerous on Tanna, Paton suggested that Abraham and his wife should consider going back to their island. Abraham would not hear of it, “Missi, I remain with you of my own free choice and with all my heart. We will live and die together in the work of the Lord. I will never leave you while you are spared on Tanna” (151). Shortly after this, Abraham prayed passionately for Paton, his wife, and the ministry. Paton records the prayer and then comments, “In this manner this great simple soul poured itself out to God; and my heart melted within me as it had never done under any prayer poured from the lips of cultured Christian men” (171).

### **5. Develop a Wide Circle of Co-laborers and Supporters**

John Paton developed a wide circle of co-laborers and supporters in a truly catholic spirit. He was not alone in his mission because he understood himself to be part of a worldwide visible organization—the church. The Lord enabled Paton to use his time away from the mission field to lay a foundation of spiritual and financial support that would last for decades. His son Frank, one of six who lived, would carry on the work.

Support came not only from Australia and Britain, but also from America.

### **6. Learn from Past Mistakes**

John Paton learned from past mistakes. For example, on a very practical level, he learned that living too low and near the ocean on the islands exposes to disease, especially during the rainy season. So after a fatal mistake, he built up higher, where there is a breeze, to avoid the “ague and fever” (78).

After the loss of several missionaries' lives and the near loss of his own due to no means of escape during times of danger, Paton raised money to buy a missionary supply ship. First was the *Dayspring* in 1863 (229); the second *Dayspring (Paragon)* in 1874 (387); and the *Daylight* in 1897 (441).

### **7. Demonstrate the Power and Love of God in Contrast to Idols**

John Paton sought to demonstrate the power and kindness of the true and living God in contrast to the idols of the New Hebridians. So he leaned much on his God in prayer. The son of an old “Inland Chief” fell sick. In good pagan fashion, the chief blamed it on “the Worship,” reminding us of the need for Augustine's *The City of God*, with its apologia for Christianity not being at fault for the fall of Rome. The chief threatened to murder the missionaries if his son died. With much prayer and suitable medicine the boy recovered. The chief became devoted to the Patons (320).

In sum, the very return of Paton to the islands, where he came so close to losing his life, testified

to the natives that he sincerely loved them and desired their everlasting welfare.

One especially poignant instance of the demonstration of God's power was in the digging of a well on Aniwa. This, Paton records, "broke the back of Heathenism in Aniwa" (345). The lack of mountains on the flat coral island of Aniwa meant there was little rain. Thus, there was little potable fresh water. So, Paton proposed to the old chief and his fellow chief, who seemed to be earnestly inquiring about the religion of Jesus, that he would dig a well, and see if God would bless them with fresh water (346). From a human perspective it was an almost impossible task to dig so deep. The natives thought this foolish, since rain never comes up from the earth (348). "And the phrase 'living water,' 'living water,' kept chiming through my soul like music from God, as I dug and hammered away" (349). As the water came bubbling out of the ground, Paton declared to the amazed people that this was Jehovah's gift to them (351). On the next sabbath the chief gathered the people and declared that Jehovah who brought water from the earth had done what the chief's gods could never do, so he would now be a follower of Jehovah God (354–55).

Let every man that thinks with me go now and fetch the idols of Aniwa the gods which our fathers feared and cast them down at Missi's feet. Let us burn and bury and destroy these things of wood and stone, and let us be taught by the Missi how to serve the God who can hear, the Jehovah who gave us the well, and who gave us every other blessing, for He sent his Son Jesus to die for us and bring us to heaven. (355)

Thus, a new era of salvation had dawned on that remote island in the New Hebrides.

Paton's tale is a great adventure story, but an adventure, unlike so many modern exploits, with a grand purpose: to bring good news to some of the most culturally and spiritually impoverished people on earth. It is a tale every missionary, at home and abroad, must read. 📖

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## John, the Media Ecologist: Why I Am a Media Ecologist

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

"I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face," explained the Apostle John (3 John 13–14).

The Apostle John, in a simple but profound way, practiced media ecology in the first century. But, what is media ecology? you may ask.

Media Ecology is the study of the relationship of media to their cultural environment. *Ecology* is from the Greek οἶκος (*oikos*) for house, and deals with the management of households and other realms as interconnected environments or systems. Media ecology focuses on the critical analysis of media as environments and as part of the larger environment or cultural context. Secondly, media ecology deals with management or stewardship which the analysis of media warrants.<sup>2</sup>

For the Christian, media ecology is an aspect

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=282&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=282&issue_id=70).

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 152. A fine example of this stewardship applied to preaching is T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

of the general stewardship of all of life in this present world. Such stewardship is an aspect of what is enjoined by Paul in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” This specifically Christian duty, therefore, involves a critical awareness of the ways in which each of the media affect us and our cultural environment—our various relationships; and finding ways to overcome any tendency we discover in media to conform us to this world. Simply put, media ecology is a stewardship of the God-given gift of communication that distinguishes humanity as his image-bearers.

Many people mistakenly perceive media ecology to be an entirely negative discipline. Hence the pejorative label Luddite is often used to describe us. But, as I’ve explained elsewhere, unless someone catches me smashing computers because they threaten my livelihood—as was the case with nineteenth-century weaver Ned Ludd, after whom this epithet is named—I cannot be fairly called a Luddite. John did not reject letter writing as a medium of communication. He simply understood that it was no substitute for the face to face communion of persons. The word communication implies communion. Depending on the medium of communication, the communion of persons is more or less facilitated. Community is related to the same root. The quality of our communion and the communities of which we are a part are formed, for good or ill, by the media we use and the larger media environment of which we are inescapably a part.

But how are we to understand the pen and ink as media? These, along with all inventions and technologies, are “extensions of man,” as Marshall McLuhan would describe them. They are the product of our creativity as God’s image bearers. In this sense the entire created order is an extension of the triune God. Not emanations, mind you, but extensions in the sense that God’s character and acts are revealed in them.

To shun criticism of technology, while claiming that various inventions are just tools, is to shun

wisdom. Wisdom is often defined as the proper use of tools. Proper use, in turn, requires the critical skills of identifying liabilities and benefits through critical analysis, as I have defined it above. Another way of understanding this critical process is suitability. As a media ecologist seeking to be a good steward of media this means that we will not seek to use pen and ink, or any other technology, to do what only personal presence can do. The apostle John understood the benefits and liabilities—or the suitability—of pen and ink, and acted accordingly. The maturing Christian is called to do the same.

### **A Noteworthy Anniversary**

In this, the one hundredth anniversary of Marshall McLuhan’s birth, it is noteworthy that so many within and outside the church are becoming aware of the significance of his contribution to understanding media. The subject I began studying, speaking, and writing about over two decades ago, is now, for the first time since the 1960s, becoming more popular. Back then Joel Nederhood and Neil Postman were among the small group who understood the importance of McLuhan’s unique insights into the effects of the electronic environment upon culture as a whole. Back in 1990, Nederhood was the only one I knew within the evangelical and Reformed church who really grasped the importance of understanding media. There was, of course, no shortage of content critique among evangelicals. But that is not what McLuhan wanted us to see. He wanted us to see what the media themselves are and how each medium and the sum total of media alter the messages they communicate. A good example of content criticism is the way movies are rated, by evangelicals and the population in general, according to the presence of violence, sex, and foul language. A more sophisticated version of this would be worldview criticism. But, legitimate as these concerns may be, they do not step back to look at the nature of the medium itself and ask, what is TV, or cinema, or the Internet? This is the matter to which McLuhan wished to awaken us.

But, as encouraging as the renewal in popularity of (and in many cases a genuine appreciation for) McLuhan's thought may be, the real question remains: Will Christians be willing to do the hard work of discerning the patterns of the new media environment and take appropriate steps to protect biblical truth as it is embodied in the church's worship and government, and in the lives of God's people? Christians are called to be transformed by intellectual and spiritual renewal. To shun this responsibility is to remain in the default position of fallen humanity. If we are not wise stewards, our tools will shape us and our relationships with God, his church, other people, and his world. And this shaping will go largely unnoticed and thus unchallenged.

Let's look briefly at the uniqueness of McLuhan's insights into the nature of electronic media and at some ways in which his insights can help us face the challenge.

### Marshaling McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan's entire pedagogy—including his puns and probes—was aimed at awakening sleep walkers to their media environment.

Marshall McLuhan didn't mince words when he observed: "Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot." The term "idiot" is only *apparently* uncharitable. The original Greek word (ἰδιώτης 1 Cor. 14:24 "unlearned," 2 Cor. 11:6 "untrained in speech") indicated ignorance of a particular language. The point is that, as a culture, we are largely ignorant of what we are doing with media, or more precisely, what the media are doing to us. That too was McLuhan's point—technological ignorance.<sup>3</sup>

Such ignorance is dangerous. Just as a fish is largely unaware of his watery environment, so we

are largely unaware of our electronic environment. If the water is polluted, the fish dies. But, unlike fish, we are gifted with the ability of doing something about our man-made environments. This bedrock conviction of McLuhan came, I believe, from his basically Christian view of man as *imago dei*. He insisted, "There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening."<sup>4</sup> Mere contemplation and awareness is not enough, however. Action must be taken to navigate the new environment. Like the fishermen in Edgar Allan Poe's "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841), to survive the ocean vortex one must observe the patterns of its forces and act accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Know where the off button is and use it.<sup>6</sup>

Many people seem to think that if you talk about something recent, you're in favor of it. The exact opposite is true in my case. Anything I talk about is almost certainly to be something I'm resolutely against, and it seems to me the best of opposing it is to understand it, and then you know where to turn off the button.<sup>7</sup>

Far from advocating the move from print culture to electronic culture, McLuhan encouraged us to take the blessings of literacy seriously. Hidden in the uncharted sea of McLuhan's words of the continuous text of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (and leaving the false impression of uncritical enthusiasm about the electronic environment) are

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4 Marshall McLuhan, "McLuhan Probes," in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, eds. Sanderson and Macdonald (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1989), 219; Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 25.

5 Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1951), 43, 45.

6 Bruce W. Powe quotes McLuhan without attribution in "A McLuhan Symposium," in *Marshall McLuhan The Man and His Message*, eds. Sanderson and Macdonald, 120. It appears to come from a 1966 interview by Robert Fulford found in *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, eds. Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003).

7 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*, Stephanie McLuhan and David Staines, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003), 102.

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3 Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 279 (quoting Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964], 18).



these startling, but almost entirely ignored, words: “Far from belittling the Gutenberg mechanical culture, it seems to me that we must work to retain its achieved values.”<sup>8</sup>

Another important element of McLuhan’s essentially Christian anthropology is his consistent disparagement of Gnosticism, a denial of the value of embodied existence. For McLuhan this was one of the liabilities of electronic media. It contradicts the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> “Discarnate” was a favorite word McLuhan used to describe the condition created by the electronic environment. Along the lines of the Apostle John’s concern for his flock is my concern that because of this tendency to disembodied existence (discarnation) we must ask some hard questions of ourselves regarding every relationship in our lives. And this is not only negative. Criticism in this sense is an exercise in understanding, not negativity. So, we should ask, how does my involvement with this particular medium enhance or detract from my relationship with God, his Word, his people, the church, public worship, my family, people I work with, my neighbors, and God’s world? For example, I once gave a talk on media ecology to a small group of seminary students. I began by saying, “Please turn off your cell phones, because I don’t want anything to come between you and me.” How often do our gadgets get between us and others?

Another set of questions should involve the ways that media, as well as all technologies, change my perception of the world around me, including people and institutions. Meeting people in person who we have only known through the Internet, for example, is instructive in terms of assumptions that prove wrong. On the other hand, I may learn a lot about someone by a simple Internet search. Watching network news may alter our perception of the world in such a way that we become afraid to leave our homes or communities. The Internet, however, might give us a more accurate report of

what’s actually happening in Tahrir Square during the uprisings in Cairo, Egypt. The Internet may expand our knowledge of the world, but social networks may limit us to only those we know and actually narrow our view of the world.

Beyond this are profound questions of how electronic media have changed social structures, and what, if anything, we can do about it. Most people are not in a position to change these structures, but being aware of how access to information alters the institutions of our world enables us to see what we need to navigate. This was McLuhan’s goal. By observing the patterns of technological change we learn navigation skills. For example, a man who chooses not to participate in social networks may come to realize that, as a consequence, others know more about what’s going on in the lives of his friends than he does. By recognizing the way social networks function, he can find other ways to make sure he stays in touch.

It should be noted that my criticisms of a particular medium are not meant to be universal pronouncements, only my particular application of media ecology in my situation in life and with my unique sensibilities. In this sense, much media criticism falls into the category of Christian liberty. As Paul told the Corinthians, “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Cor. 10:23).

This is not say that absolute truth does not impinge on these questions. God’s law and the wisdom of his Word must be brought to bear on every area of the Christian life. Church officers must wrestle with the use of electronic media in public worship, in church discipline, and in shepherding God’s flock. Social networks, email, and the Internet are tending to subvert Presbyterian government. Officers must take loving, wise steps to overcome this tendency. Officers need to promote the kind of personal presence in church relations that forms the basis for other kinds of electronic interaction.

There are few black and white answers to the perplexing questions raised by the new electronic environment in which we live. But Christians have been given an infallible framework, the lens

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8 McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 135.

9 Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 166, 286–90.

of Scripture, for living in and interpreting God's world. We have also been given wisdom in the common culture about the history and nature of technology. Through these provisions of our God, I believe we can navigate this present age to the glory of God. That is why I am a media ecologist. My goal in this essay has been to sample the thinking I believe we should engage in to be good stewards of media. I have employed Marshall McLuhan as one very useful guide. He is by no means an infallible or sufficient guide, but a very good place to begin.

So the next time you take up pen and paper, your smart phone, or iPad, or view the world through the lens of a screen, think of the apostle John—weigh the benefits and the liabilities, and act accordingly. 🌐

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# Servant Interview

## Harold Leonard Dorman: Spokesman for Almighty God

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### An interview by Gregory E. Reynolds

It was a great privilege to interview Pastor Harold Leonard Dorman on Sunday, September 26, 2010. Harold has been in the ministry for over fifty-two years in Maine, the same congregation in two locations, first in Cornville and later moved to and renamed Skowhegan OPC in 1977. He was ordained back in 1958 in the Presbytery of New York and New England. He actually began ministering before his ordination in 1954, shortly after graduating from Westminster Theological Seminary. So, he has been laboring for over fifty-six years in all.

Harold was interviewed in the house of his son Ron Dorman, who is an elder in the church in Skowhegan, and with Harold's wife, Marjorie. Many thanks to Pat Clawson for taking the raw material of the transcript of this interview and arranging it in its present thematic format. Thanks also to David Veldkamp for transcribing the interview. Questions are in bold; answers are in roman type.

### The Beginnings

*Harold Dorman was born on July 4, 1917, in Hamden, Connecticut. (Italic sections are summaries of parts of the interview.)*

**Did you have anything to do with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hamden, Connecticut, in the early days?**

I became a part of the church in June 1938. Probably in March of that year, I went to a prayer meeting next door at the Shepherds' house. Marvin Derby had not yet been ordained to be the minister. Mr. Bebe asked me, "What does God want you to do?" And I said, "Well, God wants me to obey his commandments." I could see by the look on Mr. Bebe's face that wasn't what he wanted. So I told him I did come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I was absolutely sure that he was my Savior. That came about as the result of a meeting that was in town when Craig Long was the minister there. Mr. Shepherd took me there, and I sat down and listened, and the biggest word that came to my mind and stuck with it was that Jesus was my *substitute*. That made good sense to me. Mr. Long wanted to know if I would like a copy of the Gospel of John, and he gave it to me. I read it, and by the time I got to the end of it I knew that I belonged to the Lord. There was no question in my mind about that whatever.

We started in New Haven [Connecticut]. We were in a big church building for a while, but there was no way that we could afford to keep paying for that building, even though it was a huge building for probably \$15,000. But back then \$15,000 was a fortune! So we had to give it up. Then we moved upstairs over an office building on Orange Street in New Haven. We couldn't make the payments on it. The church was pretty poor, so we moved to different places.

Then I was off to the army for thirty-eight months. And in the army I found a church, Second Presbyterian, in Pensacola. It was Southern Presbyterian, and it didn't take them long to give me a job to teach young people. I don't remember that there was anything in what the minister preached that I didn't approve of.

When I got out of the army, I went to college. And that's where I met my wife. I went to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for four years. I graduated from there [in 1950], and then in the fall I went to Westminster Seminary and went

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=266&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=266&issue_id=67).

there three years.

### **When did you graduate from Westminster?**

In 1953. I came into the church in June 1938, two years after the OPC started. The thing that I missed the most is that I never met Dr. Machen.

### **Who were your favorite professors?**

I liked them all! I was a handy man, and I worked for all of them. I worked the least for Professor Murray. All I did was take care of his car one summer while he was over in Scotland. He wasn't an American citizen, so he had to go back to Scotland every so often. I did a lot of remodeling for Dr. Van Til in his house. One time I was working [at Van Til's house] and I accidentally put my hand down, and a drill poked a hole in my hand. Right away he was so pleased he could exercise his doctor's degree and give me a little medication. I got to know them in a way that you wouldn't from the classrooms.

And for Dr. Clowney it was the same thing. I even helped Professor Kline build his house. And let's see, who else? I put linoleum down in one of Professor Woolley's rooms, and Mrs. Woolley, she got down on her hands and knees and wanted to do a little bit of it next to me. She was not brought up to do labor; she was a member of [Russian] royalty, which of course, mystifies me.

### **Yes, that's not something we're familiar with here in America. Were there any books that you can remember reading that left a strong impression on you?**

Well, Professor Murray's books. I read quite a few of those. And Dr. Machen's books. And of course Van Til, too. I loved all of my professors. Dr. Van Til may have been my favorite.

### **The Church in Maine**

#### **How did you come all the way up here to Maine?**

The (Cornville) church had a vacancy; there was no minister here then. The Rev. (Charles) Stanton moved on to Lewiston or some other place, and so my sister, Emily, was instrumental in

getting me to come up here. It's not advisable, usually, to preach to people who are members of your family, but it worked out fine. They invited me to come, so I came up and preached to them (in Cornville). The church building had been vacant for a long time. So (Rev. Stanton) got a group of people together and had a congregation there. And then I came around and took over from where he left off, more or less.

#### **I noticed that between graduation in 1953 from Westminster and your ordination in 1958, there's a gap. So did you come back and preach?**

Well, actually, I got the feeling that they didn't want me up here because it was Mr. Stanton's area. But the Lord prevailed. So, in spite of it, I did become the minister there. I came in 1954, but it was 1958 before they (The Presbytery of New York and New England) actually ordained me.

#### **How did you survive financially during that time?**

Well, I'm a handyman, so I had no problem doing things to earn a little money. So I never went hungry. There were lots of empty churches when I came up to Maine. We met in South Solon, but rarely did we (meet) in a church. There was a little house that belonged to one of the families and they kind of renovated it a little so we could hold services there. But then, when they moved to Solon, for a little while I held services in the church on Main Street over there. But that didn't last too long. That's about twenty miles maybe, from my house to where the church was.

#### **Now, since 1977, you've been meeting right here in Skowhegan? Do you own that building?**

Yes. We bought it right away. It was a laundromat, and then I guess it became a garage where they fixed cars. So we had to put a new cement floor in it. I remember hauling away all the pieces of broken cement. But it made a good church for us.

*Elders of the church include son Ron, Myron Moody, Sr., John Hilton, and Freemont Moody.*

*From this point on in the interview, Ron contributed substantially.*

**Ron Dorman:** Back in the past there were quite a few people in the town of Cornville for whom you did baptisms [for their children], and you also married quite a few of the people in that area.

There was one family that wanted me to baptize their child, but they weren't members of the church. So I told them, "I can't do it."

**Ron:** You did funeral services for a lot of people.

Oh, a lot of funeral services. And people that I'd never heard of before—I got requests to do funeral services for them. But that's kind of dwindled down. See, back then there were fewer ministers. Now there are a lot of little churches all over the place. The Protestant Reformed Church caused us a problem. What happened, you see, the Protestant Reformed Church wanted to establish a church. And they wanted me to be in it, but I didn't want to be in it. Hyper-Calvinists are what they were, and I didn't feel comfortable with them, so I said no to them. They tried to have a church about ten miles down the vine from us, but that didn't work. They couldn't reach people. We've got to have a free offer of the gospel. God is sovereign; he knows who his people are. We know God will gather his children. We're only his instruments.

### **Presbytery**

**When you first got involved with the presbytery, what were meetings like?**

It certainly was small, but the presbytery was geographically bigger then. They cut it down to the northern and southern parts, more or less. Connecticut and Southern New York. Massachusetts and Maine were separate. The Presbytery in the past was small enough so we did have meetings of presbytery at Cornville.

**I remember you as a fixture. You always were right up front, and you were always there. I missed you when you were not able to come as**

**you got older and your eyesight failed. Thankfully you can still preach.**

I can drive twenty-five miles.

**Do you have memories of Professor Murray coming up here?**

I do remember Professor Murray coming up, and he'd stay with Emily and Myron. I remember him walking down the street by himself many times, exercising himself, I guess, out in the country a little bit.

**Did he ever preach at presbytery?**

Oh sure, he must have. And I know that it was mostly different from others. He was very dogmatic. And I know in his classes, when he taught us, and we had a test, we'd better make sure, if we were going to organize it, that we did it the way he did it.

He was a disciplined man. But I loved him and I got along fine with him. It was such a delight when I found out he found a wife and he was going to get married. (I never did know which eye was the glass eye and which was the real one.)

### **Ministry in Cornville**

**Ron:** You remember telling about how you used to go around the town of Cornville and pick up a lot of people to bring them to church? And you had about sixty people in vacation Bible school sometimes.

Yeah, we had pretty good vacation Bible schools. It was quite a job running around picking them all up, but I was glad to do it.

**Ron:** I remember you telling about sometimes you spent more money on gasoline going around picking people up to bring them to church than what came in the offering plate.

I certainly lost money running around to these outlying places. I remember one time on the South Solon I ran out of gas because some kids in the neighborhood had siphoned out my gasoline.

**Ron:** I guess what amazed me growing up was

how many hours you put in a week. You put in a lot of hours in preparation for church, and you also put in many hours doing handyman work, repairing people's washing machines and putting up a ceiling for somebody or working on fixing a neighbor's barn cleaner that got hit by lightning. So you were doing all those kinds of things to earn enough money. Like Paul, the tent-maker, you had a side job so you could support everything.

I didn't mind. It gave you a chance to get acquainted with people, too. You don't go into the ministry to make money. Twenty dollars a week, I guess, is what I first got. Of course, back then twenty dollars was much more than now. Go into the ministry because you feel that people need to know the truth.

**Ron: You remember how many services you used to do over there in Cornville?**

Well, at first it was only one—and in the afternoon. Two o'clock or something like that. That's the way it began. But then I changed it so that we could have a service in the morning. And I don't know how much longer it took, but I wanted one in the afternoon too. And sometimes, of course, I preached in other areas, like South Solon and Brighton even. There wasn't much up there, but we went up there with just a few people because Mr. Stanton had been in the habit of going to these different places. So I kind of followed him, but it wasn't very practical.

**Ron: You also had a service at the Barkers' boarding home for many years in the afternoon.**

That was interesting, too. I had a chance to talk to the boarders up there. The Barkers were members of our church.

**Ron: So you did a morning service, an afternoon service at the boarding home, then an evening service.**

That's right. It kept me busy.

**Ron: And we grew a lot of vegetables. We had a big garden.**

We used to have a big garden. In late years it's dwindled down. The deer used to come around and eat things up.

## **Hospital Chaplain**

**You're a chaplain over at Redington-Fairview General Hospital in Skowhegan?**

I've been a chaplain since 1972. So that makes thirty-eight years. There were no chaplaincies before that year. And so I'm one of the original chaplains, and many of the others have been long gone. But a lot of the ministers in town don't seem to make too much of it.

**How have the communities of Cornville and Skowhegan received you as a minister?**

The Reformed faith is not very well known or liked around here, so you don't get a very good response. I notice that when I go to the hospital as a chaplain there'll be lots of people say, "When I get out of here I'm going to come over to your church and listen to you." But it only happened once. And the poor man died. So he came, but he died shortly after.

**So your ministry at the hospital was really to spread the gospel, not necessarily because you expected people would come to church.**

I didn't figure I'd go there to proselytize people. But if they were happy with what I told them—my prayers or reading Scripture or answering questions—I enjoyed it. And I still do.

We go on a regular basis, but it's probably every two months or so. Most ministers are so busy they can't, but I don't have a big church with all these other things going on. I'm a little freer.

## **Ministry Wisdom**

**What's the thing you've found the most difficult about being a minister of the gospel?**

I guess I never thought about it that way. I take everything one day at a time.

**So that's why you've lasted for fifty-six years, then. You never look at the negative side of**

things.

I don't let those things get through to me. I'm not upset easily.

**I saw this little sign in your kitchen that read, "Don't worry, God is in charge."**

That's exactly true. I don't have to worry because God is sovereign and he's working everything for his own glory and according to his own ordained purposes. That's something I learned early.

When I was in the young people's group in New Haven I came into the youth group when Phyllis Bing spoke on the third question of the Shorter Catechism. And her brother, Elton, was the president of the young people. He wanted to know if I would be willing to take a turn. I didn't have the foggiest notion what I was getting into. I ended up with the seventh question of the Shorter Catechism. I'll tell you, it was an eye-opener. It really made me get a good solid foundation in the Reformed faith. I think I still have a copy of my message I gave for the seventh question, "What are the decrees of God?"

**When you were at presbytery recently, you were asked what recommendation you would have for young men entering the ministry. What advice would you give to them?**

First of all, I'd want to make sure they had some understanding that it wasn't going to be easy, because it isn't. But you don't let anything get to you because there are problems no matter what it is you do in this world. The ministry, of course, has its own peculiar problems. But don't let it get to you.

**Preaching as God's Spokesman**

**What is the greatest joy that you have as a minister?**

The greatest joy is to preach sermons. So I enjoy it every week.

**Is there anything about preaching specifically that you would recommend to young men?**

I would tell them to study as much as you can for each sermon because the more you know, the better it is. You are God's spokesman, and that is a tremendous responsibility—to be a spokesman for almighty God. That's something to be very serious about. It's not a time to tell jokes. I hated it when some ministers would spend time with all kinds of funny stories to keep people laughing

It's very serious because you're speaking for God and he's going to hold you accountable for every word you give out in the congregation. I have to answer to him.

**What was your method for preaching? Do you go through whole books, or do you preach themes from Bible?**

Mostly by books. I never really picked up themes.

**What are you preaching on right now, Harold?**

Right now one book is Habakkuk, and in the evening it's the Gospel of John. I like John, but Habakkuk is amazing to me. It's a little harder, but I enjoy it.

**Do you take a large paragraph, or do you go slowly verse by verse?**

I think it would vary. Sometimes it's a portion, sometimes it's one verse. I don't have any particular idea as to what I prefer. I guess it's as the Spirit leads me as I study the passage.

**Back in the early days, was there one preacher you heard who really stuck out in your mind, and you said, "That's how I want to preach"?**

Well, Professor Murray impressed me very much with his sincerity. My pastor was Dr. Clowney—he wasn't "Dr." then I guess—but he was a good one. So I liked him. Let's see, who else did I have? Rev. Marvin Derby [from the Hamden church].

**You were making the point, Harold, that no one should go into the ministry for the money.**

Ministers move around sometimes because they can get more money. I was invited to candi-

date one time for a church outside of Washington, D.C., but I refused to even go down there and do it. They were put out with me, but I didn't want to go down there. I figured, I'm a country boy, and to live down there in Washington, D.C., I'd be out of place. I couldn't see it.

**So you believe that being committed to the people of a particular place is important.**

Well, I think it is, because you fit better some places than others.

**And people can tell if you really do want to move on.**

Well, I haven't moved on, you see. I've stayed.

**You have. For longer than anyone I can remember in the OPC.**

I'll be here a while yet unless the Lord calls me home. I have no intention of stopping preaching.

**Well, that's a wonderful testimony, Harold.**

**Thank you. ☺**

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# ✦ Servant Word

## Without a Manuscript?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **F. Allan Story, Jr.**

This was the incredulous query of a candidate for a year-long internship. He couldn't imagine himself ever preaching without a manuscript or taking an internship that required him to do so. He turned it down.

Why are some so committed to preaching from a manuscript? Some use a manuscript as a crutch out of fear that they might come to a point at which they didn't have anything to say. Some, though hopefully none in the OPC, use manuscripts out of a desire to impress hearers with their eloquence. These are unworthy motives. Others would claim that preaching from a manuscript is the only way to do justice to the importance of preaching. They want to take great care in the choice of words to convey great truths. They want to be precise about controversial doctrines, issues, or passages. The manuscripts of Jonathan Edwards show how hard he worked at crafting sentences that went beyond merely conveying information to the understanding to impressing these truths on the heart. Undoubtedly such motives are commendable. Still others preach from manuscripts because they were taught to do so and have never considered that it could be done otherwise.

Many in Reformed churches were taught in Reformed seminaries to preach from manuscripts. Those from some other Reformed seminaries were

never allowed to do so. Many, perhaps most, of the greatest preachers preached without manuscripts. That Edwards, Samuel Davies, and Thomas Chalmers used manuscripts is evidence that it can be done well. Most of us have heard excellent sermons preached from manuscripts and also without manuscripts ever having been prepared. Does it really matter?

I'm writing with the belief that it can matter and that there is generally much to be gained by omitting manuscript preparation. But before writing in support of that approach, I want to make some qualifications. First, I would note that it is possible to prepare a manuscript and then not use it in the pulpit. This was what my seminary homiletics professor recommended. He advocated this as a good discipline for the first few years of ministry, and I'm not sure I disagree entirely. It gives practice and fluency with the words and ideas used in preaching. Secondly, I recognize that most proponents of manuscripts intend sufficient preparation or rehearsal to allow some freedom from the manuscript in the pulpit. Thirdly, I would agree that there are times when at least a portion of a sermon should properly be written, such as introductions or conclusions or areas which are especially delicate. Fourthly, I certainly intend no deprecation whatever of those who stubbornly stick to the awful hindrance of useless manuscripts. Basically, all I really want to do here is to encourage some who would have never thought of omitting manuscript preparation to give serious consideration to this approach.

I would suggest two reasons for not preparing manuscripts. Preaching without preparing a manuscript allows for better stewardship of time in the preparation of sermons. It also allows more effective communication in the preaching of sermons.

### **Stewardship of Time**

Stewardship of time is almost by itself a sufficient reason to generally avoid preparing manuscripts. Certainly preaching is the most important part of the calling of a minister of the Gospel, but there are other important components of a pastor's

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=234&issue\\_id=61](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=234&issue_id=61).

work, components which in occasional emergencies take the greater part of a minister's week. One New Testament professor recommended an hour of preparation time for each minute of preaching would surely limit the performance of those other duties—though it might also lead to shorter sermons!

The careful writing of a manuscript (and it must be careful if it is to produce any of the benefits claimed for manuscripts) requires a great deal of time. In comparison with not writing the sermon, writing it necessarily means that something else gets left out. Eating, sleeping, and family time are all necessities, though they may each be occasionally neglected. Prayer, study, planning, teaching, counseling, and visitation are all crucial aspects of pastoral ministry. Is this the place to cut in order to have time to write sermons? Where is the time to be found?

What too frequently seems to happen is that the time for manuscript preparation is taken from more important parts of sermon preparation. The need to write, often seems to preclude time for necessary reflection. Don't we understand the Scriptures better when we take adequate time to mull them over? We dare not rush our exegesis in order to write the sermon. A sermon that distorts the text is a poor sermon no matter how well written. But neither can we write before we have organized the presentation of the truths taught in the text, and that requires time also. And then adequate time needs to be given to thinking about the application of the truths taught in the text. Worse than omitting application would be making improper application, but that danger exists if writing begins too soon. In these senses, polished language may be the enemy of precision, even if precision drives the desire to polish language. Not preparing a manuscript allows more time for preparing the content of the sermon. Time not used in manuscript preparation is time gained for use elsewhere.

### **Effective Communication**

I won't deal here with criticisms of the poorly

read sermon without enough preparation to make eye contact, etc. But I do want to underscore that continued preparation after the sermon is written is a recognized necessity of preaching from a manuscript, and that this preparation too takes time. Most who preach from manuscripts want to communicate effectively and do take time (if there's time left at this point) to read and reread and rehearse.

But all of the things we're supposed to do in public speaking come naturally when we're aware we have a message from God for the people of God, and we know what that message is. A studied understanding and feeling of the importance of the text along with a love for our hearers will make us eloquent naturally. Eye contact and voice inflection will be compelling. A mother doesn't prepare a manuscript to plead for her child. A young man doesn't prepare a manuscript to read as a proposal to a young lady (unless maybe it's poetry). Even the movies tell us that the lawyer who throws away his carefully-worded closing summation and speaks from the heart is the lawyer who convinces the jury. So it is with preaching.

True passion on the part of the preacher is obvious to his hearers, and it conveys to those hearers something of the importance of what he's preaching. But polished language may well be the enemy of passion. No doubt undisciplined passion can lead to infelicitous speech, but passion affects hearers beyond what mere eloquent words can do. We seem to be wired to gauge the importance of what a man says by how he says it. Well-practiced, polished words may be made dramatic, but at the expense of the appearance of the actor's craft. This looks like artifice. Read that, artificial. If we appear to be acting, we become less believable. When I hear intentional and artificial variation of pitch, pace, or volume, I think (usually rightly) the speaker is thinking more about rules for public speaking than about the significance of the point he's trying to make. But such variations are natural when they come with in-the-moment, on-the-fly composition of sentences. Passion, sincerity, concern, compassion, and horror are more easily conveyed when really present in the speaker when he speaks than

they are if he writes and then reads or recites with even the best of preparation.

A further issue of sermon effectiveness has to do with freedom during the preaching of the sermon. Certainly the Spirit can, and often has, used manuscript-based preaching to work effectively in hearers. Certainly we believe that the Spirit works through means and that preparation for preaching is an important means that the Holy Spirit blesses. But there are dangers in using this as an argument for manuscripts. First, if the Spirit has blessed sermons that suffered from the defects of dependence on manuscripts, he has also blessed sermons that were not written at all and were preached by men without natural eloquence, sermons with the frequent use of the non-word “uh,” sermons that didn’t have smoothness in their flow. Secondly, we understand that there is a difference between not preparing a manuscript and not preparing for a sermon. Both manuscript and non-manuscript preachers make use of means and depend on the Spirit for blessing. But I would ask the question whether we believe that the Holy Spirit works in the preacher only in his preparation and then during the preaching of the sermon works only in the hearers. Calvin, Pierre Marcel, and Martin Lloyd-Jones argue strongly against such an idea. The preacher who doesn’t preach from a prepared manuscript is able to modify his sermon if the Spirit sheds new light on the passage during the preaching itself or even if new understanding comes in the shower on Sunday morning (do you hear personal experience here?). Without a manuscript, there is freedom to modify a sermon based on who is present that morning or what the morning’s news might be. There is freedom to meet the eyes of individuals in the congregation and to gauge the response of the congregation. Are they paying attention? Are they confused? Contact is in every way amplified. Impact is generally greatly enhanced.

### **Dealing with the Fear Factor**

I understand the fear factor. I remember the first time I delivered five consecutive days of thir-

teen and a half minute devotionals on the radio. Although I normally preached to my congregation from notes, I was afraid that I would not be able to speak to a cold microphone. I prepared a manuscript for each day and practiced and rewrote so that I could finish exactly in the allotted time. It nearly killed me—after all I still had to preach on Sunday! I saw that this was not workable. The next time, I prepared well, made careful outlines, and prepared introductory and closing sentences, and of course I thought about what I would say, but I skipped the manuscript. It worked! It worked with no visible audience. When we preach, we generally preach to those who know us and whom we know, and, with the freedom that comes from not being tied to a manuscript, we can get feedback from the congregation about whether they are really following what we’re saying. We can talk to our wives or kids without a manuscript. We can carry on a normal conversation quite adequately. We don’t stumble over our words. Sometimes we’re even eloquent. Why should we fear preaching without a manuscript?

When you thoroughly know and understand your text, when you understand its main message and the applications of it, when you have fed your own soul with all of that, you can preach without a manuscript. Jonathan Edwards used a manuscript in his preaching until George Whitefield visited Northampton during the Great Awakening. At Whitefield’s prompting, Edwards ceased preparing manuscripts for every sermon, and his manuscript sermons show transition to outlines and then to simpler outlines as the years went by. It is possible to make the change. It may be helpful to remember that Jesus, Peter, and Paul didn’t use manuscripts.

When I was in my first pastorate, in a small Alabama town, I was with the Episcopalian rector when he was asked if he would pray for a need that had just arisen. He declined because he didn’t have his prayer book with him. What do you do if you open your Bible at the beginning or just before the beginning of a worship service and realize you left your manuscript at home? You don’t decline to preach, and you don’t leave the service to go home

and get the manuscript. Wouldn't it be better to preach without a manuscript intentionally a few times before that happens? And if it hasn't happened yet, remember you're getting older (once again, the voice of experience!).

## Conclusion

Give it a try! But you may need more recommendation than mine. Read John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry*;<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Dabney, "Lecture 23: Modes of Preparation," in his *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric*;<sup>3</sup> J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, Letters 7–9;<sup>4</sup> Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, part 4, chapter 5, section 2.<sup>5</sup> Most have written at greater length than I have here, and usually with more balance. Appendices 1 and 4 of Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*<sup>6</sup> have an excellently balanced discussion. Read those, but try it. ☺

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# A Brief Defense of Manuscript Preaching

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **Matthew Cotta**

T. David Gordon has reopened the issue of preaching and preaching style in his thought provoking *Why Johnny Can't Preach*.<sup>2</sup> Preachers in particular, but also the church in general, would do well to be more open to review and critique on this matter. Anyone familiar with the writings of Neil Postman,<sup>3</sup> or even our own Greg Reynolds, knows that this is a topic that needs to be broached regularly in the church.<sup>4</sup> We, who have the greatest of all stories to tell, ought to seriously consider the methodological assumptions or homiletical presuppositions that inform the way we preachers tell the story.

Postman argued that the shift in Western society from a print media culture to a visual media culture has certain ramifications for societal discourse. He warned about the consequences of binding the acquisition of knowledge to a form of media that is associated with entertainment. We now see evidence of the veracity of Postman's critique in education and various other facets of the culture of our day. Style truly reigns over substance.

In the ecclesiastical sphere, we in the Reformed world often criticize evangelical churches that have shaped their worship services and/or their general approach to ministry in order to keep in

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2 John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry* (1847; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 141–42 in context.

3 Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (1870; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979).

4 J. W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching: Being Contributions to Homiletics* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 147–65.

5 Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (1830; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 286–96.

6 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 329–39; 346–49.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=235&issue\\_id=61](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=235&issue_id=61).

2 T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

3 His *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), ought to be in every minister's library and required reading in seminary homiletics courses.

4 On the relationship between orality and manuscript use, see Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 378–83.

step with the media of the age (e.g., those who use video clips, PowerPoint presentations, town-hall forums, etc., in worship). Our emphasis on the glory of God and our commitment to the regulative principle of public worship have in many ways precluded our patterning worship after the spirit of the age. We are right in this, and we properly critique evangelicals for their compromise on this matter.

That being said, it seems that even while we note the beam in our brother's eye, there is a speck in our own. What about our attitude toward manuscript preaching? Might it be that the media-ecological shift in Western society that Postman wrote about is reflected in the church's attitude toward the use of a manuscript in preaching?<sup>5</sup>

While there have always been preachers who preferred not to use a manuscript when preaching, it would not have been uncommon prior to the invention of television for preachers to have taken a manuscript with them into the pulpit. Indeed, it is well known that many of our own Reformed stalwarts preached from a manuscript. Our devotional lives would surely be impoverished were this not the case.

Yet today manuscript preaching has not only been marginalized, it is dismissed and even ridiculed for purely stylistic reasons. Some even argue that to preach from a manuscript is to close oneself off from the "moving of the Spirit."<sup>6</sup> Manuscript preaching is roundly considered as nothing more than a dead letter. A sermon's spiritual effectiveness can be gauged, so it seems, by how often the preacher looks down.

Homiletics courses in many Reformed seminaries give the impression that manuscript preaching, if it is to be considered at all, is to be considered as a historic relic that is about as relevant today as an outhouse. If they take it up directly,

they take it up among the list of things preachers ought never to do. Sadly, many seminary professors seem to be speaking with one mind on this.<sup>7</sup>

Bryan Chapell has argued that reading from a manuscript will not work in our generation.<sup>8</sup> R. Scott Clark declares, "This is a terrible communication strategy. People are trained by television news readers and presidents and pundits to have someone delivering important information by looking them straight in the eye. You have the most important information in the world to deliver! Why would you do it whilst looking down at a piece of paper?"<sup>9</sup>

Both of these brothers argue not against manuscript preaching as such, but only inasmuch as, stylistically, it invariably and necessarily puts a communication barrier up between the preacher and his hearers, hearers who are accustomed to and indeed prefer another mode of discourse. The more one can get away from his manuscript, or his notes, or even looking down at his Bible, therefore, the better.

On the flip side, it is often argued that the more "lively" the preacher is (that is, the more he is "untethered" from pulpit or manuscript), the more his own personality shines forth. And the more the preacher's personality shines forth, the better he will be able to "engage" the congregation. The engaged congregation will "connect" with the preacher, and, thus, receive the Word of God preached by him. In our age, only such "untethered" preaching can lay claim to being powerful, "Spirit-filled" and/or "Spirit-anointed" preaching.

Now it is true, manuscript preachers look down more often than their extemporary counterparts, and to always be looking down rather than regularly looking into the eyes of the congregants would, of course, be less than desirable from a

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5 Might it also be that we have imbibed more of the methods of the Second Great Awakening than we would like to admit when it comes to our homiletical presuppositions?

6 Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2007), 103ff.

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7 This mind-set is also prevalent in some OPC presbyteries, as evidenced by the usual floor comments following the sermons of would-be licentiates who happened to use a manuscript.

8 <http://worldwidefreeresources.com/upload/48ea3380bc8ab.pdf>

9 <http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/a-few-words-to-student-preachers/>

communication standpoint. The novice manuscript preacher will have to diligently work on this. But to dismiss, marginalize, or lambast manuscript preaching because it is different from what churchgoers “trained by television news readers and presidents and pundits” have come to expect, or to assume that Spirit-anointed manuscript preaching is oxymoronic, is in this manuscript preacher’s estimation proof of the aforementioned speck in the eye.

In the service then of reexamining our prejudices against manuscript preaching, let me offer several positive, practical arguments as to why manuscript preaching has merit and can be usefully employed in the church of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, manuscripts help to ensure that a preacher will not only devote himself to careful exegesis, but to careful, well-thought-out articulation. Preachers spend hours and hours in detailed exegesis of a biblical passage but often give short shrift to considering how they are going to communicate their exegetical findings.

After getting their thesis statement down, a few good illustrations, and a three point alliterated outline, they are ready to wing it as far as the rest of the message goes. For some preachers this works out just fine. For others, it might be better for them to take time crafting their message so that they say precisely what they intend to say.

Secondly, and related to the first, manuscript preachers are far less likely to drift from their subject, say something erroneous, stupid, or distracting. We are on point. We are precise. We say it the best way we can think to say it, and we took a lot of time considering what the best way to say it might be. We are not scrambling for words or passages or supporting arguments, nor are we prone to say something we later wish we could take back. More manuscript preaching might actually reduce the number of complaints that come before sessions and presbyteries.

Thirdly, because of our precision and care in articulation, because we spend time crafting the sermon itself, the sermons of manuscript preachers tend to be shorter. Time isn’t wasted searching for the right way to communicate a point. Time isn’t

wasted scanning the memory banks.<sup>10</sup> Given that we are all concerned about how best to engage our generation, we might well consider that, attention spans being what they are in our day, manuscript preachers might actually have the advantage here.

Fourthly, the impact of the preacher’s personality on communication is a two-edged sword. While there are good arguments to be made as far as not hiding oneself behind a manuscript, in letting one’s humanity come across in our preaching, in being personable, etc., there are equally good arguments to be made as to why preachers should personally decrease that Christ might increase.

Sinful, spotlight-loving creatures that many preachers are, it might be far better for their own personal sanctification and for their future congregations’ edification if their homiletics instructor taught them how to make themselves come across *less* in their sermons. Besides, we flatter ourselves in assuming that our individual personalities always aid in the communication of biblical truth. If we are honest, we know that the contrary is often the case.

Fifthly, manuscripts make sermons easier to disseminate and distribute. How many times has a member or a visitor come up to you after the service to ask if there is any way he or she can have a copy of the sermon? The manuscript preacher, again, has the advantage here. On several occasions, I have simply handed them my sermon, right then and there. Usually they are surprised, because they hadn’t known that I had preached from a manuscript.

Moreover, manuscript preachers are able to give members, should they need or request it, copies of his sermon at or prior to the beginning of the service. He can email or otherwise get copies of his sermon to the sick or infirm members of the congregation for the Lord’s Day.

There are several members in my congregation who are hearing impaired, and on occasion we have had saints who were entirely deaf worshipping with us. Being able to give them a copy of the

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<sup>10</sup> This is not the same as a “dramatic pause,” though the two might be indistinguishable in seasoned extemporary preachers.



sermon up-front has enabled them to be engaged and connect with the sermon in a manner that no amount of untethered personableness could ever have afforded.

Manuscripts can also be easily uploaded to the Internet (church websites, *Sermon Audio*, etc.). Again, one needn't be a dinosaur to be a manuscript preacher. In fact, in many ways manuscript preachers are more able to take advantage of technological media in the dissemination of our sermons. Since our sermons are both written and spoken, manuscript preachers can get the preached Word out by both PDF and MP3.

As mentioned earlier, manuscripts of sermons provide devotional material for many of us. If we haven't read the collected sermons of Edwards, Vos, Warfield, Machen, or any of our other Reformed fathers, we should.

Manuscript sermons are more likely to be converted into print collections, commentaries, etc., both for the edification of the broader church and for wider distribution among unbelievers. Indeed, they are more likely to be translated into other languages. It might not be likely that many of us will have our sermons be so used of God, but he may very well be pleased to do so.

Lastly, having manuscript sermons available better enables a preacher not only to be ready to preach in and out of season, but better enables him to preach a solid, well-crafted, well-prepared, and well-delivered sermon in and out of season. Much more could be said, but this should suffice at least to offer a brief defense of the practice of manuscript preaching.

There are, to be sure, liabilities. Young manuscript preachers do look down more than they should (not that the power of the Spirit working by the Word is thereby necessarily diminished). Like any preaching, manuscript preaching takes practice and experience to do well. Perhaps the biggest liability, however, is the need for a reliable printer.<sup>11</sup> I know from personal experience that waiting until Sunday morning to print off one's sermon

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11 Of course, "old-school" manuscript preachers who handwrite their sermons are exempted.

can lead to some truly nerve-wracking moments. But given that we do not conceive of technological advances as *mala in se*, this might merely be an encouragement for churches to buy their manuscript preaching pastor an iPad he can take with him into the pulpit. ☺

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## The King James Version in the Church: Past, Present, and Future

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by **Leland Ryken**

The King James Version of the Bible has reached the milestone of the four hundredth anniversary of its first publication. Academic and religious conferences, museum displays, books and articles, and commemorative editions of the KJV have exploded in such quantity that 2011 can confidently be declared The Year of the King James Bible.

The King James Version is a book of superlatives. Sources claiming that the King James Bible is the best-selling book of all time are too numerous to cite. Adam Nicolson, author of the book *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*, claims that more than five billion copies of the King James Bible have been sold.<sup>2</sup> According

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=272&issue\\_id=68](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=272&issue_id=68).

2 Adam Nicolson, interview on Online News Hour, December 24, 2003; accessed at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec03/nicolson\\_12-24.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec03/nicolson_12-24.html).

to David Daniell, in his magisterial book *The Bible in English*, the King James Version is “still the best-selling book in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Multiple sources claim that the King James Bible is the most frequently quoted book in existence. The author of the book *The Story of English* calls the King James Version “the single-most influential book ever published in the English language,” and *Bartlett’s Bible Quotations* agrees.<sup>4</sup> A rare book website claims that the King James Version is “the most printed book in the history of the world.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, Gordon Campbell, in his recent Oxford University Press book entitled *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011*, believes that the King James Bible is “the most important book in the English language.”<sup>6</sup>

My aim in this article is two-fold: (1) to provide a wide-angle survey of the influence of the King James Bible in the Christian church for the past four centuries, and (2) to provide some thoughts on how the King James Version continues to be a presence in the Christian church, even among those who do not use the “Authorized Version” as their primary Bible.

## The Puritan Origins of the King James Bible

I have no doubt that the heading that I have affixed to this section of my article will raise a few eyebrows. After all, everyone knows that the Geneva Bible of 1560 was “the Puritan Bible.” Yes, it was, but the Puritans played a key role in the translation and publishing success of the King James Version.

The point of origin for the King James Bible was the notorious Hampton Court Conference of 1604. This conference was occasioned by the Pu-

ritans, and the circumstances are as follows. When James I, king of Scotland, succeeded Queen Elizabeth I as monarch of England, he went in procession from Scotland to London. He was intercepted by a Puritan contingent and presented with the Millenary Petition (so-called because a thousand Puritan pastors had allegedly signed it). It was a list of Puritan grievances and requests.

The new king responded by calling the Hampton Court Conference. The conference turned out to be a farce. It pitted four hand-picked moderate Puritans against eighteen Church-of-England heavyweights. The king summarily dismissed all of the Puritan requests, threatening to “harry them out of the land, or worse.” With everything apparently lost, the Puritans made a last-ditch request for a new English translation of the Bible. Unbeknown to the assembly (and preeminently to Archbishop Richard Bancroft, who scoffed at the request for a new English Bible), the king had already given thought to a new translation. He surprised everyone by granting the Puritans’ request.

So there is a very real sense in which the King James Version owes its origin to the Puritans. But there is more to the story than that. Why did King James put his support behind the project of a new Bible translation? He himself partly answered that question. In the very act of consenting to a new translation, the king made a sneering comment about the Geneva Bible, the preferred translation among the Puritans. According to the “official” account of what was said, the king professed “that he could never yet see a Bible well translated into English, but the worst of all his Majesty thought the Geneva to be.” Why did the king support a new translation? Because he despised the Puritans’ preferred Bible and the revolutionary sentiments expressed in its marginal notes.

Additional factors expand the picture of the indebtedness of the King James Bible to the Puritan movement of the day. Although the King James Version was conceived partly as a put-down of the Puritans, when the actual process of translation was set into motion, everyone rose above partisan spirit. Something like a benediction fell on the process of translation. All members of the

3 David Daniell, *The Bible in English* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 427.

4 Robert McCrum, *The Story of English* (New York: Viking, 1986), 109; *Bartlett’s Bible Quotations* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), xi.

5 <http://www.greatsite.com/ancient-rare-bible-leaves/king-james-1611-leaf.html>.

6 Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

translation committee were ordained clerics in the Church of England, but within that parameter all viewpoints were represented. Approximately a fourth of the forty-seven translators were men of Puritan sympathies.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, we hear so much about how 80–90 percent of the King James Bible was carried over from William Tyndale’s translation that we have been lulled into believing it. Those figures are true *for the parts of the Bible that Tyndale translated*, but he translated no more than two-thirds of the Bible before his martyrdom. In the final analysis, the Geneva Bible contributed most to the King James Version, with one source claiming that the Geneva Bible “is textually 95% the same as the King James Version.”<sup>8</sup>

If we turn from the origins of the KJV to its reception history, the Puritans again play a role. The last edition of the Geneva Bible published in England appeared in 1616, just five years after the first publication of the KJV, suggesting that the Geneva Bible did not retain its dominance as long as is often assumed. Additionally, it might be expected that when the Puritans gained the ascendancy around 1642 they would have thrown their weight behind the Geneva Bible, but they did not do so. In another surprise, between 1642 and 1715 at least nine editions of the KJV were printed with the Geneva Bible notes.<sup>9</sup>

Even that is not the end of the story of the Puritans and the KJV. As noted in the preceding paragraph, the King James Version had already gone a long way toward supplanting the Geneva

Bible during the decade in which the Westminster Assembly held its meetings. But I did not know until Gregory Reynolds sent me a copy of the Orthodox Presbyterian edition of *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* that “the language of [the KJV] is at times reflected in the Confession and Catechisms” (p. x). In confirmation, upon further research I discovered that the Authorized Version “immediately superseded the Bishops’ Bible for use in [English] churches.”<sup>10</sup>

### The King James Bible in the Church

In situating the King James Bible in relation to the Puritans I have actually told the first chapter of the story that I announced at the outset, namely, the influence of the King James Version in the church. The King James Version began its influence in the church from the moment of its publication, but when we think of the total history of the King James Bible we appropriately think of its influence as extending from the middle of the seventeenth century to the present moment. For those of my readers who are older than forty-five, chances are good that they themselves experienced the dominance of the King James Version. After all, until the 1970s, when the British and Americans spoke of “the Bible,” they meant the King James Version. By contrast, today I commonly find that virtually none of my students has experienced the King James Version firsthand or regularly.

I can tell the story of the influence of the King James Version in the church best by means of snapshots that gesture toward a larger picture. So let me start with my own childhood and early adulthood. From earliest years I heard the King James Bible read three times daily after family meals. The KJV was the basis for my biblical education and memorization at church and Christian school. Midweek lessons on the Heidelberg Catechism during my high school years were saturated in proof texts from the KJV. The same was true of my study of Louis Berkhof’s *Manual of Christian*

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7 Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 218.

8 Craig H. Lampe, “English Bible History,” online essay at <http://greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/>. David Daniell claims that when the King James preface states the translators’ aim to make a good [translation] better, they “were referring to the Geneva Bible,” and in fact, in the rest of the preface entitled “The Translators to the Reader,” Miles Smith “quoted Scripture almost always from” the Geneva Bible. *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 294.

9 Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 284.

10 Alec Gilmore, *A Dictionary of the English Bible and Its Origins* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000), 26.

*Doctrine* in my “Senior Bible Course” in high school. When I was nine years old, my Christmas gift was a King James Bible with my name inscribed on the cover and on the inside a presentation note from my parents. I used this Bible to the end of my college years.

When I revisit my Iowa roots, a stroll through the rural cemetery where some of my forbears and family acquaintances lie buried presents me with a virtual museum display of famous resurrection verses from the King James Bible: “The Lord is my light and my salvation” (Ps. 27:1). “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord... , that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13). “Asleep in Jesus” (an allusion to 1 Thess. 4:14). “I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25). All of these verses—and more besides—were chosen and inscribed with verses from the King James Bible because it was the only Bible that evangelical Protestants used.

The same thing is true of wall plaques that I remember from my childhood. When my family visited fellow church members or neighbors, it was rare not to see Bible verses on the walls. I helped myself to a plaque from my parental home when I got married and left home. After all, it bore the verse that my pastor had given to me when I made public confession of faith: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). It had escaped my notice until I wrote my book on the King James Version that, with the eclipse of the King James Version in evangelical circles, the presence of Bible plaques on walls also nearly vanished. I propose that this congruence is not unexpected.

Another snapshot that gives us a glimpse into the degree to which the King James Version seized the affections of Christians through the centuries is the Bible verses found on the walls of Protestant churches. I once jotted down the Bible verses that came into my view as I sat on an outside aisle at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. They included these: “He being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4); “Being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10); “Well done, thou good and

faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of they Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

I have seen dozens of Bible verses on the walls of old churches and cathedrals in England, and many in churches in the U.S. This includes Covenant Presbyterian Church in suburban St. Louis, where I was married and where after the sanctuary was enlarged and rearranged the words of John 3:16 in gold-edged lettering were again positioned on the wall behind the pulpit. I can imagine someone’s saying that the King James was used in these churches because that was the only Bible in town. That is true, but when the King James Version ceased to be the common English Bible, Scripture verses largely ceased to be placed on church walls, suggesting that nothing else has stepped in to fill the place that the KJV once held.

### **Christian Publishing and Preaching**

As I have noted, the story of the King James Version in the church is told partly by its public inscription on tombstones, plaques, and church walls. I will note in passing that if we widen the scope from the church to culture at large, the same picture emerges: the King James Version was permanently inscribed in full public view for over three centuries. For example, every year two million visitors file past the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and read Leviticus 25:20 in its King James form: “Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof.” Anyone passing through the gate of Harvard University can read the inscription, “Open ye the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in” (Isa. 26:2 KJV).

If we shift from publicly displayed inscriptions from the King James Version to Christian publishing and preaching through the centuries, the same picture of the dominance of the KJV in the Protestant church emerges. Several years ago the annual conference of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology published a booklet in connection with the conference theme of justification. The great theologians of the past whose writings on

justification were excerpted in the booklet had all used the King James Version: Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, Horatius Bonar, A. W. Pink, J. C. Ryle.

The same story is told by Bible commentaries from the past. Today authors and publishers of Bible commentaries conspicuously note the English Bible that has been used in the commentary. By contrast, I recently looked in vain in the prefatory material to Matthew Henry's commentary for an indication of what translation Henry had used. That omission was the norm for Bible commentaries until approximately 1970. Everyone *knew* what translation the author had used, namely, the King James Version.

The same is true of famous preachers from 1700 through the middle of the twentieth century. What translation did Jonathan Edwards use? Charles Spurgeon? John Wesley? Billy Graham? We hardly need to ask. It was the King James Version, which for more than three centuries was the Bible of the pulpit in Protestant churches throughout the English-speaking world. Charles Spurgeon was so fond of the KJV that he said regarding it that it would "never be bettered, as I judge, till Christ shall come."<sup>11</sup>

It would be inaccurate to think only of England and America when assessing the role of the King James Bible in the Christian church. We also need to consider its influence in the missionary work of English-speaking missionaries around the world. During my 43 years of teaching at Wheaton College I have witnessed a steady stream of students from non-Western countries, and overwhelmingly the English Bible of these students has been the King James Version. David Daniell tells the story of the activity of the English and American Bible societies in the nineteenth century, and he entitles the unit that covers this history "KJV for the World." Alister McGrath notes that "wherever English-language versions of Christianity sprang up, these would usually be nourished by this definitive translation. The impact of the King James

Bible on the language and worship of Christianity in Africa and Australasia has been immense."<sup>12</sup>

## The King James Version Now

It is easy for people who have never used the King James Version as their primary Bible individually or in church life to dismiss the KJV as being no more than a relic in the museum of the past. Actually, the King James Version remains a major influence in the life of the church. For starters, the King James Version is still the English Bible of choice in many Protestant churches and among perhaps millions of Bible readers. When we consult the charts on current Bible sales, to this day the KJV remains the second best selling English Bible on the market. In March of 2011 it actually rose to first place on one index of sales.

A second sphere in which the KJV maintains a highly visible presence is the Christian art and culture of the past. Even if all copies of the King James Bible were to suddenly vanish, the KJV would live on as a cultural presence for Christians and non-Christians alike. Literature is the most obvious instance. Starting with early seventeenth-century writers like George Herbert and John Milton, and continuing for three centuries, the King James Bible was the single most important source and influence for English and American literature. Charles Spurgeon made the oft-quoted comment regarding John Bunyan, "Prick him anywhere, and ... the very essence of [our Authorized Version] flows from him."<sup>13</sup>

What is true of English and American literature is true also of music, hymnody, and painting. Every Christmas thousands of people hear Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. As they listen, they hear the King James text for more than two hours. Because hymn writers usually do not quote verbatim from the Bible, we are usually only vaguely aware of how much they take from the Bible. To become more aware, sitting down with Isaac Watts' hymn "O God, Our Hope in Ages Past" and Psalm

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11 *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings), 4: 269.

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12 McGrath, 290.

13 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:269.



91 before us will prove an instructive exercise. Likewise with some famous paintings: American Quaker painter Edward Hicks was so fond of the “peaceable kingdom” passage in Isaiah 11:6 that he painted it a hundred times, and on many of those paintings the King James Version of the verse is painted right on the picture frame.

### The Future of the King James Version

In terms of both its inherent qualities and its influence, the King James Version is the greatest English Bible ever. But it started to “show its age” two centuries ago, and its extreme archaism of language and grammar, combined with the fact that it is not based on the best available scholarship, will ensure that its once-towering stature will continue to erode. The loss of a common Bible (which is what the KJV was for three centuries) has been catastrophic in the evangelical church, which now suffers from a famine of the Word in the pulpit and widespread illiteracy among the laity.

Still, the King James Version has not become as invisible as many people think. It lives on in modern translations that perpetuate its philosophy of translation and its style. I agree with a verdict that Alister McGrath states on the last page of his book on the KJV. The true heirs of the King James translators, writes McGrath, are not people who regard English Bible translation as perpetually fixed with the KJV, but rather those who continue the work of the King James translators by producing new translations. I believe that this is primarily true of new translations based on the King James premises of verbal equivalence (an English word or phrase for every word of the original text) and a dignified style.

I think it demonstrable that the modern translation that best fits those criteria is the English Standard Version. (The New King James Version is essentially an updated King James Bible, not a genuinely modern translation.) The preface to the ESV conspicuously plants its flag with “the classic mainstream of English Bible translations,” which it also calls “the Tyndale-King James legacy.” Nearly everywhere we read in the ESV, we feel that we

are reading the King James Version in contemporary form. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20 ESV), not, “Here I am!” (NIV) or “Look at me” (*The Message*). “Vanity of vanity, says the Preacher” (Eccl. 1:2 ESV), not “Meaningless! Meaningless! Says the Teacher” (NIV).

### Honor Where Honor Is Due

It is right that we honor the King James Version of the Bible in its anniversary year. It is the greatest and most influential Christian book of the English-speaking world. It is understandable that non-Christians would seek to debunk it, but it is disgraceful when evangelical Christians do so. Even if we do not use the KJV as our primary Bible all of the time, we can read it part of the time. And we can perpetuate its presence—not just its memory but its presence—by adopting a modern translation that follows in its lineage. 📖

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# Servant Worship

## Baptism and Church Membership: A Plea for Confessional Fidelity

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by **Bryan D. Holstrom**

In response to an overture from the Presbytery of the West Coast, the 1965 General Assembly elected a three member committee chaired by John Murray to consider the following question: Does the Constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church permit church sessions to receive into communicant membership those who refuse to present their children for baptism on account of scruples concerning infant baptism?

The committee's report, which was submitted to the following year's Assembly, was brief but forceful. They stressed the indisputable nature of the fact that baptism was of divine origin and institution, and as such, wrote that "it is the obligation of believing parents to present their children for baptism." To hold otherwise, the report stated, "would constitute a weakening of the witness the church bears to the ordinance of infant baptism as one of divine warrant, authority, and obligation."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the person so refusing to submit his children for baptism is guilty of "rejecting the covenant promise and grace which God has certified to his people," and of withholding from the

church "the holy seed which God in his goodness has provided for it." Such a person is not only delinquent in doctrine, but guilty of what our subordinate standards characterize as a "great sin."

Despite the forcefulness of the committee's language, however, their arguments failed to win the day. When the question was put to a vote, the Assembly chose to side with the view of a single dissenting member of the committee whose qualifying considerations were incorporated into the final report. That member argued against adopting a firm rule in the matter, and instead to leave it to the discretion of individual sessions to decide the issue in each case.

Whatever may have been the practice of individual sessions prior to the formal adoption of that position in 1966, it is undeniable that such discretion is nowadays, more often than not, exercised in favor of receiving those who refuse to present their children for baptism. Some churches have even taken to maintaining separate rolls for the baptized and unbaptized children of members.

The present essay seeks to expand upon the arguments made in the 1966 report, with a twofold purpose in view: 1) to convince individual sessions to exercise their discretion in accordance with the majority position, requiring prospective members to baptize their children as they are received; and ultimately, 2) to encourage reconsideration and reversal of the position taken in 1966 at a future General Assembly.

Briefly, the argument for overturning the earlier decision is based upon the fundamental conviction that for elders to admit parents into membership without requiring the concurrent baptism of their young children is to act contrary to what is required of them as overseers of the church in both Scripture and the Westminster Standards.

### Scripture

Every elder who is ordained in the OPC has sworn to receive and adopt the provisions relating to baptism in the Westminster Confession, "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." Thus, our denominational fidelity

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=238&issue\\_id=62](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=238&issue_id=62).

2 The full report may be accessed under the title "Refusing to Present Children for Baptism," at [opc.org/GA/refuse\\_bapt.html](http://opc.org/GA/refuse_bapt.html).

to the practice of infant baptism is already firmly established and not in question here. Rather, the focus herein is upon the narrower question of how it is that Scripture precludes granting to elders the option of dispensing with baptism as a requirement for membership in Christ's church. The answer to that question is found in the Bible's teaching on the purposes for which baptism and its forerunner, circumcision, have been given, and the importance that God attaches to them as signs and seals of his covenant of grace.

At the outset, it is important to recognize that the biblical case for infant baptism is built upon the covenantal understanding of redemptive history, which also forms the framework for Reformed theology in general. Through this scriptural lens, we are able to see that the promises made and sealed to Abraham in his circumcision are the exact same ones which find their continuing fulfillment in his "descendant" Jesus Christ. Although the outward sign has changed from circumcision to baptism, the meaning and purpose for which it is administered is precisely the same—to mark the one receiving the sign as belonging to the covenant people of God, and for testifying to the righteousness of the faith which God imparts to those whom he unites to his Son (Rom. 4:11). This is why Paul can so easily equate the two rites (Col. 2:11–12; see also WCF 27.5).

With this understanding of the place of baptism in the church as a backdrop, it is easy to see why our confession and catechisms assert the doctrine of infant baptism without apology or equivocation. This makes it all the more puzzling why it is that, when the discussion shifts to the importance of baptism within God's economy, and the sanctions which accompany its neglect, the Reformed Christian so often turns tail and runs in the face of Baptist opposition. But isn't that precisely what we do when we accept the position taken at the 1966 GA? If we accept the argument that baptism is less important than circumcision, and thus optional on the basis of private scruples, have we not cast doubt upon our whole case for infant baptism in the first place? Since none of us would seriously suggest that circumcision was merely

an optional rite of entry into the Old Testament church, on what basis do we make such a distinction with respect to baptism? Both rites come to us via direct command of God, and the account of God's nearly taking Moses' life in Exodus 4 because of his failure to circumcise his own son should serve as an urgent warning against our neglecting baptism.

Just as we rightly ask the Baptist to show us the evidence for God having done away with placing his covenant sign upon the children of believers, so too must we ask him to show us the biblical evidence that failure to do so carries any less of a penalty or negative consequence in the New Testament era. Are the children of believers who do not receive baptism in this age any less cut-off from the benefits of the covenant than those who did not receive circumcision in the Old Testament era? If it be argued in the affirmative, where is the support for such a conclusion?

Even if it is argued that the particular nature of redemption, or the fact that we are in an age of "greater grace," somehow overrides or minimizes the adverse effects upon the covenant child who is denied the baptism that he or she deserves, that does not change the fact that in our refusal to apply the sign we are defying a direct command of God. Regardless of whether or not the consequences to the covenant child of not receiving the sign are less severe in this age, the fact is that there was nothing *optional* about the administration of the rite, either in its original pronouncement to Abraham, or its subsequent pronouncement to the apostles from Christ himself.

Moreover, we must be careful that we do not use the "greater grace" argument as a convenient cover for our sin. To argue that God would not take the life of any one of us for sanctioning such an infraction of a clear command says nothing about the appropriateness of doing so. It does not make such an act pleasing in his sight. Judgment for our failure to do the right thing is merely delayed until a later time (Heb. 13:17; James 3:1).

Besides, what sense does it make to argue that, in an age of *greater* grace, the act of administering a sacrament which brings blessings to the recipi-

ent is now merely optional, as opposed to commanded? The sacrament is God's action upon the child, not the reverse. It is a *means of grace*. Our Reformed tradition has always recognized that, although the rite of baptism itself is not automatically regenerative, we nevertheless have every reason to believe that God is pleased at times to offer his saving grace to certain covenant children at that very moment of administration, a possibility for which our own Confession seems to make allowance (WCF 28.6). While there is no warrant for assuming that this will happen in the case of any particular covenant child, one thing is certain—it *cannot* happen in this manner if the rite is not administered in the first place. Such is the potential impact of our decision upon the children whom God has placed in our charge.

### The Westminster Standards

The position adopted by the 1966 GA is also at odds with our subordinate doctrinal standards. The following excerpts touch upon the matter either directly or indirectly.

#### Regarding Baptism:

“Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized” (WCF 28.4).

“Baptism is a sacrament ... whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church” (WLC 165).

Regarding the subjects of baptism, “infants descending from their parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized” (WLC 166; see also 177).

It is “a *great sin* to contemn or neglect this ordinance” (WCF 28.5).

#### Regarding the Second Commandment:

“The duties required in the second commandment are the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and

ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word; *particularly ... the administration and receiving of the sacraments*” (WLC 108).

It would be superfluous to add much in the way of commentary to the passages listed above, since they largely speak for themselves. Collectively, they speak to the duty of having children baptized, and of baptism as being the only route to membership in the visible church. The language used does not admit of any discretion in the matter under consideration. Infants “are to be baptized.” The failure to do so is a “great sin,” since it constitutes a violation of the second commandment in the case of both the parents and elders who allow for its neglect.

Some have tried to blunt the force of the Confession's teaching here by arguing that the characterization of baptismal neglect as a “great sin” occurs only within the larger context of an assertion that baptism is not necessary to salvation. But what difference does that make to the discussion here? The relevant words are not taken out of context. They call the neglect of baptism a great sin, plain and simple. The qualifying phrase, on the other hand, has nothing to do with the issue at hand, for no one is arguing that the rite of baptism is a necessary concomitant to saving grace. The question involved here is unambiguous to the core: Does the WCF call the neglecting of baptism a great sin, or does it not?

Significantly, neither of the two arguments that are frequently advanced in favor of dispensing with the rite of baptism addresses the explicit language of condemnation found in the Confession. The first argument—that requiring the prospective member to baptize his children amounts to imposing a standard of full confessional subscription on him—is absurd. The only thing under consideration here is faithful obedience to the administration of the sacraments. Moreover, the argument misses the point that we already require full subscription with respect to the other sacrament. I am not aware of a single OP church that admits to membership those who demand that their infant children receive the Lord's Supper. On what basis do we take a different approach to baptism?

As for the second argument—that such families are better off worshipping in our churches than down the street in one of Baptist persuasion—who among us could take issue with such a statement? But the irony is that we feel that way precisely because we have already accepted the superiority of our Reformed tradition, which includes our theology of baptism. And if we do so, then what sense does it make to abandon an important tenet of that tradition just to keep one or two or even ten families in the fold, when the other ten or twenty or fifty families are counting on us to uphold that tradition? Is such a policy fair to them? Wasn't it our faithfulness to the Reformed tradition that attracted most families to our churches in the first place? What will we have to offer them in the future if we begin to look like the great mass of churches out there for which biblical doctrine is, at best, an afterthought?

At the end of the day, only one conclusion seems plausible in the face of the evidence: we do not take seriously the Confession's statement that the neglect of baptism is a great sin. As a denomination, we have *effectively* taken an exception to the Confession's teaching at this point. No other explanation of our position makes any sense. The language of the Confession is too explicit and straightforward here to allow for any other possibility.

So that begs the obvious question: What is such language still doing in our doctrinal standards four decades later? Either we embrace and adhere to that section of the WCF or we do not. But we cannot have it both ways. If we are to be consistent, we must either reverse our 1966 decision or formally amend our doctrinal standards to eliminate the offending language. I pray that we choose the former course over the latter, but integrity demands that we do something to resolve the tension. Such inherently inconsistent thinking may be the norm in our modern secular society, but it has no place in the church of Christ. If we are not willing to uphold our confessional standards at this point, we should be honest about it and make our break with tradition official.

## Conclusion

An old legal maxim says that “hard cases make for bad law.” The point of that old saw is that when fallible men seek to apply the plain dictates of the law against an otherwise sympathetic party, too often it is the law that gets set aside. The result is that a bad precedent is established for all future cases. I can't help but see an application of that principle in our adoption of the 1966 position on baptism and church membership. In a desire to accomplish otherwise laudable goals, we've taken an express affirmation found in our doctrinal standards and chosen to ignore it. But at what cost to precedent have we done so? What will be our response to those who will inevitably come demanding that we make an exception to our practice of distinguishing between communicant and noncommunicant members? Yet we have even less confessional support for drawing the line at this point, since there is no comparable language in our standards condemning paedocommunion as a great sin. Alas, the hard case of turning away those with Baptist scruples has made us vulnerable on any number of fronts.

Frankly, it is inexplicable to me that we have chosen to take an exception at precisely the point where our Confession has spoken most clearly and emphatically. What else could account for such a departure, except that we have succumbed to the pressures of the baptistic culture all around us? I don't know of a single Baptist church that would accommodate the scruples regarding infant baptism of a Reformed Christian who came to it seeking membership. In our accommodation of theirs, is the Baptist not warranted in assuming that we really don't believe that deeply in what we preach on this subject? If it is a great sin to leave our children unbaptized, then it is likewise sinful for church leaders to countenance such an infraction.

In an earlier time, Machen reminded us of the stakes involved here. In commenting upon the calamitous split between Luther and Zwingli over the meaning of the other sacrament, he wrote:

It was a great calamity indeed. But the calamity was due to the fact Luther (as we believe)

was wrong about the Lord's Supper; and it would have been a far greater calamity if being wrong about the Supper he had represented the whole question as a trifling affair.... A Luther who would have compromised with regard to the Lord's Supper never would have said at the Diet of Worms, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me, Amen." Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the spiritual nature of our calling, we elders are, after all, still human. We are frail and weak, and we sometimes allow personal friendships and the desire for peace to prevail over the hard task of doing what God has called us to do. It is easy to see how we may be individually led astray in matters such as this. But there should be a measure of protection against such tendencies when we assemble together as a session (or presbytery or general assembly). We should be able to, even *expected* to, hold one another accountable to our own standards, and in that more detached setting our deliberations should be free from such weaknesses and compromising influences.

Undoubtedly, such a stand will cost us a potential member now and then. But God will bless our faithfulness to his Word. In the long run, the only *safe* course of action for us as a denomination is to follow Scripture (as summarized in our confession) and let God supply the increase. May it never be said of us that we were more concerned about numbers or friendships than we were about pleasing him. ☺

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3 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 50–51.

# Wine or Grape Juice: Theological and Pastoral Reflections on the Fruit of the Vine in Communion

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by **John W. Mahaffy**

For many years, probably from the time of the organization of this church as a separate congregation, the body has used grape juice in the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup> Recently the session has begun to look at the issue of using wine, either in place of or in addition to grape juice. As members of the congregation responded to a request for input, it became clear that this is an issue on which opinions run strong and not all in the same direction. This paper is a brief effort to reflect on some of the theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral issues involved in what is a complex question. It is not intended to provide a definitive answer on whether to use wine or grape juice. Rather, it is a way of formulating my own thoughts and suggesting questions that we ought to address together as we look at the issue of the substance in the communion cup.

Although the issue involves the sacraments and can be studied as part of that element of theology, it is helpful to look at other aspects. The reasons for changing from wine to grape juice involve history, both of the church and of American and other cultures. Questions of ethics and Christian liberty are involved. One's tradition, world and life view, and emotions may have as much to do with the position adopted on this issue as do specific theological or exegetical arguments. Enfolding all

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=237&issue\\_id=62](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=237&issue_id=62).

2 Presented to the session of Trinity Presbyterian Church of the OPC, Newberg, Oregon.



these other questions ought to be the question of the impact of our discussion and decisions on the unity of the body of Christ. Are we acting in love?

Without developing the positions in detail here, I am convinced that what was used in the Lord's Supper in the New Testament church and throughout the history of the church until the discovery of pasteurization, was wine, the fermented fruit of the vine. The transition from wine to unfermented grape juice appears to have had far more to do with the temperance (or, more accurately, abstinence) movement than with either exegetical or theological argumentation.<sup>3</sup> Particularly helpful is the booklet by G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church*,<sup>4</sup> in which he traces the capitulation of the church to the pressures of social movements, using as a case study the former United Presbyterian Church of North America, of which Williamson was at one time a member. Williamson carefully examines scriptural teaching on the subject and also details the way that this church not only went beyond Scripture but departed from it in requiring total abstinence. He emphasizes the tragic consequences of the church binding the conscience with man-made rules. The use of wine as our Lord instituted the sacrament and its use in much of the history of the church give me sympathy for the position that today the use of wine is more appropriate than grape juice in the Lord's Supper.

It may be helpful to keep in mind that we are dealing with two separate, but related issues. The first is the appropriate and best observance of the Lord's Supper, what we might call the sacramental issue. The second is that of Christian liberty. We would do well to identify aspects of the question

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3 See the eleven part series by Dr. Robert S. Rayburn, pastor of Faith PCA, Tacoma, [http://www.faithtacoma.org/sermons/Revising\\_Communion/communion.htm](http://www.faithtacoma.org/sermons/Revising_Communion/communion.htm). See also the fourth part of "The Pattern of Worship at Michiana Covenant Church," <http://www.michianacovenant.org/worship.html>. I have found both sources very helpful, although both may overstate their positions at certain points.

4 G. I. Williamson, *Wine in the Bible and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Pilgrim, 1976; repr. 1980). Out of print, but a scanned copy is available at: [http://www.nethtc.net/~giwopc/Wine\\_Book.pdf](http://www.nethtc.net/~giwopc/Wine_Book.pdf).

that relate to each issue and be cautious about confusing the two.

Some of the arguments that I have read favoring the use of wine in communion almost sound as though those using grape juice are disobeying a direct command to use wine.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is worth noting that the accounts of institution in the Gospels do not mention wine by name, but the cup (which, clearly, I believe, contained wine, not grape juice). It is helpful to keep in mind the breadth of the scriptural use of the language of wine, representing both the wrath of God, who makes his enemies drink the dregs of his cup,<sup>6</sup> and his rich blessing (wine gladdens the heart, it is offered without money and without price—and that picturing the offer of God's free grace!<sup>7</sup>). While all of this makes it appropriate to use wine in the sacrament, as our Lord did when he instituted the meal, it does not necessarily imply that another form of the fruit of the vine is inadequate. Just as some who once argued for grape juice to replace wine failed to grasp a biblical balance, so some today, perhaps in reaction, seem to place more emphasis on fermentation of the fruit of the vine than the Bible itself does. One session, after admitting that "The Bible draws no distinction between wine and grape juice or between fermented and unfermented wine," goes on to assert: "Grape juice is dead, but wine has passed from death to life through fermentation."

Near the beginning of his discussion of the Lord's Supper in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin comments with his usual grasp of biblical balance, "We must neither, by setting too little value on the signs, dis sever them from their meanings to which they are in some degree annexed, nor by immoderately extolling them, seem

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5 One session's position paper on the issue concludes with: "If the Lord Jesus Christ has indeed commanded us to use wine, is it not dangerous for us to intentionally keep this powerful covenantal symbol of blessing and curse from our celebrations of the Lord's Supper?"

6 Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17.

7 Psalm 104:15; Isaiah 55:1. References could be multiplied on both sides.



somewhat to obscure the mysteries themselves.”<sup>8</sup> Scripture focuses on the crucified Christ presented to us in the bread and the cup, and does not emphasize some of the details involved. Those details are of secondary importance, as Calvin later observes:

In regard to the external form of the ordinance, whether or not believers are to take into their hands and divide among themselves, or each is to eat what is given to him: whether they are to return the cup to the deacon or hand it to their neighbour; whether the bread is to be leavened or unleavened, and the wine to be red or white, is of no consequence. These things are indifferent, and left free to the Church, though it is certain that it was the custom of the ancient Church for all to receive into their hand.<sup>9</sup>

Although it would be anachronistic to read the fermentation issue into Calvin’s discussion, his principle of dealing with vital matters and being less rigorous about others is a solid one.

As far as the sacramental issue is concerned, I believe we can conclude that neither the use of wine nor the use of grape juice is *wrong* in the observance of the sacrament, although there is strong biblical precedent for the use of wine. In my view, the issue of frequency of observance is of considerably more weight than questions about the details of the bread and the cup.

The issue of Christian liberty<sup>10</sup> is complex and affects the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Again, without arguing what might need more develop-

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8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 4.17.5.

9 *Ibid.*, 4.17.43.

10 WCF 20, “Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience,” especially Section 2: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.”

ment in some circumstances, while the Scriptures clearly condemn drunkenness, the beverage use of alcohol in moderation is morally indifferent.<sup>11</sup> It is not wrong to partake, and it is not wrong to abstain. Either may be done to the glory of God. The stronger brother is under obligation not to despise the weaker brother nor to set before him an occasion to sin, and the weaker brother must refrain from condemning the stronger. Perhaps the best brief treatment of the principles of Christian liberty is John Murray’s article “The Weak and the Strong,” in which he discusses the classic passages, Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.<sup>12</sup> Murray identifies the issues involved in these Scriptures, and carefully outlines the respective responsibilities of both the weaker and the stronger brother. A close reading of this article ought to precede decisions on this subject.

It may be helpful for those who use alcoholic beverages to reflect on the great abuse of alcohol out of which came pressure to abstain. Historically this abuse was recognized, not only in fundamentalist circles but also in some branches of Presbyterianism,<sup>13</sup> to the point that some churches required total abstinence for members, or at least for officers.<sup>14</sup> In this setting some have taken vows to abstain. Remembering the binding nature of an oath, since a vow to abstain from alcohol does not bind the swearer to sin, I do not believe it is

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11 In discussions of Christian liberty “indifference” becomes a technical term referring to something that God neither commands nor forbids. Ultimately nothing that we do is indifferent to God, and we should be able to either use or refrain from using to his glory.

12 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume 4, Chapter 9 (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1982), 142–57, originally published in *The Westminster Theological Journal* 12, no. 2 (1950).

13 In reading John Paton’s autobiography, as a minor side note in what is one of the best missionary autobiographies, I was struck by his strong advocacy of total abstinence, which he specifically contrasts with temperance, in dealing with drunkenness in Glasgow more than 160 years ago. *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 2007), 38.

14 Until fairly recently, this was true of a church with which the OPC has close fraternal relations, The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. See also Williamson’s *Wine in the Bible*.

wrong to continue to keep such an oath, even though the person may no longer believe that the Bible requires abstinence.<sup>15</sup> The church ought not to pressure the person otherwise.<sup>16</sup> Likewise those who abstain ought to reflect on the long history of God's people enjoying wine as his gift and using it to God's glory without falling into drunkenness. Particularly for those for whom alcohol abuse (drunkenness) has involved sin and pain in their lives or their family members' lives, it may be difficult to appreciate this, but they need to distinguish proper use from abuse.

I believe that the church continues to need instruction on the matter of Christian liberty,<sup>17</sup> but that we ought to be cautious not to use the Lord's Supper as a lever in this issue.

As we consider the possible use of wine in the sacrament, we also need to keep in mind that in many churches are members or visitors who have had or continue to have a struggle with drunkenness and may not be confident of their partaking of even a small amount of wine without fear of falling back into sin. We need not determine how substantial this lack of confidence is to appreciate that this is where some people are at this point in their sanctification. Williamson appears to overstate his case when he argues that, "The *only* source of danger [for the alcoholic being tempted to drunkenness] is man's sinful heart."<sup>18</sup> Total depravity affects the whole person, the body as well as the heart, and the church needs to be sensitive to that. Murray, with careful pastoral concern, writes:

In some cases the cost of sobriety is total abstinence. The words of our Lord apply. It

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15 Williamson, *Wine in the Bible*, 34–35. Williamson argues to the contrary, "Thus we conclude that a man who has taken an unscriptural vow of perpetual and total abstinence should renounce this vow, even if he has every intention of continuing the practice of total abstinence."

16 Psalm 15:4 and WCF 22.4 "Of Lawful Oaths and Vows" (emphasis added): "An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin; but in *anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance*, although to a man's own hurt."

17 Romans 14 provides a natural setting for such instruction.

18 Williamson, *Wine in the Bible*, 23, emphasis added.

is better to enter into life with one eye than having two eyes to go into the hell of fire. True believers afflicted with such a temptation to excess must be dealt with very tenderly and sympathetically.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the use of the vine in the form of wine can encourage and be a means of grace precisely to those who have struggled with immoderate use of alcohol and have found forgiveness and new life in Christ. One of our members tells of a church she knows where many members have come from skid row with a strong history of drunkenness, from which they have repented. Some of those members testify to the liberating joy of receiving Christ in the sacrament in the same substance to which they once were enslaved. I sent an early draft of this paper to a fellow pastor who has been through that struggle (and now abstains), asking him to comment particularly on the occasions when he experiences wine in the communion service. He responded (and I quote with his permission):

I do not have trouble or temptation if the sacrament has wine. It did take a while. To this day, when I know that there is fermented wine, I say within myself, "My Lord, I drink this as an act of worship."

He also recalled an occasion several years ago when the wine was unexpectedly strong:

As I was serving the sacrament and drank that wine—wow! The bells went off, the whistles rang in my soul—and I responded in silent prayer, "Thank you, Lord, for the reminder of my addiction!"

What is the range of saints to whom we are serving the cup? Some may be convinced that the appropriate contents of the cup ought to be wine. Others may have a preference for that, but not a conviction on the issue. Others may be indifferent on the issue. Some may simply be uncomfortable with their own use of wine, but not believe it is wrong for others. Still others may believe

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19 Murray, "The Weak and the Strong," 148–49.

they would be sinning to use any wine, or may be bound by an oath previously taken (whether or not that oath was a good one to take). And there may be those who fear that they would be causing others to sin by partaking of wine. There may be a few who for medical reasons or because of having had aversion therapy cannot partake of wine. We would do well to encourage all sides to be cautious to avoid imposing their preferences on others, but rather to approach the issue with love.

Given this breadth, it appears to me that, if the session is going to move towards using wine in the Lord's Supper, it would be wise, at least for quite some time,<sup>20</sup> to have both wine and grape juice available in the trays. Robert S. Rayburn's concluding lecture puts it well as he reports the decision of the session of Faith PCA, Tacoma, to add wine to the communion trays:

I say "add" wine, because we will continue to offer grape juice for those who prefer it. We realize that generations have come and gone since grape juice became the accepted substitute for wine in the Protestant evangelical Lord's Supper. It is a deeply engrained practice and there are many who not only prefer grape juice to wine, but are convinced that wine ought not to be used. There are such people in this congregation and in other congregations of our own Presbyterian Church in America and other evangelical churches. We know that. We do not think it right to expect that everyone will come to our convictions as quickly as we have. And we do not want to put an obstacle in the way of any Christian's sincere and happy participation in the Lord's Supper here. Nor are we a congregation in isolation. We are part of the world of evangelical Protestantism and we are fully aware of the difference of conviction on this point that can be found throughout that world. We want our Supper to be accessible to all.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Which is a polite way of saying, "for the foreseeable future," for reasons outlined in the following quote.

21 [http://www.faithtacoma.org/sermons/Revising\\_Communion/](http://www.faithtacoma.org/sermons/Revising_Communion/)

(I am unimpressed with the pastoral impact of making those who request grape juice stand out uncomfortably, perhaps by having to ask to be served a separate cup.) Including both wine and grape juice may help separate the sacramental issue from that of Christian liberty. Were the session to begin this practice, the use of different forms of the fruit of the vine in the tray may be seen by some as detracting somewhat from the unity expressed in the one cup of the sacrament. However, the two forms of the fruit of the vine in one tray probably has less impact on symbolism than the replacement of a single common cup with individual glasses.<sup>22</sup>

Our discussions and decisions as a session need to keep in mind not only the theological issues involved in the sacrament but the pastoral effects on the flock as well. Our actions ought to encourage not only theological maturity but practical, loving sanctification. ☺

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Revising\_FPC\_LordsSupper\_No.11\_Conclusion\_May.06.2001.htm.

22 I have had occasion to partake of the Lord's Supper where a common cup was used but suspect that current concerns about hygiene would make that a difficult choice today. While it was apparently one cup that our Lord passed to his disciples, Scripture is not clear that a single common cup is mandated for proper observance.

# Servant Work

## John Bunyan as a Youth Pastor

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by Robert J. McKelvey

### Introduction

In *The Saint's Privilege and Profit* (1692), John Bunyan confesses: "I love to play the child with little children."<sup>2</sup> Here he relates the story of offering to cut off the sore finger of a child and replace it with "a brave golden finger." Not surprisingly, the child turned away unhappily. We may question his approach here, but the incident shows a burden to learn from and minister to youth. He was not a "youth pastor," a title that does not sit well with me, but he certainly was a "pastor of youth," which I maintain that *every* pastor should be. In this article, we will consider Bunyan's approach to children, examine some of his key writings on the subject, and apply our findings to the church today.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=243&issue\\_id=63](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=243&issue_id=63).  
2 John Bunyan, *The Saints' Privilege and Profit* (1692), in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor, 3 vols. (1854; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:674. Hereafter cited as *Works*. This treatise is also found in volume 13, ed. W. R. Owen, in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, 13 vols., ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976–94). Hereafter cited as *MW*. The Offor edition remains the most accessible and affordable collection of Bunyan's works and all three volumes can be accessed online at <http://www.johnbunyan.org>. The Oxford collection stands as the definitive edition of Bunyan's works. Where it is possible, I will cite both editions. The extensive italicization in the original text has been eliminated. Some antique spelling and capitalization has been retained.

### Father Bunyan

In *Grace Abounding* (1666) and during the seventeenth-century Restoration, Bunyan from prison addresses his persecuted congregation several times with such titles as "my children" or "my dear Children."<sup>3</sup> At that time, he had four children of his own by his first wife (d. 1658). Later, he had two more by his second wife, Elizabeth, after he wrote *Grace Abounding*. With her, he knew the pain of losing a child at birth, and his beloved blind daughter, Mary, also died before him. He also knew the heartache of spiritual death, as his son Thomas apostatized and was possibly portrayed in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680). Bunyan was known to be a spiritual leader in his family, and we clearly see that his role as an earthly Christian father fostered his fatherly care to other children in the church.

### Oh, the Children of Believers!

Bunyan speaks of those who "make a great ado with the Children of Believers; and Oh the Children of Believers!" as he warns against presumption concerning children raised in a Christian home.<sup>4</sup> As a Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist, Bunyan wrongly denied the idea of a covenant child unless he or she was regenerate, though he did affirm the benefit of a godly home.<sup>5</sup> He also saw the need to minister to believing children in the church who could be among the best of saints.<sup>6</sup> His writings show insight into the ways of children as he ministered to and learned from them, as when he expresses the bitterness of sin from "a little girl that loved to eat the heads of foul Tobacco-Pipes."<sup>7</sup>

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3 John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1–4; and *Works*, 1:4–5.

4 See *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ* (1678), in *MW* 8:294; and *Works* 1:262.

5 See *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659) in *MW* 2:172; and *Works* 1:555.

6 See *The Desire of the Righteous Granted* (1692), in *Works* 1:744.

7 These two examples come, respectively, from *The Acceptable Sacrifice* (1689) in *MW* 12:52; and *Works* 1:707; and *Seasonable Counsel: Or, Advice to Sufferers* (1684) in *MW* 10:7; and *Works* 2:693.

## Writings for “Catching Boys and Girls”

### *Christian Behaviour* (1663)

This work sets forth the duties of Christian households where good works emerge as the fruit of saving faith.<sup>8</sup> In the process, Bunyan addresses three groups of children: unbelieving children of godly parents who must still honor their parents; believing children of believing parents who share a common faith and are all the more obliged to reverence their parents; and Christian children of unbelievers who must speak to their parents “wisely, meekly, and humbly” and live faithfully before them. The last group must even bear abuse in hopes that their parents may be saved: “O! how happy a thing would it be, if God should use a Child to beget his Father to the Faith!”<sup>9</sup>

### *Instruction for the Ignorant* (1675)

This catechism, affirms Bunyan, is for both the “old and young” under his preaching who yet remain unconverted.<sup>10</sup> Related to children, he asks, “Q. Did God ever punish little Children for sin against him?” The answer states that God did such things as drown little children in the flood, burn them up in Sodom, and maul them with bears. “Alas!” the child cries out, “What shall we little Children do?” Bunyan states, “Either go on in your sins: or remember now your Creator in the days of your Youth, before the evil dayes come.” Bunyan later testifies that Jesus loved to see children come to him even if most children do not. God calls even children to worship him while remembering that the offspring of believers are not necessarily “Children of God,” but only those who are “the Children of the promise.”<sup>11</sup> While relatively few questions directly address children, they all remain useful as they point children to Christ. Further, the burden Bunyan has for the catechesis of children clearly emerges.

8 See Bunyan’s “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Christian Behaviour* in *MW* 3: 9–10 and the discussion of J. Sears McGee on the same in Introduction to *MW* 3: xix–xxxii.

9 *MW* 3:37–40; and *Works* 2:562–64.

10 *MW* 8:7; and *Works* 2:675–76.

11 *MW* 8:17–19, 21–26; and *Works* 2:679–80, 681–83.

### *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680)

This work comes as the antithesis to *The Pilgrim’s Progress, Part I* (1678) as it traces the fall of the reprobate Mr. Badman to hell by way of a dialogue between Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Attentive.<sup>12</sup> Badman had godly parents but wallowed in the sins of youth, which serves as a warning to children of the consequences for such a life. For example, he hated the Lord’s Day, “because of the Holiness that did attend it; the beginning of that Day was to him as if he was going to Prison (except he could get out from his Father and Mother, and lurk in by-holes among his Companions, untill holy Duties were over).”<sup>13</sup>

Badman later lured a godly woman into a disastrous marriage. She sought to point their seven children to the Lord, though only two came to Christ. Through her life contrasted to Badman’s, we learn the value of godly parents. In a call for a balanced approach of loving discipline, Wiseman advises: “I tell you, that if Parents carry it lovingly towards their Children, mixing their Mercies with loving Rebukes, and their loving rebukes with Fatherly and Motherly Compassions, they are more likely to save their Children, than by being churlish and severe towards them: but if they do not save them, if their mercy do them no good, yet it will greatly ease them at the day of death, to consider; I have done by love as much as I could, to save and deliver my child from Hell.”<sup>14</sup> By addressing parents, Bunyan emerges as a protector of youth and at the same time a consoler of parents who seek to raise their children in the Lord. These children may still turn out bad as the “children of wrath.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, the benefit of godly parents remains, and Bunyan encourages them to persevere. Further, he counsels all children to count their blessings and rebukes ungodly children regarding

12 See John Bunyan, “The Author to the Reader,” in *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman, Presented to the World in a Familiar Dialogue between Mr. Wiseman, and Mr. Attentive*, eds. James F. Forrest and Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1; and *Works* 3:690.

13 *Badman*, 17, 24; and *Works* 3:596, 600.

14 *Badman*, 63; and *Works* 3:617.

15 *Badman*, 63, 75; and *Works* 3:617, 623.



the mercies they scorn.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part II (1684)*

In this sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress, Part I*, Christiana, the wife of Christian, and her four sons journey through familiar places from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City led by their faithful guide, Mr. Great-heart. Likely, as Richard Greaves maintains, this is the model of the seventeenth-century dissenting pastor “who provides leadership, protection, edification, and above all the voice of experience. He knows what to expect, offers counsel on how to deal with it, and functions as a heroic protector.”<sup>17</sup> Regarding Bunyan's ministry to children, we can say that through Great-heart he leads women and children on pilgrimage in the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

A fantasy quest unfolds in which Bunyan by way of Great-heart plays the child with children while inculcating spiritual truth as the pilgrims slay with swords Giants Grim, Maul, Slay-good, and Despair; face a hideous, seven-headed monster and demolish a castle. There are powerful images at the Interpreter's house, such as that of the muck-raker caught up in this world, the spider that exposes the venomous nature of sinners, the sheep as a saint coming silently to the slaughterhouse, and the sinner drinking down iniquity like a robin gobbling up poisonous spiders. There are proverbs such as, “One leak will sink a Ship, and one Sin will destroy a Sinner.” At the House Beautiful are earthy yet spiritual lessons about such objects as medicine, clouds, rainbows, pelicans, fire, and roosters. At the house of Gaius are riddles or “nuts” whose “shells” need to be cracked to get to the inside “Meat.” One was, “A man there was, tho some did count him mad, The more he cast away, the more he had,” which was to signify, “He that bestows his Goods upon the Poor, Shall have as much again, and ten times more.” Christiana's son Samuel had such a great time here that he whispered to his mother, “this is a very good mans

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<sup>16</sup> *Badman*, 77, 78; and *Works* 3:623–24.

<sup>17</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 500–501.

House, let us stay here a good while.”<sup>18</sup>

Catechesis is also stressed as the character Prudence questions the boys to “see how Christiana had brought up her Children” in such areas as the Trinity, creation, redemption, heaven, hell, the eternity of God, the Scriptures, and the resurrection of the dead. Prudence later exhorts the boys to learn as much as they could from their mother, from others, the book of creation, and especially the Bible. Here Bunyan emphasizes the need for parents and the church to instruct children in the ways of the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the allegory the four boys are all married and while awaiting their time to cross over the river of death to the Celestial City, they live “for the Increase of the Church in that Place where they were for a time.” Here at the finish, the children of Christian and Christiana stand before us as successful pilgrims, calling us back to the preface of the allegory where Bunyan expresses his desire that he might “perswade some that go astray, To turn their Foot and Heart to the right way.”<sup>20</sup>

### *A Book for Boys and Girls (1686)*

Of all his writings, the *Book for Boys and Girls, or Country Rhimes for Children* most directly addresses children, yet Bunyan sees its benefit for children “of all Sorts and Degrees.” For example, he speaks of adults who act like children: “Our Bearded men, do act like Beardless Boys; Our Women please themselves with childish Toys.” He himself testifies, “My very Beard I cast behind the Bush” as he gets on the level of a child for the purpose of spiritually “catching Girls and Boys.”<sup>21</sup>

The book contains a mixture of emblems and propositional truth set in verse as it draws object lessons from simple subjects of creation as “temporal things spiritualized.” The longest and perhaps

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<sup>18</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That Which Is to Come*, Parts I and II, ed. James Blanton Wharey; 2nd ed., revised by Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 167, 194, 203, 231–32, 263, 264. Hereafter cited as *PP*.

<sup>19</sup> *PP*, 224–25.

<sup>20</sup> *PP*, 311.

<sup>21</sup> *MW* 6:190–91, and *Works* 3:747.



most memorable is “The Sinner and the Spider” (XVII), which follows the dialogue of a man and a spider, who as a “filthy” creature shows himself nobler than the sinner without a Savior. Other poems include animals, such as “Of the Mole in the Ground” (XIX), manifesting the folly of worldliness through a “Poor silly” dirt-digging mole; “Of the fatted Swine” (XXIV), pointing to future judgment by way of “full-fed Hogggs prepared for the knife”; and “Upon the Frog” (XXXVI), which likens the hypocrite to a damp, cold, wide-mouthed, large-bellied frog “Croaking in the Gardens, tho unpleasantly.”<sup>22</sup> Some of the poems deal with children directly, such as “Upon the Disobedient Child” (LXVI), showing the grief of children who were once parents’ “delights” but rebel to “delight in Paths that lead to Hell.”<sup>23</sup> Bunyan’s poems highlight the power of emblems to convey spiritual truth. One that even children today will grasp is the “Meditation upon an Egg” (III), showing that children of believers have no guarantee of salvation: “The Egg’s no Chick by falling from the Hen; Nor a man a Christian, till he’s born agen.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Lessons for the Church Today—“That Which Hits the Man”**

I will feebly attempt to be like Bunyan in shooting two arrows of truth on target. After all, as he notes in his preface to *A Book for Boys and Girls*, “Tis that which hits the man, doth him amaze.”<sup>25</sup> First, pastors must learn the value of exercising fatherly care towards the entire church, which includes the children. With our heavenly Father as our model, pastors are spiritual fathers in the household or family of God. In this sense, we have a responsibility to bring up all the children of the church especially as we regard them as covenant children. We spiritually beget, care for, protect, direct, govern, and correct them on behalf of God according to his Word. Just as these children

should not be afraid to come to their earthly father, they should feel comfortable with us as we receive them as spiritual fathers. This does not mean we become surrogate dads to other children or release the parents of the church from their responsibilities, but it does encourage the fatherly care manifested by such individuals as the apostles Paul (e.g., Gal. 4:19; Eph. 6:1–4; 1 Thess. 2:11), and John (e.g., 1 John 1:1, 18, 28; 3 John 4) and Jesus Christ (e.g., John 13:33). We rightly take issue with Bunyan’s convictions against covenant children, but we do well to follow his fatherly example.

Second, pastors do well to cast their beards “behind the bush” in order to “play the child with children.” Two areas where we fail in this regard are in the pulpit and outside the same on the Lord’s Day. Many preachers make little or no effort to address children in their sermons. Even in churches where covenantal status is emphasized, our sermons often miss the applicatory mark or simply fly above the cognitive heads of children. Then, when we step outside the pulpit, we often spend no time with those children who already have little to no idea about what we were “going on about.” Yes, their parents have the responsibility to fill in the blanks, but often the pastor is so unlike Jesus who welcomed the seemingly insignificant children (Matt. 19:13–14). Perhaps you struggle with the very attitude of hindrance that Jesus rebuked. Is it possible that you have better things to do than to be bothered by the little kids in your church? Pastors, do you pay attention to children and get down on their level to interact and even play with them?

Third, realize that every minister is called to be a pastor of youth. Children may be “saints small in age” or even living examples of Mr. Badman, but the pastor must bring the truth to bear upon their lives.<sup>26</sup> This may mean giving serious consideration to how you can apply your sermon to children, making time to pull aside that troubled teen, addressing the subject of parenting for the welfare

22 MW 6:197, 204, 208, 214–22, 227.


23 MW 6:197, 223–24, 264.

24 MW 6:202.

25 MW 6:192; and *Works* 3:748.

26 In speaking of young believers, Bunyan uses the phrase, “saints small in age” in *Seasonable Counsel: Or, Advice to Sufferers* (1684), in MW 10:42; and *Works* 2:710.

of not only the parents but also the children, reviving the lost art of catechizing in your church, crying out to God in prayer for the children, learning to tell stories to kids and perhaps even writing one yourself, getting personally involved in youth events and camps (at least showing an interest in them), or learning to view yourself as a Great-heart or heroic protector of young pilgrims.

The Scriptures set forth the necessity for a pastor to rule his house well that he might provide the same care for all in the “household of God” (1 Tim. 3:4–5). Within the OPC, one area where we can improve is for pastors to take an interest in youth-related activities on the level of the congregation and presbytery. Again, I am not advocating a program-oriented approach but a concentrated effort to be involved in the lives of our youth that every pastor may be about “catching Girls and Boys.” 

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## A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief

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by **Gordon H. Cook, Jr.**

The faithful pastor knows that the funeral is not the end of grief, but just the beginning. Love, compassion, sympathy, reassurance that tears are always

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=254&issue\\_id=65](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=254&issue_id=65).

acceptable, ample opportunities to share stories of their loved one, special sensitivity around holidays and anniversaries, the delicate balance between added congregational support and intrusiveness, involvement in memorials and other activities which prompt remembering, and of course the practical care of widows (and widowers) whose families are unable or unavailable to provide that care.<sup>2</sup> These are pastoral responses to grief which normally, in combination with the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of God’s people, will foster hope and help the grieving person get through that first year. It is never easy.

As a pastor you will see raw emotions come to the surface from time to time. The grieving person will need to share stories, sometimes over and over again. Particularly the person will repeatedly share the story of how the loved one died. It is appropriate for the pastor to inquire about this periodically in order to facilitate this repetition. Each time the pastor will gently encourage the grieving person to see God’s love and provision reflected in that story. The observant pastor will also notice that the grieving person is beginning to adjust to the world around them.

One day the grieving person will tell his or her pastor about cleaning out his or her loved one’s closet or drawers, giving away the clothing, or changing the room which is most associated with the deceased. These are telltale signs that the person has emotionally relocated the deceased and is preparing to move on with life.<sup>3</sup>

Normally, the work of grief will occur over the course of a year or two. When it’s over, those who have processed their grief will feel a sense of relief and closure. However, a variety of factors in

2 I hardly need to mention the numerous biblical admonitions to provide care for the widow (cf. Deut. 10:18, 26:12–13; Psalm 68:5; 146:9; Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3–5, 16; James 1:27). In our modern society an elderly widower may find himself in the same situation envisioned in Scripture, requiring church response. Help with transportation, household responsibilities, health care needs, even financial support may be biblically mandated for all the elderly who are bereaved among us today.

3 J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer, 1991), 16.

the life of the person who is grieving, in his or her relationship with the deceased, or in the event that precipitated grief can create complicated grief, which will not resolve on its own, even with good support from a caring pastor. In this article, we will look at complicated grief, the factors which are likely to produce it, and an appropriate pastoral response.

## Complicated Grief

The definition of complicated grief is often drawn from Horowitz, Wilner, Marmar, and Krupnick.<sup>4</sup> “Pathological grief is ‘the intensification of grief to the level where the person is overwhelmed, resorts to maladaptive behavior, or remains interminably in the state of grief without progression of the mourning process towards completion.... [It] involves processes that do not move progressively toward assimilation or accommodation but, instead, lead to stereotyped repetitions or extensive interruptions of healing.” The literature on this subject has several labels which are used for complicated grief: pathological grief, complicated bereavement<sup>5</sup>, abnormal grief (or grieving), unresolved grief. Surveys suggest that between 10 and 15 percent of all grieving might be categorized appropriately as complicated grief.<sup>6</sup>

William Worden identifies four types of complicated grief.<sup>7</sup> 1) A chronic grief which continues on without stopping and never comes to a satisfactory conclusion. 2) Delayed grief in which the normal grieving process is suppressed or limited at the time of loss and then resurfaces later with far greater emotional intensity. 3) Exaggerated grief in

which the person feels completely overwhelmed with grief and resorts to behavior which makes his or her situation worse.<sup>8</sup> 4) Masked grief, similar to exaggerated grief, but here the person is not aware of the loss (or losses) lying behind the symptoms.

Bev set her table for two every afternoon and then became angry when her husband didn't come home. Jim couldn't come home. He had died several months earlier in a tragic accident.

It had been a snowy January morning which had deposited more than a foot of new snow and made local roads very slick. Bev remembered helping Jim shovel the driveway even before the snowplow had passed down their road. He was determined to make it into work that morning, a trip of about five miles. Bev kissed him goodbye as he climbed into his pickup. She then went inside and called her office to let them know she would not try to come in to work (which would have been a trip of nearly twenty miles). She lay down to rest for a while. She was awakened by the phone. The local sheriff told her there had been an accident and that he would stop by in a few minutes to take her to the hospital. She knew the sheriff and found it strange that he was coming to get her. She remembers offering up a prayer that Jim would be okay.

Bev didn't remember seeing the pickup off the road, even though they had to drive right by it. Jim was in the operating room when she arrived, and they wouldn't let her in. Later the doctor came and said something to her. She was finally allowed into the room where Jim seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

The church where they were members had a new pastor. His funeral service was very formal, right out of the book. Bev has no memory of ever talking with the pastor about the service or about Jim's death. (She stopped attending church services after this and never saw that pastor again.) She felt that she had to be strong for the children. Jim's family had come up from the South, and she

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4 Ibid., 70, quoting M. J. Horowitz, N. Wilner, C. Marmar, and J. Krupnick, “Pathological Grief and the Activation of Latent Self Images,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 137 (1980): 1157.

5 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision* (Washington, DC: the American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

6 Worth Kilcrease, “Is ‘Grief Counseling’ Helpful or Harmful to the Bereaved?” in *Psychology Today* (May 9, 2008), no page given. (Drawn from the *Psychology Today* website, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-journey-ahead/200805/is-grief-counseling-helpful-or-harmful->)

7 Worden, *Grief Counseling*, 71–74.

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8 If you would like to consider a biblical example of complicated grief, try a close review of King David's grief over the death of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 18–19).

found herself spending most of her time providing hospitality.

On one level, Bev knew that Jim had died in that accident. On another level, it never quite registered. During the days that followed, Bev threw herself back into her work. Many mentioned how well she was taking it. But in the evening the chair on the other side of the table was empty, and she wondered if Jim was taking another “company trip,” or worse that he was seeing someone else.

Sleeping became a major problem. After about a month, this caused her life to begin to fall apart. She remembers pulling the sheets off the bed one night and jumping on them, screaming, “If you’re not going to sleep, then you’re not going to have a bed to sleep in!” The screaming actually worked, once she calmed down she slept several hours that night.

Her work began to suffer, and her mother became concerned enough to take her to a doctor. He gave her twelve pills and sent her home. “Twelve pills! What good was that going to do?” She took her twelve pills and threw them as hard as she could onto the floor. The sleepless nights persisted, and her work continued to decline.

Finally her supervisor placed her on administrative leave and told her to go get some counseling. Her mother took her to another doctor. At least this one listened. He set her up with a grief counselor and an antidepressant.

I met Beverly some twenty-five years later, serving as the hospice chaplain for her sister and mother. They died just a month apart. Being aware of some of Bev’s story, I provided an extra measure of pastoral support for Bev, helping her to reconnect with her local church (under a new and far more pastoral minister). We spent time in prayer and in the Word, and for the first time Bev was able to tell the complete story. One day I stopped by at her request for a bereavement visit. When I arrived she had a book in her hands, the guest book from Jim’s funeral. For the first time in twenty-five years she read through the names of those who were present, verbally introducing me to each person and sharing stories about them and about Jim. The short visit became a long one and

was filled with many tears. Tears that were twenty-five years late, but better late than never.

Now Bev continues with her church. She has taken up clogging and dances with a local group at country fairs and nursing homes and the like. She has a life again. And at last report, she sleeps well at night.

This is complicated grief. It does not often resolve, and certainly not in any short time frame. For those who suffer with it, it touches every aspect of their lives.

## Signs of Complicated Grief

There are some signs of complicated grief that we should look for as pastors.<sup>9</sup>

- continued irritability with outbursts of violent rage;
- deep feelings of guilt, regret, and a significant decline in personal self-image;
- suicidal thoughts or plans to act upon the thoughts;
- severe and increasing inability to concentrate, to learn new information, or to remember previously known information;
- self-destructive behaviors;
- radical and sudden changes of lifestyle, often shocking to the family: relocating one’s home, changing jobs, dropping out of school, ending significant relationships, etc.;
- the development of physical symptoms which imitate those of the deceased.

Bev’s lack of normal grief emotions around the time of the funeral, her denial of the death of her husband (acted out at the supper table), her inability to sleep, and her inability to perform the basic tasks of her job were all signs that the grieving process was not following a normal course. In the early days following a significant loss these

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<sup>9</sup> These are the most serious of the signs offered by J. Shep Jeffreys in his helpful book, *Helping Grieving People: When Tears Are Not Enough* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005), 266–68.

signs could easily be mistaken for acute but normal grief. However, after several months had gone by with a clearly negative trajectory, they became the markers of her descent into the darkness of complicated grief.

In general, the pastor should be concerned if the grieving person, over time, is becoming increasingly emotional or has shown no emotion, if grief lasts for a long time (usually in excess of two years), or if the person becomes increasingly dysfunctional as time goes by. Pastors are not trained to diagnose complicated grief or to distinguish it from various physical ailments. A pastor who suspects complicated grief should refer the grieving parishioner to a medical professional to ensure that there are no physical causes for these symptoms and to make a referral to a professional grief therapist if this is appropriate.

### **Factors Which Contribute to Complicated Grief**

There are various factors which may predispose a person to complicated grief.<sup>10</sup>

Some are personal:

- a personal inability to express emotions;
- a history of depression or other mental disorders;
- a history of past complicated grief reactions.

Some are social:

- a loss that is stigmatized by society (suicide, AIDS, substance abuse, abortion, criminal activity on the part of the deceased, etc.);
- grief in a person whom society does not view as an appropriate mourner (a gay partner, the elderly, a roommate, a convict, the homeless, etc.);
- or grief that is expressed through personal

isolation or withdrawal from others.

Some are relational:

- strong ambivalence in the relationship between the mourner and the deceased;
- over-dependency in the relationship on the part of either person;
- abuse in the relationship.

But the strongest predictor of complicated grief is the nature of the loss itself:

- sudden, unexpected death;
- violent, mutilating death or murder;
- suicide;
- multiple losses in a short period of time;
- catastrophic disaster;
- death that is viewed as having been preventable;
- where the grieving person was a witness to violent death;
- where the grieving person played some role in the cause of death;
- where no body or other convincing evidence of death was found;
- where the grieving person was not informed of the death or was prevented from attending the death-associated rituals (funeral, memorial service, burial, etc.);
- death of a child;
- death after a prolonged illness.

Not everyone who experiences one of these factors will develop complicated grief. In fact most will not, but all are at risk. A pastor involved with a family that experiences any of these should be aware of the potential for complicated grief.

### **A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief**

A devout Christian couple experienced the crushing loss of late term miscarriage. The pastor offered to do a funeral service since the unborn infant had been named and joyously anticipated by

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<sup>10</sup> Jeffreys, *Helping Grieving People*, 280–81. Worden, *Grief Counseling*, 65–70. Therese Rondo, *Grief, Dying and Death* (Champaign, IL: Research Press Company, 1984), 43–57, 64–68.

the couple, their friends and family, and even by the congregation. The couple was uncertain, and the decision was made to hold a memorial after a regular worship service and to invite others present to share their own similar experiences.

After worship that morning the pastor announced their intentions and invited any who wanted to participate to stay. The memorial began soon after and continued for hours. Dozens of women shared their experience of miscarriages, and the pain and grief they still felt many years later. In many cases, these women had never told anyone other than their immediate family about the pregnancy. The couple was well supported, and many reported how healing they found the service.

Sometimes I wonder how different Beverly's life might have been if the pastor who did Jim's funeral had taken the time to provide real pastoral care for Bev and her family. If he had met with Bev and the family, gently encouraged them to share their stories about Jim and about the tragedy of his death, the process of normal grieving might have begun. If he had focused on Bev, making sure that she was emotionally and spiritual supported, even as she sought to care for others, perhaps the complications which would carry this grief on for more than twenty-five years could have been averted. If he and the church had followed up on her absence from worship, a significant change in her lifestyle, at least she would have had support as she walked through the dark valley of complicated grief.

Pastors cannot do it all. Complicated grief often requires the intervention of medical professionals, trained grief counselors, and professionally facilitated support groups. Yet in times past, churches and communities provided the additional support needed to see people through the kinds of grief and loss that do not easily resolve. Pastors may not be trained grief therapists, but we can and should listen for the themes of loss and intense pain which characterize complicated grief. If the person can't even speak the name of the deceased without intense and fresh grief, if even minor events trigger strong grief reactions, if the mourner can't remove the deceased's shoes from the living

room months after the loss, if he or she complains of symptoms similar to those of the deceased, or if he or she shows a sudden change of behavior or lifestyle, then the pastor needs to focus more attention, more time, and more compassion toward that grieving individual.<sup>11</sup>

A person experiencing complicated grief should be seen by his or her medical doctor to rule out physical problems. If the person talks with you about suicidal thoughts or intentions, you may be required by state law to report this to the appropriate authorities.<sup>12</sup> As a pastor, you can also help people to recognize their loss, express their feelings, and even encourage them to begin the task of saying good-bye. You can listen to their stories with compassion and explore with them how God and his grace fits into these stories. You can visit the graveside with them. You can give the widow permission to sell her deceased husband's old Ford pickup, or give the widower permission to replace the old broken stove on which his deceased wife cooked so many meals.

Listen without demanding.

Revisit without pushing.

Weep with them when they weep, and laugh when they laugh.

Invite them to make use of a local support group, or even offer to go with them for the first time.

Reassurances concerning the resurrection and the continued unfailing love of God can make a world of difference for those who are grieving. It takes only a few moments to offer a gentle reminder of grace and of the goodness of our God: "The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are

11 Worden, *Grief Counseling*, 74–77.

12 In Maine, the pastor is encouraged to seek to persuade the person to get help, physically take him or her to a facility where help may be obtained, obtain a promise from the person that he or she will not kill himself or herself, or if these fail, to report the matter by calling the state hotline. Each of you should know what reporting requirements your state places upon you as a religious professional and as a church.



comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3–4). This kind of pastoral response can be a healthy preventative or the beginning of healing for complicated grief. 🌟

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## The Danger of Excessive Grief

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by **Stephen J. Tracey**

No one ever prepared me for funerals. I don’t mean that we did not have some lectures on how to conduct them. Nor do I mean that I had no experience of attending them. I mean that as a pastor I did not realize it would be so difficult. Conducting the funeral services of dear saints, whose lives we have shared and whom we have grown to love, is deeply painful. It may sound as though that pain contradicts the faith we preach. After all, why mourn for those who have gone to glory? The answer is simple—because we are left behind. They have gone to be with Jesus, and we want to go, too. They have reached the other side. We remain in the valley of the shadow of death. Of course, the death of a non-believer brings the pastor many other sorrows we will not address in this article.

The danger we all face is that our sorrow can

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=256&issue\\_id=65](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=256&issue_id=65).

become excessive. Grief does not deny the gospel. Inordinate grief denies the glorious hope of the gospel. There is a wrong way to mourn and we must be careful not to fall into it.

### Mourning Too Much

What are the symptoms to watch out for?

#### Thinking God Is Cruel

Naomi borders on this when she says, “It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me” (Ruth 1:13). She is charging God with attacking her. She is hinting that the Lord has been a bully. Mary and Martha are more restrained when they tell the Lord, “If you had been here my brother would not have died” (John 11:21, 32). Yet their words are a thinly veiled criticism growing out of their immense grief. To think God is cruel, or somehow inadequate, is a sign of excessive grief.

#### Making Yourself Ill

We have all known those who fall into grief and never get out of it again. They stop eating, lose weight, grow weak, and eventually die. We say they died of a “broken heart.” It can sound very romantic and even spiritual. While it is true that “heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop” (Prov. 12:25 kjv), it is also true that “worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Puritan pastor John Flavel says that of all the creatures God made, “man is the most able and apt to be his own tormentor.”<sup>2</sup> To become so overcome with grief as to neglect ourselves is to allow the temple of God to fall into ruins. “We are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). Flavel also wisely said, “Time may come, that you may earnestly wish you had that health and strength again to spend for God, which you now so lavishly waste and prodigally

2 John Flavel, *A Token for Mourners*, in *The Works of John Flavel*, 5:604–66 (1674; repr., London, Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 620. The author owes a great deal to the rich pastoral insight of this work, *A Token for Mourners*. Happily this work has recently been published as a separate volume by the publishers.

cast away upon your troubles.”<sup>3</sup>

### Keeping the Wound Open

Grief is a wound that will slowly heal. It will leave a scar, but God does promise to bind up the broken heart. Yet there is a way of grieving by which we keep grief alive. We keep the wound open. There is nothing wrong with going to a grave and weeping. Mary did that. When Jesus arrived, she hurried out to meet him, and the other ladies thought “she was going to the tomb to weep there” (John 11:31). Jesus himself stood at that grave and wept, knowing that in a few moments he would release Lazarus from it. Weeping at a grave is perfectly natural. We must expect to feel pain. On the other hand, to keep weeping, every day, is to be in danger of obsession with grief itself. It is almost to deliberately pick at the wound. We all know from childhood that wounds so picked soon fester. William Plumer says of Psalm 77:2, “When our affliction assumes such a cast that we nurse our grief, it is wrong and becomes a great tormentor.”<sup>4</sup>

### Refusing to Be Comforted

It is sad to read of Jacob that “he refused to be comforted” (Gen. 37:35). He is not alone. Asaph says in Psalm 77:2, “My soul refuses to be comforted.” Rachel too, refuses to be comforted (cf. Jer. 31:15). When the consolation is at hand, to be inconsolable is a great slight on the mercy of God. It is to behave as though Christ is inadequate. To recognize that God’s hand causes grief is only to be half-sighted. The same hand also brings comfort, and we must not despise it. It often comes from the most unexpected source. When Moses brought glad tidings to Israel in slavery, “they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and harsh slavery” (Exod. 6:9). Though it is often hard to accept comfort, yet when some kind soul puts her arms around you, take the well meant Christian hug. Be glad that God has sent one of his little ones to help you. This is a lonely world, and we

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 620.

<sup>4</sup> William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (1864; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 738.

must help one another as we limp on our way to heaven.

Sometimes we can be so swamped in sorrow that we cease to pray and abandon Bible reading. We become so disturbed by providence that we grow cold in our love for Christ. What, then, is the remedy?

### A Right Way to Mourn

#### Take Time to Weep

Many poor souls think there is no place for tears in our religion. I once heard someone say to a woman, at the death of her husband, “Tut, don’t be crying, sure he’s in heaven.” Such words can lead us to feel guilty for grieving. It is not a real view of the way God has made our hearts. God says, “There is a time to weep,” Eccl. 3:4. The Lord Christ stood at the grave of his friend and wept. The people didn’t “tut”; they said, “See how he loved him” (John 11:36). It is right to weep, because it is right to love.

#### Cry Out to God

There is no sin in bringing our pain and sorrow to God. We are told to do just that, “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Over and over again we see the Psalmist crying out to the Lord. For example, Psalm 142:1–2, “With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.” Or Psalm 102:1–2:

A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you! Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress! Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!

Remember, God will keep our tears in a bottle and record them in his book (cf. Ps. 56:8). What a precious thought! When everyone else has forgotten your sorrows, God has not forgotten. He is the God of all comfort.

## Lean on Godly Friends

Job said, “Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!” (Job 19:21). Alas, none of us wants *his* friends! It is not wise to unburden your heart to all of your friends. Find an experienced Christian, one whom God has taken through the valleys; one whose faith shines in that quiet joy unspeakable and who will be able to comfort you with the comfort with which they themselves were comforted (cf. 2 Cor. 1:4). Proverbs 17:17 reminds us, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

## Some Concluding Remarks

### Remember Who Has Caused Your Grief

Consider the well-known words of Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21). What God took away in one day was seven sons and three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants. It was said of him that he was the greatest of all the people of the east. Now, surely, his grief was the greatest of all the people of the east. Yet from the very beginning he said, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Nothing but a faithful grasp of the greatness and goodness of God could sustain a man through such grief. We must always begin with the greatness and goodness of God.

### Remember the Resurrection

We are not to sorrow as others, who have no hope. “The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection” (The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 37). To be made perfect in holiness must be quite an experience! But to pass into glory ...! We do not know what Enoch experienced when he walked with God and then was no more, because God took him. We have a little glimpse in the experience of Elijah, “And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirl-

wind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). The chariots of fire were for Elijah. If this was the glory before the death and resurrection of Christ, then what will it be like for the saints of the new covenant?

I remember hearing Rev. Kenny MacDonald of the Free Church of Scotland preaching on the arrival of Christ into heaven following his death. He imagined all the inhabitants of heaven looking with eager joy at the conquering Son. Then the preacher made us look again. The Lord returned holding hands with a redeemed thief. It is Jesus who says, “Behold, I and the children God has given me” (Heb. 2:13). Kenny’s sermon was all the more powerful because his eighteen-year-old daughter had disappeared on a visit to India. She was never found. Many souls came to Christ through the preaching of that godly man.

### Remember, We Are to Set Our Affections on Things Above, Where Christ Is

The suffering of this present time is not worthy of comparison with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Richard Baxter warns of too much sorrow for sin, but his words fit the larger context of too much sorrow even in our grief. Our sorrow is too great, he says,

when it so clouds and clothes the soul in grief, that it makes us unfit to see and consider the promise, to relish mercy, or believe it; to acknowledge benefits, or own grace received, or be thankful for it; to feel the love of God, or love him for it, to praise him, to mind him, or to call upon him; when it drives the soul from God and weakens it to duty, and teaches it to deny mercy, and sinks it towards despair; all this is too much and sinful sorrow; and so is all that does the soul more hurt than good.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1674; repr., Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), 293–94.

# ✦ Servant Technology

## Why Are Technophiles So Hysterical?

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by T. David Gordon

When discussing issues that concern the public, it is not unusual for some conversations to become partisan. When this happens, it is also not unusual that the partisan discussions sometimes become somewhat shrill. Ordinarily, however, the discussions only become shrill when there are obvious personal consequences. The early feminists were perceived to be a tad shrill, for instance, but they had personal reasons to be—they were effectively denied many of the freedoms and opportunities our Constitution guaranteed to all. Similarly, the homosexual community has often been perceived as shrill, but again, the matter affects them personally. I have wondered, then, why it is that technophiles are often so shrill, since one wouldn't think that the candid examination of the pros and cons of various technologies (or clusters thereof) would be a personal issue, the way gender or sexuality issues are.

As I use the terms, a “technophile” is a person who regards technological innovation as good, without having specific grounds for doing so. A “technophobe” is a person who regards technological innovation as bad, without having specific grounds for doing so. That is, they are mirror images of each other; and I regard them both as

“technofools” for the same reason—they hold their opinions, often quite passionately, without grounds; and tend to resist reasoning or evidence for alternative opinions.<sup>2</sup>

We have few technophobes today; the Amish, for instance, may be close, because they object to machinery that is run by fuel or electricity.<sup>3</sup> And I recall once, in the early nineties, a colleague of mine had a wife who would not permit a computer in the home, due to some rather curious speculations of a metaphysical nature. But, such technophobes today are a significant minority.

The technophiles, on the other hand, well, their name is “Legion,” for they are many. For the technophile, newer is always better (despite the numberless Windows “upgrades” that crash as disconcertingly as their predecessors). I recall when the first color screens appeared on laptop computers, and my colleagues at Gordon-Conwell urged me to buy a new one, with color. I attempted to explain that teaching Greek was, alas, something of a black-and-white matter, and that displaying the aorist tense in, oh, let us say, magenta, would not likely have any pronounced effect on the students' understanding of how the tense worked. Similarly, lecture outlines for a course on Paul's understanding of the Law (of Moses) would hardly be improved by the addition of color. Oh, I suppose I could have displayed Paul's “negative” statements about the Law in red and his “positive” statements about the Law in green (for stop and go—get it?), but any student so addlebrained as not to be able to distinguish positive from negative comments is beyond the aid of a color palette. So, I simply waited until my black-and-white laptop died a natural death, and then, since there was no longer an option, purchased a replacement with a color

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2 My ideal human, on this score, is “techno-wise,” willing candidly to understand both the benefits and the costs, the assets and the liabilities, the pros and the cons, of specific technologies.

3 Even this is not quite technically accurate, since a horse-driven buggy is fueled by oats or hay. Indeed, while the Amish are quite insightful cultural anthropologists, correctly observing that the tools a culture uses shape it in many unforeseen and unintended ways, there is also an apparent arbitrariness to their decision to embrace certain technologies but not others.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=283&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=283&issue_id=70).

monitor.

What struck me as curious then, and strikes me as curious now, is why so many people were so eager for me to spend my money to “upgrade” my computer to a model that wasn’t actually an upgrade for my line of work. It wasn’t curious then, and isn’t curious now, that they may have had perfectly good uses of color for *their* work; and therefore I never raised any questions of them about why they had made *their* choice. But they were obviously troubled, in some measure, by the fact that I had not upgraded as they had. A similar thing happened when substantially faster processors were engineered, which permitted the use of real images (does the reader recall the primitive days of MacDraw?). Again, I was urged to get a newer machine, because of its “superior graphics.” My reply was, by then, predictable: I wasn’t teaching my students illustrated manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. Though some of the late-medieval manuscripts were indeed “illuminated,” I was not teaching medieval text-criticism. I was teaching exegesis and interpretation of the original text, not aesthetic appreciation for the beautiful illuminations of some rare fourteenth-century manuscripts. Had I been a professor of art criticism, a graphics-capable monitor may have been an aid to my instruction, but it simply wasn’t necessary for the arena of my instruction.

Why was it so unsettling to others that I did not run out and purchase, at considerable expense, the first generation of color monitors, or the first generation of true graphics-capable computers? Other tools do not provoke this response. None of my colleagues ever inquired whether I split my firewood with “the latest” maul, or whether I climbed “the latest” ladder to clean my gutters (though improvements in both areas were not uncommon). Electronic technologies<sup>4</sup> differ from other technologies in the unquestioning—and, at times, rabid—loyalty they seem to produce. ETs are virtually talismanic today; it is existentially

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4 I call them ETs (electronic technologies); it is not only an abbreviation, but also reminds us of their some what alien and mysterious nature.

important to have (or covet) “the latest.”

Why? Why would a colleague in another field care if I remained “behind the times,” as it were, teaching an ancient text in a fairly ancient manner? I wrote a little apology several years ago for why I don’t use PowerPoint in my classes. It was an abbreviated explanation, with substantial indebtedness to Edward Tufte,<sup>5</sup> for why the particular educational goals of the particular courses I teach would not be assisted by using this tool. I expressly said in the opening paragraph that it was an apology for *my* choice and *not* a criticism of choices made by others who taught different courses than I. Nonetheless, several of the people who came across it took great offense, and explained to me that they worked very hard on their PowerPoint presentations and employed them wisely, a matter that I had never questioned or even raised.

Why did these people become defensive about *my own* apology for *my own* pedagogical choices? Why did they even *care*? Would the same defensiveness have attended a discussion of the merits of white chalk versus yellow chalk? Well, these “why” questions are rarely answered completely. We grope about, knowing what little we do about human nature or human society, and attempt partial explanations, and I’ll do so here, with an emphasis on the “partial.” My explanation only *partly* explains why *part* of the population behaves as it does *part* of the time.<sup>6</sup> Here it goes.

Contemporaneity is probably one of the most pervasive of values in our culture. For a variety of reasons, there has probably never been a generation more infatuated with itself, or more clueless about previous generations. There are many causes for this. Commercial forces, for instance, sell us their wares by first “selling” the idea that newer is better. Political forces that could not make a cogent argument for their political theory sell their platform by “selling” the idea of change. Electronic media separate us from the past; if you

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5 *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within* (Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press, 2003).

6 But watch carefully, and you will observe some blood pressures rising despite this triple qualification.



know the world *via* television, for instance, you know a world that is only a half-century old.<sup>7</sup> All of these, and others, contribute to the pervasiveness of contemporaneity as a value in our culture. But they are not alone responsible.

I believe it is entirely possible that the first of the deadly sins in the medieval world is still the first sin of our world: pride. Pride takes many forms, of course, both individually and culturally, but its cultural forms appear to be the most difficult to notice, and the most intractable. The parable of the Emperor's new clothes reminds us of the social complicity of folly; Reinhold Niebuhr reminded us of the same; Socrates thought nothing was more dangerously entrenched than the received tradition of a culture; and Jesus was concerned that some people practiced even their religion in order to be seen (and approved) by men.<sup>8</sup> Something in us desires to believe, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that we, as a group, are more enlightened than others, nobler than others; to put it simply, superior to others. One of the conceits by which post-Industrial cultures do this is by regarding previous cultures (if only recently previous) as "primitive."

The torrent of new technologies as the second millennium moved into the third fed this wave of we're-superior-because-others-were-primitive attitude. We not only have telephones and televisions that some other generations did not have, but we have cellphones, laptops, PDAs, iPhones, GameBoys and the World Wide Web. We needed such bolstering at precisely this time, because otherwise the evidence was far from flattering. The twentieth was the greatest killing century of all

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7 The best proof of this is the so-called History Channel. There is almost never any history on the History Channel. There are programs about anticipated "mega-disasters" in the *future*; programs about people driving trucks on ice roads *today* in Alaska, and programs about *contemporary* inner-city gangs; but there is almost never any history on the History Channel, and what little there is is often mere sensationalism about a serial murderer from the 1980s. Just as Tom Cruise could not "handle the truth" in *A Few Good Men*, television cannot "handle the past."

8 Niebuhr's most relevant work on this point was *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); Socrates made this case in his Apology. Jesus's words are found in Matthew 6:2.

times, by any measure. Not only did humans kill the greatest absolute number of their fellow humans in that century, but humans killed a higher percentage of the planet's population than ever before. Worse, this was true even if we discounted the wars. By genocide alone, we killed a higher percentage of fellow humans than ever before.<sup>9</sup> And there were also the wars, some of which did not enjoy a consensus of public support (Vietnam, Iraq). Our "Shock and Awe" campaign shocked everyone (including us) and awed no one, because awe requires a more self-evidently moral cause. One of our wars only ended by the unleashing of a weapon of such destructive power that we have lived in the frightening shadow of its mushroom cloud ever since. Thus, by any fair observation, we must conclude that the twentieth century was the most barbarous of all.

And so, perhaps at some deep level of our corporate psyche, there is some need for us to "save face," as it were, in light of our recent, blood-stained history. And here, the conceit of technological progress saves the day, does it not? We may be *morally* inferior to previous generations, but we are, at least, technologically superior. We may not be so smart, but our tools are. We have smart phones, smart cars, even smart bombs, so we can afford to be a little stupid about our wars and genocides. We can do almost anything faster than any previous generation could do it, from balancing a checkbook, to doing our taxes, to writing a letter. The fact that so much of what we have done is unspeakably wicked and/or so breathtakingly inhumane (The primary leisure activity of our culture is watching television? How can we look at ourselves in the mirror?) can be overlooked since we do our wickedness efficiently (Hiroshima, Nagasaki) and cultivate our inhumaneness so effortlessly ("Laverne & Shirley" trumped *War and Peace*). If a person has only a flicker of memory, only a rough remembrance of the last century or so, such a person knows that the last century was nothing, as we used to say, "to write home about." And so, we find

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9 Lewis M. Simons, "Genocide and the Science of Proof," *National Geographic* 209, no. 1 (January 2006): 28.



face-saving solace in the only possible arena where we could plausibly declare our superiority with a straight face: technology.

Technology will save us. Of course, it won't save us from our wickedness or from our banality (nothing is more banal than television). But it will permit us to save face. It permits us to overlook that our family lives are disintegrated (four people in a car on a trip, each "podded up" alone), our "art" is trivial, our leisure time is wasted, our governors are unworthy of our honor, our international policies are often indefensible and self-defeating, our business "experts" are utter imbeciles, and our killing is boundless. We have "the latest," and for us, the latest is the greatest. And this technological superiority, at least psychologically, covers a multitude of sins. So if anyone, even a middle-aged professor of an obscure language at an obscure college, questions whether the latest, at any moment, is necessarily the greatest, then he must be silenced. The Emperor's new garb must be honored.

If, on the other hand, tools are merely tools, then the only measure of them is the purposes to which they are put, or the skill or wisdom with which they are employed. We have rarely put our ETs to humane purpose, though perhaps we will in the future. We surely do not ordinarily employ them wisely (we permit face-to-face communication to be interrupted by a cellphone, or we permit email or IM to interrupt our reading of Socrates or Robert Frost). But our tools are not mere tools; they are symbols of our last-grasp effort at saving face, talismans of our only alleged superiority to previous generations. And because they serve such an important (albeit perverse) social-psychological function, we get a little hysterical when they are regarded as what they are: mere tools—nothing more, nothing less.

Many of us, in other words, *are* personally invested in our ETs. We can be no more dispassionate about them than feminists or gay-rights activists can be; because they are etched into our psyches. We need them to provide us with self-congratulation; we need them to assure us that we are making progress (in light of the overwhelming evidence of considerable regress); we need them

to erase our memory of the recent past; we need them to assure us that our whirling rat-race of mindless, ill-considered, and ill-fated multi-tasking is actually taking us somewhere good. And since nothing else—nothing in our actual human accomplishments in the present or recent past—will provide us with such assurance, we cling to our technological creed: "Better tools make better people." And we shriek, somewhat hysterically, at those who challenge our creed. ❧

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# ✦ Servant Living

## What Should I Do? Making Decisions Biblically

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by Shane Lems

Tough decisions come up quite often in the Christian life. We face hard questions about birth control, whom to marry, what job to take, where to move, as well as those difficult end-of-life medical treatment questions. What do we do when faced with a difficult decision? If you're like me, you (sadly!) tend to face tough decisions in ways that are less than biblical, because sinful motives cloud your judgment. For example, we think selfishly about what's best for ourselves, we are quick to come to conclusions and too stubborn to change our minds, or we make the decision based on the fear of man or some other sin with which we struggle. Sometimes a tough decision is made, and only *afterwards* we realize that we forgot to pray about it at all. In this brief essay, I lay out a very general method for facing tough decisions biblically.

Of course, prayer is the first place to start when facing big decisions. We can even pray now for wisdom to make tough decisions in the future. Every major decision we face should be done with much prayer, depending upon God for grace and wisdom to obey him in our choices.

Another important step in making tough

decisions is obtaining advice from godly and wise Christians. I realize many of us may be too proud to go to a pastor, elder, or other mature Christians for advice in decision making, but this step should not be avoided. Proverbs 12:15 is clear, “a wise man listens to advice” (cf. Prov. 13:10, 19:20). In fact, it might even be wise in some decisions to consult those outside of the faith who have expertise on some aspect of your choice—like a doctor who has done the surgery before, for just one example.

For example, if you face the decision of whether or not to take a new job in a different city, you should ask advice from another wise Christian (or several Christians) to help you weigh the pros and cons, and help you pray through the issue. Quite often when we make decisions we miss some huge factors—either purposely or inadvertently—that could help us decide the godlier path. A wise Christian's advice might help us see several perspectives that are important in making the decision, perspectives that we miss from our own point of view. The Christian you select to help you in your decision making should know Scripture and be able to give you honest and objective advice. You may also want to choose a person who isn't much affected by whatever decision you make.

There are also other biblical teachings we should take into account. Below is a basic biblical guide to decision making. These questions should be wrestled over in prayer, Bible study, and discussions with other wise Christians. There are more things to think about in decision making, I realize—these are just some general things to get us thinking in the right direction. I also encourage careful and patient deliberation when making decisions—sometimes it is helpful to write down the pros and cons of the difficult choice you face (following the questions below).

### 1. Which Choice Will Glorify God the Most?

We should do everything *in order that God may be glorified* (1 Pet. 4:11); we should do everything to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). The Westminster Shorter Catechism must be on our mind

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=248&issue\\_id=64](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=248&issue_id=64).

as we make a decision: the chief end of man is to glorify God. Our decisions should glorify God—this is a basic litmus test for our decisions.

How do we glorify God? By believing in his Son and keeping his commandments out of gratitude. We glorify him when we deny ourselves and seek his kingdom above all things. We glorify God when we praise and adore him in public worship—in corporate prayer, song, and listening to his voice in preaching. Our choices should contribute positively to these things—they should help us obey the Lord, love him better, help us seek his kingdom first by denying ourselves, and help attend and be attentive in public worship.

For example, if the new job we are thinking about means we'll be working sixty-five hours from Monday to Saturday, there is a good chance it will hinder our public worship, because we'd be totally exhausted on the Lord's Day. It would also leave little time for habitual prayer and Bible reading at home. Taking the job may mean a better income, but it would detract from our worship and piety, and therefore not be conducive to our "chief end" of glorifying God. It might be a hard pill to swallow, but time in corporate worship and in private prayer is more important than a large income.

Here are a few questions to ask concerning this step of the decision-making process with the goal of glorifying God: Which choice will be most in line with the Ten Commandments? Which choice will help me better keep God's commandments? Which choice will help me deny myself and seek God's kingdom better? Which choice will best display the glories of the gospel? Which choice will help me worship God better (physically, mentally, and spiritually)? Which choice will help me be more faithful to public worship at a solid church (Heb. 10:25)? Which choice will help me pray and read the Scriptures more? Am I making a choice because I'm proud, because I love money, because I am selfish, or because of some other sin to which I'm prone? Will one of the choices bother my conscience, which in turn hinders my worship of God? Am I simply afraid, or do I lack moral courage to make the harder but more God-glorifying choice? Am I leaning towards one of the choices

because I fear people more than I fear God? Am I leaning towards one of the choices because I want to somehow get back at someone (sinful revenge) rather than praise God?

## **2. Which Choice Will Be Most Beneficial to Others?**

When making choices, along with considering how we can glorify God the best, we also should consider how our choices affect others. The Bible says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:16). In other words, when making choices, let us "look not only to [our] own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). Broadly speaking this means our choices should not hurt, but benefit other people. The Heidelberg Catechism, when discussing the sixth commandment, says we should be peaceful, patient, meek, kind, and merciful to our neighbor and do what we can to advance his well being (Q. 107). We should think of this when we make decisions.

More narrowly, and more importantly, our choices should be edifying and beneficial for other Christians (Heb. 10:24). In fact, we should "do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Our decisions should benefit Christians—we should think of them when we make choices. When facing a major decision, we do what is best for other Christians; we choose the decision that will be most beneficial to Christ's church. In other words, our choices should help other Christians better glorify God; it should help them worship better and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Our choices should help other Christians better keep the commandments. Secondly, our choices should help other Christians in a temporal way (financial, health, etc.).

For example, suppose a Christian was deciding between two colleges to attend as he continued his goal to be a teacher. One college was close to a small but solid church that would benefit from his teaching ability and his tithing (albeit a small tithe!). This would be something significant to

consider as he makes his decision. Another example might be birth control. Suppose a Christian family of six includes a wife/mother who suffers from illness and frequent depression. It may be an unwise choice to have another child at this point, because it would hurt the whole family (and possibly close Christian friends) both spiritually and physically (e.g., the wife's depression might get worse, she might get more ill, or the family might miss many worship services).

Here are a few questions to answer when making a decision. Which choice will be more helpful to other Christians? Which choice will help them worship and glorify God more? Which choice will mean other Christians grow in faith and godliness? Which choice will help my wife, husband, kids, friends, or church draw closer to God and be more knowledgeable of the Scriptures? If this is a family situation, which choice will strengthen the home spiritually (in faith, obedience, worship, prayer, fellowship, etc.)? In the long run, which is better for other Christians? Which choice is the least selfish choice (usually that is the better one)? Which choice will show love to others most? Which choice will be the greatest blessing to the most Christians? Which choice will benefit a solid Christian church? Which choice will strengthen the communion of the saints?

### **3. Which Choice Will Glorify God the Most before the World?**

The third principle for decision making comes from Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Our choices should make us shine like stars in a dark world so others glorify God (Phil. 2:15). When making a choice, we should think which option will bring the most glory to Christ and his church. I'd also encourage those making tough decisions to consider the discipleship passages in the Gospels, where Jesus tells us to count the cost, deny ourselves, and take up a cross ( Matt. 10:37–39; Luke 14:26–33; etc.).

One example might be where to build a new

shed in your back yard. Suppose a neighbor of yours is quite rude and grumpy, always looking for an excuse to mock Christians. Suppose she also enjoys a view of the nearby forest from her living room window. Though you may have the legal rights to build a shed on your property, which would block her view, you may want to let go of your rights at this point so that the woman doesn't have another reason to revile the faith. Also, by not blocking her view with a shed in a certain place, you show love to that person. The Lord may use such an event to someday make her willing to listen to the gospel.

Again, here are a few questions to ask when making decisions. Assuming unbelievers are watching (they usually are), which choice will show them that I love Christ more than anything in the world? Which choice will make them think well of Jesus's name? Which choice will make them think well of the church, of other Christians? Which choice will show others that I love Christ and his church more than my own needs and wants? Which choice will show them that the world will eventually come to an end and that my home is in heaven? Which choice will show others that I am a serious Christian?

### **Conclusion**

The above three steps could be abbreviated using several biblical principles: *Seek first the kingdom of God, deny yourselves, and love your neighbor as yourself.* If we get these and other helpful verses into our minds and hearts, it will be easier to implement them when making a tough decision. Hiding God's Word in our heart helps us avoid sin—even in the decision-making process (Ps. 119:11). Furthermore, we realize the great Reformed teaching that the Spirit and the Word go forth together—the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit in decision making will always correspond to the Word (Zech. 4:6; John 14:26; etc.). Depending on the Spirit in making decisions means resting on the Word of the Lord.

Of course, there are other things to consider when making tough decisions. I do want to point

out the fact that I didn't mention our material well being in the above. I left it out on purpose. Too often our decisions are made selfishly—we make choices based on money, housing, comfort, amenities, and so forth rather than applying the biblical principles of humility, self-denial, loving God first, and loving others second. We live in a world that distorts our ability to make decisions biblically. All around us, the world tells us we can and should have our way, right away, with no pain, little thinking, with the biggest return and pleasure. They don't call us the "Fast-Food Nation" for nothing!

However, the Christian pilgrim way is often just the opposite: we must be patient, submit to God's will, face some pain and discomfort (mortification), think hard, and sometimes forgo pleasure and wealth as we make a hard choice. Our choices may bring much discomfort our way, so we pray for courage to stand by our decision and contentment if our decision results in loss of earthly comfort.<sup>2</sup> By making a wise decision following Scripture, we receive a great blessing: a clear conscience before God and the pleasure of glorifying and enjoying him. At the beginning and end of our decision-making process, we realize that in his providence, timing, and way, God will work all things for our good and his glory. If God is glorified, we should be satisfied. ☺

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<sup>2</sup> For a lengthier treatment of cultivating Christian virtues in light of decision making, see chapter three of David VanDrunen's *Bioethics and the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

# ✦ Servant Truth

## Psalm 1: The Pursuit of Happiness

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by Larry Wilson

If there's one thing everyone wants, it's to be happy! The U.S. constitution even identifies "the pursuit of happiness" as a fundamental human right. But if everyone seeks happiness, then why do so few find it? Why is happiness so elusive? Could they be pursuing it in the wrong direction? Take a close look at Psalm 1. In Psalm 1, God says that all the ways by which people pursue happiness actually boil down to two basic ways.

### Psalm 1

Psalm 1 literally begins, "Oh, the blessedness of the man" (my translation). Then it describes the kind of person who will brim over with happiness.

Verses 1–3 identify the goal—the truly happy person, the person to be imitated, is the righteous person.

Verse 1 recites what the righteous person does not do. He does not engage in any conduct that will interfere with his relationship with God. He "walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." He avoids any attachment to the world which adulterates his walk with God (cf. James 4:4).

Verse 2 describes what he does do: "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he

meditates day and night." He positively delights in Jehovah and his "Torah." The Hebrew word "Torah" is broader than our English word "law." By "law" we mean "rules." "Torah" includes rules, but more broadly, it means "instruction." It means God's Word. The righteous person literally fills his every thought, his every attitude, his entire life with passionate devotion to Jehovah and his Word. He zestfully pursues an exclusive love-affair with Jehovah and his Word.

Verse 3 illustrates this: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water." This makes him fruitful ("that yields its fruit in its season") and vital ("and its leaf does not wither"). In short, he thrives and is productive to the glory of God ("in all he does, he prospers").

Verses 4–5, on the other hand, describe sinners.

Verse 4 uses another illustration: "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away." If the righteous are like trees, the wicked are like chaff, the husks separated at threshing from the grain. Chaff is "without root below, without fruit above."<sup>2</sup> It's "rootless, weightless, useless."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in the end, chaff blows away.

Verse 5 is very emphatic: "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." John the Baptist sounded this same theme as he warned people to prepare for the kingdom of God and its coming king—Matthew 3:12—"His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Verse 6 caps off the Psalm by contrasting the ends of the righteous and wicked. The righteous can look forward to a positive destiny: "The Lord knows the way of the righteous" (vs. 6a). The wicked, on the other hand, face a negative destiny: "But the way of the wicked will perish" (vs. 6b).

2 F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1975), 87.

3 Derek Kidner, *Tyndale OT Commentary on Psalms*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 49.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=262&issue\\_id=66](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=262&issue_id=66).



## Four Key Themes

Take note of four key themes which Psalm 1 sounds. These themes are sounded all through the Psalms, and all through the Bible.

1. The living God is the “fount of every blessing,” the true source of all happiness. This is the precise opposite of the lies of the world and the devil. “Turn away from God,” they say, “Turn away from his ordinances. God will make you miserable. Sin will make you happy.” This lie is very effective because it’s half true. In fact, there is pleasure in sin for a season, but only because in order to sin, you have to use—or misuse—God’s created blessings. And only for a season! Ultimately sin produces misery because it cuts you off from the true source of happiness and pleasure—the living God. Psalm 1 does not tell you how to work up your own happiness; it tells you how to be blessed by God, the true and eternal source of happiness.

2. The living God, our creator, holds all humankind accountable. There will be a day of judgment on which all will appear before him. And he is the holy, impartial judge who will mete out perfect justice. It won’t matter what other people think of you; it won’t matter whether you’re rich or poor; it won’t matter whether you’re red, brown, yellow, black, or white. God is no respecter of persons. He’ll scrutinize everything without partiality in the light of his perfect holiness and justice—everything! Ecclesiastes 12:14, “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

3. There are only two kinds of people, and they’re defined by their relation to God—note the clear-cut distinction this Psalm makes between “the righteous” and “the wicked” (or “sinners”). It’s very important that we notice this in our day; God says there’s no third category! It’s tempting to say, “I may not have the passion for God and his Word that Psalm 1 describes, but I’m no murderer. And even when I do sin, it’s kind of an aberration. I’m not really that kind of person.” But God says that if

you are not righteous in the way that he describes it—utterly devoted to God and his Word inside and out—then you in fact are in the other category, the wicked. You are that kind of person.

4. God says that there are only two possible destinies for people. Note the stunning contrast between the first and the last words of Psalm 1, “Blessed” and “will perish.” In other words, people end up either with God’s blessing or with God’s curse. Again, it’s very important in our day that we note well that there are only two options—heaven or hell. God says there is no third option! There’s no exit. You have to deal with your creator for all eternity—one way or the other.

### “The Moral of the Story”

Psalm 1 (together with Psalm 2) functions as preface to whole Book of Psalms. It sets the theme and the tone. And it unflinchingly confronts us with the same basic choice that we hear in Deuteronomy 30. Choose life. Serve God fully and live. Or choose death. Fail to serve God fully and perish!

So here is “the moral of the story”! Do you want to be happy? Truly happy? Forever happy? Then make sure that every fiber of your being—your thinking, your feeling, your speaking, your doing—is always and thoroughly saturated with pure and passionate devotion to God and his Word. Make sure that the living God of the Bible is your all in all. God says that this is the way to get his blessing of perfect and everlasting happiness.

The end.

### “But Wait a Minute!”

“But wait a minute!” someone says. “I felt guilty just hearing verses 1–3, let alone all those laws that I’m *supposed* to delight in. I don’t really match up to the truly happy man. In fact, I don’t even come close. What about all my sins? Haven’t I already forfeited this happiness? Even if God would let me start fresh from now on, how could I possibly maintain that level of pure devotion to God? What about my indwelling sin? What about

my sinfulness, my sin—fullness?”

That’s exactly right, and the fact is that we really don’t understand Psalm 1 if we think it congratulates us and says “I’m OK, you’re OK. It’s only those really wicked people who we don’t even know, who we just hear about on the news, who have to worry.”

Instead, we’d really better take seriously that this Psalm describes God’s expectations and standard for his image-bearers. He created us; we belong to him. And he created us for himself; we owe him. He has the right to expect us to listen only and always to him, and we have the obligation to do it. Psalm 1 doesn’t describe a super-spiritual, above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty type of person. It describes the mere ABCs of our most basic, rudimentary duty. God holds us accountable to at least this standard.

In other words, to fall short of deeply, constantly loving God and his Word as Psalm 1 describes it is sin! To fail to love the living God of the Bible with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and to fail to love what God loves—his Word, his ordinances, his church, his people—is wicked! Even benign neglect of these things is tantamount to seating yourself among the scoffers. Sometimes we congratulate ourselves by saying “even though I don’t feel like obeying God, I do discipline myself to obey anyway.” But Psalm 1 says that it’s also desperately wicked to not feel like obeying God! It’s sin!

And every sin merits God’s wrath and curse, both in this life and the next, so that God is right in all he says and righteous in all his judgments. Nothing bad ever happens to us in this life that is worse than we deserve if, in fact, what we actually deserve is God’s white-hot wrath! We don’t really understand Psalm 1 unless we see that it exposes our iniquity and condemns us as guilty.

### **The Fulfillment of Psalm 1**

But it’s also important to remember that God didn’t give Psalm 1 directly to us. “A text out of context is a pretext.” And we take Psalm 1 out of context if we forget that God inspired it under the

old covenant, “under the law.” Read the Old Testament. The Old Testament saints understood that they were sinners. And they knew that their God is holy. But they also knew that their God graciously provided means for them to receive forgiveness and be reconciled with God. All through the Psalms, in fact, we find admissions of sin, expressions of contrite repentance, faith, and reliance on God through his ordained atoning sacrifices. And God graciously accepted these sacrifices offered in faith.

But God never accepted the Old Testament sacrifices as ends in themselves. They were sacraments that kept lifting his people’s faith up to God, that kept assuring them that somehow God was taking care of their sins. The New Testament book of Hebrews says, nevertheless, that they actually served also as constant reminders that the sin problem was still there—it had not yet been settled. But in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He was holy, harmless, undefiled. He fulfilled all righteousness. He fulfilled Psalm 1.

### **The True Pursuit of True Happiness**

Thank God, Jesus Christ is the one who merits the blessedness of Psalm 1. He is the truly happy man, the truly righteous man who stood up under the scrutiny of God’s holy judgment and received God’s promised blessing. And—thank God!—he did so not just for himself, but as our representative, as our mediator, as our Savior.

Jesus Christ performed all our duty for us. And he paid all our debt for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Why? Psalm 1:6 warns that “the way of the wicked shall perish.” But Jesus came because “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus accomplished all righteousness in order to rescue those whom the Father had given him.

Therefore, in perfect justice, God gave his full

blessing to Jesus Christ. He raised Jesus from the dead and he exalted him, giving him the name that's above every name. And the exalted Christ gives that full blessing to all who belong to him, to every one who is in him. To truly pursue true happiness, flee to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.

When you flee to Jesus Christ, he changes your *standing* with God. When God unites you to Christ, he justifies you. He declares his once-for-all verdict that you are righteous, so that you escape his curse and receive his full blessing. He adopts you. He embraces you as his beloved child and gives himself to you as your loving Father.

Jesus Christ also changes your *life* before God (verses 1–3). When God joins you to Christ, he regenerates you. By his Holy Spirit he gives you a new heart, a new love, a new loyalty, new desires, and himself as a new master. He begins to sanctify you. In union with Christ you die to sin and rise to newness of life; in Christ you begin to put sin to death in your life; in Christ you begin to turn from, to resist, to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil; in Christ you begin to delight in God's Word. You discover that while you once found it impossible to resist the siren song of the world, now the voice of Jesus is becoming so much sweeter to you that the world is losing its allure. You actually find yourself beginning to meditate on his Word day and night.

The Spirit of Christ does this progressively, rather than instantly, and he uses means—means of grace—especially the Word and sacraments in the fellowship of his covenant community. Since you so desperately need his sanctifying work, sink your roots deep into the fountain of living water (Jer. 17:13; John 7:37–39). Diligently use the means of grace. Don't "sit in the seat of scoffers" (vs. 1). Instead, seize every opportunity to "stand in the congregation of the righteous" (vs. 5). Meditate on God's Word day and night.

Hope in the Lord. He'll cause you to produce "fruit" and "green leaves"—in spite of affliction, even using affliction as a means to make you produce more and better fruit. Look at Jeremiah 17:7–8. Even if they face drought and scorching sun, God's planted trees thrive and flourish

when they drink deeply of the fountain of living water—the living God himself, who draws near to his people in his mediator through his Holy Spirit working by and with his Word and sacraments. Abide in Christ and you will bear much fruit (John 15). He will bear fruit through you (Rom. 7:4).

In reliance on the grace of God in Christ, then, and in pursuit of true happiness, more and more despise and turn from the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, the seat of scoffers. Instead, more and more pity those who are ensnared in sin, more and more fear for their eternal destiny, more and more pray for them, more and more try to make Jesus Christ known to them.

Moreover, Jesus Christ changes your *destiny* before God. "God knows the way of the righteous" (vs. 6a). This means a whole lot more than just that he knows *about* the way of the righteous. He knows about the way of the wicked too. But he *knows* the way of the righteous. He knows it in the sense that he knows you; he knows everything there is to know about you; and he cares. He knows your way so personally, so lovingly, and so intimately that he causes all things to work together for your ultimate good, your ultimate happiness. He knows your way so personally, so lovingly, and so intimately that not even a hair can fall from your head apart from his will!

"But the way of the wicked will perish" (vs. 6b). Note that it's not just that the wicked will perish (although they will). But more than that, their very way will perish. When the kingdom of glory comes, the kingdom of evil will be abolished. Then each and every one who is righteous in Jesus Christ will enjoy perfect blessedness in God's presence in a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, saved from even the presence or possibility of sin and its effects.

When this is your hope, the true pursuit of true happiness radically transforms your priorities. You more and more cultivate an eternal perspective (compare Psalm 73). If this is your hope, then stop envying the wicked, wanting to enjoy their temporal advantages. Keep remembering that, in spite of temporary appearances, they are "like chaff"—rootless, weightless, ultimately fruitless.

No matter how beautiful or powerful or important they might seem to be, in the judgment they'll be "blown away" as forever irrelevant. But you! Lay up your treasures in heaven. Shuck off temporal distractions so that you may pursue eternal happiness. Jim Elliot gave his life trying to bring the gospel to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He had written in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Amen! "God knows the way of the righteous" (vs. 6a).

Pursue happiness with all your might! Pursue true happiness, lasting happiness, everlasting happiness! How? Pursue the living and true God—the fountain of living water. Pursue him through the mediator he sent, Jesus Christ, his Son, our Savior. Pursue him through the means of grace he ordained, the Word and sacraments, those "weak and foolish" tools of his powerful, wonder-working Holy Spirit. Seek happiness where it can be found—in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and you will find it. ☺

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## Christ's Test of Our Orthodoxy

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by **Jack W. Sawyer**

In our age, the French are known for their foods and fashions, and the English are renowned for their formality and elegance. In our own country,

the neo-Nazis are well-known for their hate, and Hollywood is famous for its glitz and glamour. In the religious sphere, some Utah Mormons are notorious for their polygamy, and the Moral Majority movement in Lynchburg, Virginia, is especially remembered for its outrage at America's moral direction. All groups in the world, large and small, are either famous or infamous for something—usually something they choose to emphasize. What is your local church known for in your community? And, what are you well-known for within your local church?

As Jesus entered into the final, daunting chapters of his earthly, redemptive mission, he had some critical matters on his mind that he wanted to impress upon his followers. Among these important thoughts were the words of John 13:33–35:

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus resolutely set his face to go to Jerusalem; in the loving interest of his covenant people, he determinately stayed the course of this dreadful pathway to the cross. Now speaking these words, Jesus is anticipating that he will soon square-off with sin, death, and the devil in a decisive, cosmic conflict. And, as the Second Adam, the federal head of his people, he will soon face compounding temptations to abandon his saving mission.

For Jesus, the near-future involves exceeding sorrow and deep grief. His closest acquaintances will soon betray and abandon him, and he will suffer numerous indignities at the hands of evil men. Additionally, as he speaks, Jesus is aware that all his suffering will culminate in his death, an unusually cruel and horrific death.

Nonetheless, King Jesus, by faith, is also anticipating an ironic reversal in this decisive, cosmic

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=264&issue\\_id=66](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=264&issue_id=66).

battle. He also believes he will soon victoriously rise from the dead, securing his people's eternal salvation. In addition, he also anticipates ascending to heaven soon, to be exalted in glory at his Father's right hand.

These things right before him, Jesus knew he had but "a little while" with his beloved, dependent disciples (his "little children"). Consequently, he had some very important things to say to them about relating to one another. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." This "new commandment" required the deliberate pursuit of a quality of love that transcended the Old Testament command to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19:18). For these disciples to love others, as they had been loved by Christ, would mean that they must also tread the costly pathway of a Christ-like, cross-like love-ethic (cf. Matt. 16:24–25; Phil. 2:1–8; 1 John 2:3–11; 3:16–19; John 13:3–17). In the future, Jesus would be physically absent from the disciples, but the quality of his exemplary love, by his command, was to continue amid and through them.

Moreover, this "new commandment" is followed by a weighty proclamation: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Here Jesus declares that observable love between believers is to be the *hallmark* of the Christian community. It is to be considered *the definitive mark of genuine Christianity, a certifying badge of discipleship*. When outsiders observe a Christian community, according to Jesus, they are to see a beautiful, Christ-like love evidenced in the various relationships. Thus, as they observe the Christian community's marriages, families, friendships, or gatherings, this signature mark is to stand out as the prominent atmosphere of all the relational exchanges. While the Romans might pursue being well-known for the cruelties that maintained their vast power, and the Greeks might pursue being well-known for the learning that maintained their high culture, the disciples of Christ were to pursue being well-known for their beautiful Christ-like, cross-like love for one another. In summary, Jesus here proclaims that

*the world has a spiritual standard to test the church against, and here the church has a means of knowing whether its orthodoxy of community is as pure as its orthodoxy of doctrine.*

Obviously, these passages aren't difficult to understand, and, as such, they are easy to treat with indifference. Somehow in the inner workings of our remaining sin, we Christians become complacent, overlooking the gravity of living out these familiar words. Because we intellectually consider Christ's command in John 13:34 as highly important, we somehow convince ourselves that mentally valuing these words equals obeying them. Such a dichotomizing temptation isn't new to modern Christians, as Jesus, John, James, and Paul all seem to have anticipated such a self-deceiving propensity in believers (John 13:17; 1 John 3:18; James 1:22–25; Gal. 6:7–10), and it seems that both the Corinthians and the Ephesians both deluded themselves in these matters (1 Cor. 13:1–13; Rev. 2:1–7).

Likewise, if we're honest, we know that we're prone to put other things in love's rightful place within the Christian community. For instance, love is supplanted in the church when our good intentions die birthing, when our resolves to minister to others in the body fail to reach expression or realization. Similarly, love in the body of Christ is also displaced when we hyper-prioritize other legitimate things ahead of it. Even the pursuit of good things, like the diligent pursuit of our theological development, voracious reading habits, and fighting doctrinal causes can supplant love. For some reason, there seems to be in us a twisted proclivity to believe that if we are short on love, we can somehow make up for it by being longer on truth. But nothing could be further from the truth.

In addition, Reformed believers often don't seem to grasp that *loving others is a sophisticated life-skill that believers must spend their lifetimes improving*. Loving others wisely and effectively requires much deliberate effort and experience, and it takes years to master (e.g., Titus 2:1–5). After all, growing in one's love for others is just like the pursuit of one's theological growth: it requires

spiritual cultivation and discipline to develop and mature. If we give it a low priority in our Christian walk, such will leave us unequal to the relational challenges that confront us. Moreover, the fallout of such inaction can be quite ugly and painful, littering a local church's history with misunderstandings, strife, schisms, hurt, and distrust. Everywhere we go, Lady Wisdom cries out for us to come and learn, and she also ever warns us of the consequences of ignoring her life-giving pleas (Prov. 1:20–33).

Furthermore, idle negligence in learning to love leaves believers unqualified and ill-equipped to relate and minister to other people who face complicated circumstances. As an example, it is rather complex to prudently approach another believer whose child just tragically died in a car accident. Entering such a delicate situation demands maturity. Good intentions alone are not enough, as those ministering will need much love-laced wisdom. In such a heartbreaking tragedy, believers need to understand that loving means putting their own helpless feelings aside when they approach such a devastated brother or sister. Otherwise, they may inadvertently lose the golden opportunity to love, instead thinking that they must somehow say something magical to make everything okay (which, in reality, shifts the focus of their ministering onto their own helpless feelings). More often than not, when another's grief is fresh, our words should be few. Loving others this way, intelligently, *is a sophisticated life-skill that believers must spend their lifetimes improving.* The Spirit, in sanctifying a believer, imparts such love just as he does light—via the means of instruction, correction, and training. Hence, believers need to invest energy and effort into maturing in it, and they also need walking, seasoned examples of what it looks like to live this out in a Christ-like way. Learning how to love others, in such challenging settings, requires making it a deliberate priority.

Similarly, such is also true of marriage and child-rearing. An infantile love, bubbling over with good intentions, simply isn't enough. Staying married and raising children is one of the most sophisticated things we'll ever do in life, and if we

would have a loving, cohesive family, it will be via much energy and effort in the deliberate pursuit of a wise, discerning love (Phil. 1:8–11; James 3:13–18).

Jesus's words, “by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” haven't made it into many of the historic, orthodox creeds; nonetheless, they provide a simple, reliable test of the church's true state of spirituality.

As we have seen, observable love in the church is critically central to Christianity. We are to preeminently love—as we have been loved—for the glory of God. Yet, what do people see today when they peek into our churches? Ashamedly, what is often common in our churches is that members leave a church after rather insignificant (sometimes even petty) differences. Or, needy believers are avoided because of the personal cost and complexity of becoming involved with them. In many of our churches, there is abundant moral concern and outrage about sin and error, yet precious little sincere empathy. In others, there is such an over-emphasis on pure doctrine and theological issues that very little energy is left to expend on seriously learning how to love one another. So, what does the world conclude when they see this? They, of course, accurately infer that believers aren't essentially different, so they conclude that “Christian” relationships are just like the other relationships they observe in the world. Remember our text says: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, *if you have love for one another.*” And, how do you suppose our beloved Christ, who issued the “love-one-another” command, responds? Well, how else could he respond: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46).

Vital as these matters are, consider: when was the last time you heard someone identify a group of believers as manifesting the John 13:35 mark? Moreover, how many believers do you know who consider evidencing this definitive trait as an indispensable component of their orthodoxy?

In contrast, let's consider what might positively come to pass if this virtuous love-mark was com-



monly evidenced and experienced among Reformed, orthodox believers.

For instance, wouldn't it be interesting to know what might become of the ministries of seminarians who embraced John 13:35 experientially? What if our future pastors spent as much time in their ministerial preparations learning how to skillfully pastor as they did learning how to skillfully preach? What if these two things were so interwoven into their beings that outsiders observed them being as loving as they were learned? What if they left seminary knowing that learning to navigate relationships was as important as learning to navigate Scripture? What if they became convinced that the manifestation of a Christ-like love in the church is one of the most powerful weapons in the Christian apologetic?

Similarly, I wonder what might become of a session's ministry if it maintained a deliberate record of, at least, remaining sincerely concerned and cordial to the most challenging people that leave its church? What if these elders saw every such circumstance as a providential opportunity to demonstrate Christ-like, cross-like love toward such sheep? What if this session firmly held its doctrinal convictions—amid all such encounters—yet it also determined that agreeing to disagree, wisely and lovingly, was also just as central a matter of Christian orthodoxy?

In the same way, what do you suppose might come to pass if a group of friends in one of our local churches got John 13:35 deep into its spiritual bloodstream? What if those around this group observed that these believers had become as earnest to address pressing, emotional needs in others as they were to pick-apart complex theological issues? How do you suppose such would impact their marriages, their children, the other members in their congregation, or the unbelievers who peek into moments of the group's day-to-day being and doing?


In summary, it has been said that: "People don't care about how much you know, until they first know how much you care." Common as this old adage is, isn't it also profoundly true? Love is a universal language, observable and discernible to

all men, converted or otherwise. Its fruitful manifestation is beautiful, healing, and influential. *Its rarity in the world is the church's prime opportunity.* What in the world are we waiting for? Why don't we Christians just honestly embrace this command and get busy doing it—today? After all, we have an abundance of examples of how to live such a life in the gospel accounts of our Savior.

The Gospels record that Jesus was an astonishing, powerful theologian (Luke 2:46–47; Matt. 7:28–29; 13:54; 22:23–33; John 7:14–15), an adept, formidable debater (Matt. 21:23–27), and masterfully wise at navigating the theological schemes of subtle opponents (Matt. 22:41–46; Luke 20:19–26). Nevertheless, throughout all four Gospels, we also find that his doctrinal ministry wasn't an end in itself, as it was inseparably interwoven with a ministry of constant caring. His caring and his doctrine perpetually intersected; his loving deeds (even just the ordinary ones) were just as profound as his teaching.

For example, Jesus was *known* for associating himself with lowly people that other "believers" despised (Matt. 9:9–13; John 4:7–9), and he was *recognized* as continuing to do good to others even after he was falsely accused of doing evil (Matt. 9:32–35). Christ was *observed* as moved with compassion at the sight of tired, wandering sheep (Matt. 9:36), and he was *renown* for being a shelter to the needy and weak who faced the legalisms of false, insensitive leaders (Matt. 12:1–13; 15:1–11). He is *remembered* for insisting on being readily accessible to children (Mark 10:13–16), and he was *noted* for taking time to relieve those suffering in the shadows when others were quite comfortable passing by them (Matt. 20:29–34). At times, Jesus was so inundated with people's needs that he had to make time for privacy and prayer (Mark 6:30–32, 45–46; Luke 4:42; 5:15–16), and his ministry was *publicly aimed* at the poor, needy, and broken (Luke 4:18; John 8:1–11). Although he was a Master and Lord, he is *well-known* for assuming the role of a lowly servant (John 13:4–17), and he is *acclaimed* for empathetically entering into mankind's plight with death up close and personal (John 11:1–6, 25–26, 34–38, 43). Jesus was *famous*

for ever pressing on in his resolve to sacrifice himself in the interest of others (Luke 9:51), and, even when he was suffering and dying, Jesus was *noticed* meeting the pressing needs of other people (Luke 23: 42–43; John 19:25–27).

In conclusion, all of us are remembered for something, and leaving a spiritual legacy is something we do—whether good or bad, whether we like it or not. Is your orthodoxy of community as pure as your orthodoxy of doctrine? What are you currently well-known for, and what do you want to be remembered for in the future? What is your church currently well-known for, and what do you want it to be noted for in the future? Jesus’s will is crystal clear: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” 

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# Servant History

## Who Narrates the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? The Church and Its Historians

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by John R. Muether

For a small denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has poured considerable resources in the study of its past.<sup>2</sup> But is it getting an adequate return on its investment? Challenges to the value of denominational history have risen in several quarters. Some academics wonder if it is real history. Denominational advocacy, they claim, is at odds with good scholarship. Beyond academic suspicion, there are more troubling ecclesiastical concerns. Critics allege that denominational self-consciousness inevitably fosters pride, and it derails the church's pursuit of Christian unity. A "global" ecclesiology should trump the study of denominational particularity.

If these claims are true, then is the OPC becoming more historically self-conscious to the extent that it is growing more idiosyncratic and even sectarian? That seemed to be part of the fear of the protest at the Fifty-third General Assembly in 1986 that followed the failure of the OPC to "join" and be "received" by the PCA (a much anticipated

union vote that collided with a fiftieth anniversary celebration). We will return to that protest in due course.

Attention to OPC history is not, by itself, that unusual. Every denomination has had insiders and outsiders study it. But unlike most denominations, we have had a large number of interpreters who have *left* the OPC.

The burden of this presentation is to reflect (in a very brief fashion) on the interpretation of representative Orthodox Presbyterians who have left the denomination and then to compare those insights with historical interpretation from within the church. These are two approaches to our history. I would identify the former as the prevailing viewpoint and the latter as the minority report.

In comparing these two approaches, I want to borrow rhetoric from an unlikely source. In 2008, theologian Robert Webber's latest book posed the question in its title: "Who Gets to Narrate the World?"<sup>3</sup> Webber urged readers to resist cultural accommodation and counterfeit narratives: Christians must tell the Christian story. I am not able to commend Webber's book. It is the narrative of social transformation, and anything less than that he seems to argue, is a culturally irresponsible betrayal of the church's calling in the world. And yet, the question in Webber's title calls for our reflection. The OPC struggle for identity is tied to this question: Who narrates the OPC? Are we a Reformed church telling a Reformed story or are we an Evangelical church abandoning its distinctively confessional identity?

### Views from the Outside

A son of the OPC, George Marsden recently retired from a distinguished career that included posts at Calvin College, Duke Divinity School, and the University of Notre Dame. Marsden first published on the history of the OPC when still a student at Westminster Seminary. His "Perspective on the Division of 1937" was a seminal treatment

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=268&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=268&issue_id=67).

2 This article is an edited version of the pre-assembly lecture given at Sandy Cove, Maryland, on June 8, 2011.

3 Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World? Contending for the Christian Story in an Age of Rivals* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008).

on the early history of the OPC, and has been influential in understanding the OPC as an essentially Old School denomination, distinct from the New School impulses that would come to characterize the fundamentalism of the Bible Presbyterians and later the Evangelicals who departed in the 1940s.<sup>4</sup>

When Marsden addressed an OPC pre-assembly conference in 2006, he shared some reflections on his first published work. Marsden suggested that his earlier interpretation might be losing its value because through time denominations become broader coalitions that absorb into them “a variety of heritages.” He wondered whether the OPC’s traditional eschewing of political stances (consistent with its Old School heritage) has survived the “political turn” of the recent quarter century with the rise of the religious right. “Today,” Marsden noted, “in many churches, political stances are virtually confessionalized in the sense of becoming tests of true faith.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, if the OPC were established on Old School principles, it might be less so seven decades later. But Marsden did not necessarily view that as a bad thing. He expressed the concern, shared by many former OPC interpreters, that the size of the OPC remained (in Marsden’s words) “a troubling question.”<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Marsden is also known for popularizing, if not originating, the taxonomy of Reformed thought in America that divides the Reformed world into doctrinalist, pietist, and culturalist camps. In this schema, the OPC epitomizes the doctrinalist expression of this tripod. This classification has its strengths, including the way it reinforces the OPC’s emphasis on doctrinal precision and underscores its connection to the theol-

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4 Originally serialized in the *Presbyterian Guardian* in 1964, it was reprinted in *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986), 295–328.

5 George M. Marsden, “Perspective on ‘Perspective on the Division of 1937,’” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 177–78.

6 *Ibid.*, 175.

ogy of Old Princeton. But among its weaknesses is the implication that each of these points of view is, by itself, inadequate to embody Reformed faith and life; consequently each needs the supplement of the others to balance out its deficiencies. The temptation is to think, for example, that the OPC may have its doctrine right, but it must look elsewhere for sustainable expressions of the Christian life. Charles Dennison had a particularly insightful response to this argument.

A more profitable approach to the doctrine/life problem is to realize that both [Old School and New School] carry within them what is perceived to stand opposite them. If both the doctrine and the life side are distinct temperaments in their approaches to Christian faith, they stand holistically, as “systems” complete in themselves. Therefore, the doctrine side has its own perspective on the Christian life; while the life side is not devoid of doctrine but possessed of doctrine essential to its character.<sup>7</sup>

Another influential outside voice is historian Mark Noll. Many readers remember the former elder at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, Illinois, for applying the metaphor, at the time of the OPC’s semicentennial, of the denomination as the “pea beneath the mattress” of American Presbyterianism: the OPC “is very small, but it is rock solid and undeniably there.” And the OPC has continued to be there. (It has even outlived the journal in which Noll published his reflections.) Noll goes on to point out, however, that the church has endured at the expense of remaining very small.

Among the most significant factors in establishing this feature of the church’s identity, Noll asserts, was the change in the church’s name in 1939. When the church went from becoming *The* Presbyterian Church of America to the *Orthodox* Presbyterian Church, the revised nomenclature redirected the church’s place in American Prot-

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7 Charles G. Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2002), 145.

estantism. Noll describes: “Self-identity was now clearly in focus. This would be a purified, doctrinally precise remnant, not the great Presbyterian presence in America.”<sup>8</sup>

With this shift the church would abandon a role in the public sphere, and it would assume an antithetical approach to culture. This would allow the peculiar features of Van Til’s apologetics to predominate in the young church. None of these features, Noll suggests, were characteristic of the founding of the church three years earlier but they were the largely unintended consequence of the new name: “This was to be a doctrinally rigorous, procedurally precise body. Its glory was its faithfulness to Scripture and the heart-moving, intellectually satisfying system of doctrine embodied in the Westminster standards. If this confessional loyalty led to obloquy from the wider world, if it sometimes encouraged a sectarian spirit, if it took the place of the desire to transform culture, all that was the necessary price to pay.”<sup>9</sup> If this made the OPC safe for presuppositional apologetics, it also rendered the church inhospitable for those desiring a broader connection to American Evangelical life.

The third voice I want to cite warrants some explanation. Theologian John Frame is not a historian, and he has been critical of what he regards as the domination of historical perspectives in contemporary Reformed theology. Yet that has not thwarted his own interpretive work. Frame published reflections on the recent Reformed past in his widely quoted essay “Machen’s Warrior Children,” a piece which may qualify him as the most influential of post-OPC interpreters.

In the essay, Frame surveys twenty-two debates in conservative Reformed circles since Machen’s death, from premillennialism to Federal Vision. While the OPC is not his sole focus, it takes a disproportionate hit on Frame’s scorecard. Indeed, the deck is stacked in Frame’s narrative to make the OPC look particularly bellicose. He writes,

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8 Mark A. Noll, “The Pea beneath the Mattress: Orthodox Presbyterian in America,” *Reformed Journal* 30:10 (October 1986): 15.

9 *Ibid.*, 16.

especially with the OPC in mind: “Once the Machenites found themselves in a “true Presbyterian church” they were unable to moderate their martial impulses. Being in a church without liberals to fight, they turned on each other.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover he makes this observation, also with the OPC in mind: “The various anniversary celebrations and official histories in the different Reformed denominational bodies have been largely self-congratulatory.”<sup>11</sup>

Much of the argument of “Warrior Children” is based on Frame’s skepticism toward denominations found in his 1991 book *Evangelical Reunion*. Here his starting point is his claim that “denominations are the result of sin.” Thus it is foolish to celebrate them. And so Frame urges a wider vision in place of the turf-protecting myopia of Protestant denominationalism. Denominations are man-made substitutes for the courts and fellowship that God has ordained. If our priorities were rightly ordered, he argued, we would be good Christians first and good Presbyterians second.<sup>12</sup>

The misplaced energy that is poured into denominations and their maintenance has the effect of majoring in minors. It generates pride and chauvinism that become barriers to reunion, which is precisely what he argues took place in the OPC in 1986.

### Stigma in OPC History

These three ex-OPC interpreters briefly surveyed are among others who left the OPC for different reasons and in different directions.<sup>13</sup> Gen-

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10 John M. Frame, “Machen’s Warrior Children,” in *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology: A Dynamic Engagement*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 143.

11 *Ibid.*, 145.

12 John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion: Denominations and the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). While it is not my purpose to debate the merits of Frame’s argument here, one might point out at least in passing that it is just as legitimate to argue that denominations are the result of discipline. Discipline faithfully administered is a cause for celebration.

13 In the case of Marsden, Noll, and Frame, it was the CRC, the EPC, and the PCA, respectively. If we expanded the study, post-OPC destinations extend from the BPC (Carl McIntire) to the mainline Presbyterian Church (Edwin Rian).

erally, they left with their appreciation of Machen intact, claiming that the OPC had departed from its founder's broader perspective on Reformed faith and life. The OPC narrowed that vision at times even to the point of reveling in its separatism. All of them took note of the OPC's failure to see the growth that was reasonably expected of the church, and all of them predicted after they left the church that the OPC was a precarious institution facing an uncertain future.

My point in recalling these perspectives is not to gloat at predictions of the demise of the OPC that have proven to be somewhat premature. Nor ought we to overlook the ways in which these voices have described some of the tragedies, disappointments, and failures in our past.

But seventy-five years provides the vantage of reassessing the assumptions that undergirded these voices. These interpreters have imposed paradigms for interpreting the OPC that have dominated much historical reflection. We need to appreciate how deeply established this way of thinking has become. In particular, these writers collectively point to the role of controversy, and a particular way of interpreting controversy, in the story of the OPC.

Barry Hankins, historian at Baylor University, recently penned a thought-provoking article on the effect of controversy on religious identity. He writes: "Historical events, especially bad ones, and especially religious bad ones, take on a life of their own. Turned into stigma, such events seem to become the causes of more history," at least in popular impression. Hankins explains that "one event or a few events close together can snowball into a negative image that is almost impossible to root out of public consciousness."<sup>14</sup> He cites three "religiously stigmatizing historical events" of notoriety: Münster, Salem, and Waco. And then he also looks at the turn in American fundamentalism with the Scopes trial, the disappearance of Aimee Semple McPherson, and the murder trial of J. Frank Norris, episodes which combined to alter

14 Barry Hankins, "The (Worst) Year of the Evangelical: 1926 and the Demise of American Fundamentalism," *Fides et Historia* 43 (2011): 13.

the public impression of fundamentalism.

To be sure, the OPC has experienced nothing as scandalous as these episodes. Yet Hankins invites us to see that on a smaller scale, it has suffered stigmas that have distorted its history. Let me cite two examples of "religiously stigmatizing events" in OPC history. First, the Gordon Clark controversy is often referred, even in scholarly contexts, as the "Clark heresy trial." It was no such thing. Nor was it the case of the church held hostage to a debate between two theologians talking past each other. This episode began as a complaint in the Philadelphia Presbytery regarding the irregularity of the procedure by which Clark was ordained in 1944. It expanded into concerns about Clark's views on the incomprehensibility of God, but at no time were charges pressed against Clark. That it is frequently labeled the "Clark–Van Til" (elevating Van Til's role in the affair) reveals how distorted is the popular impression of the controversy. Since Clark left the OPC in 1948, the church has been stigmatized with the perception of narrow-mindedness.<sup>15</sup>

Another example returns us to the 1986 protest. The context of this vote was the sense of a unique ecumenical moment before the church. With the unexpected growth of the thirteen-year old Presbyterian Church in America, the OPC was at last going to join a nationwide Presbyterian witness. It was deeply traumatic for advocates of union to see that the extended courtship failed to result in marriage.

The logic of the ensuing protest reveals how the expectation was shaped by an Evangelical framing of the OPC story. The vote, argued the protestants, confirmed a "shift" in OPC identity:

Our distinctive no longer seems to be that which our founding fathers stood for in 1936, i.e., that we serve as the spiritual successor of the Presbyterian Church in the USA and a

15 I described some causes of that confusion in chapter 4, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 100–113. The best treatment of the Clark controversy is the essay by Michael A. Hakkenberg, "The Battle over the Ordination of Gordon H. Clark," in *Pressing toward the Mark*, 329–50.



voice against liberalism. Rather, our rationale for separate existence (at least from the PCA) now appears to be that these Reformed and Presbyterian brothers are less Reformed in practice than we.

The protest concluded:

The crossroad has been reached and the Assembly has chosen a course. In our judgment this course looks backward instead of forward, inward instead of outward, and is exclusive rather than inclusive. Our deepest concern is that this course may not be altered in the future.<sup>16</sup>

So it came as little surprise in the years that followed that many of the protestants left the OPC and “voluntarily realigned” with the PCA.

### Retelling the Story

The Clark controversy and the failure to unite with the PCA are two episodes in our history when the denomination has been stigmatized in popular impression. How does one “destigmatize” the OPC? That requires a retelling of the story.

Let us now turn our focus briefly on three voices among those who stayed in the OPC: Paul Woolley, Charles Dennison, and Darryl Hart. We can call them resistant fighters, because they have each, in different ways, challenged what I have described as the dominant Evangelical narrative about the OPC.

Paul Woolley was the first church historian on the Westminster Seminary faculty, and accordingly he had the effect of shaping the thinking of the early ministers of the church. Woolley extended Machen’s plea for the centrality of doctrine in a healthy denomination by contrasting heavenly mindedness with an earthly infatuation with cultural influence. Early frustration with the direction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church took two forms, he noted: there was malignant discontent and healthy discontent. The former sought rapid

numerical growth, especially by collaborating with broader Evangelical organizations. The latter sought to develop greater consistency in the church’s propagation and defense of the Reformed faith.

Woolley framed the choice in provocative terms: “Does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have a growing revival of the preaching, teaching, and application of the Biblical and Reformed faith? Or does the Orthodox Presbyterian Church want to have many members and much money and read about itself in the newspapers?” Woolley’s point was to focus his readers’ attention on the nature of true progress. There was room, he argued, “for real progress in the completeness with which the faith is preached in our pulpits.”<sup>17</sup>

Consistent with the plea from that provocative article, Woolley made, throughout the course of his life, a sustained effort to remind the church of its calling to be a doctrinal church in an anti-doctrinal age. Particularly perceptive in Woolley’s approach was his identification of doctrinal indifference. Beyond the liberalism of a “broadening church,” Woolley saw in Evangelical churches a pragmatic orientation. In a context that privileged size and influence, theology was dismissed as impractical and restrictive. And so doctrine lost out to two versions of Christian moralism, from both the left and the right in American Protestantism.

In his tenure as OPC historian, Charles Dennison wrote extensively on the subject of Orthodox Presbyterian identity. For Dennison, identity extended beyond confessional commitments to an embrace of a biblical theological approach to Scripture. This is the “heart of our Reformation heritage,” he urged, because here “we find ourselves, not so much by describing the biblical text or even by ‘applying’ it, but by living in and from it.”<sup>18</sup>

A biblical theological orientation had consequences that Dennison urged the church to accept. “Such an approach to Scripture is painful,”

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16 *Minutes of the 53rd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1986), 39–40.

17 Paul Woolley, “Discontent!” *Presbyterian Guardian* 13 (July 23, 1944): 213–14.

18 Dennison, *History for a Pilgrim People*, 202.

he conceded, “since it demands the giving up of our life in this world for the sake of Christ and the heavenly world confronting us in the Word.... Surrender to the biblical perspective and to Christ’s call sets before us a basic dimension of the church’s identity. We are a pilgrim people.”<sup>19</sup>

The metaphor of pilgrimage forms a particular calling for the OPC in its American context. It is positioned to point the church catholic to its heavenly identity. Dennison spells out what this means:

We must lovingly, but persistently, direct Christians away from ethnic and cultural restrictions. We must serve the churches of the world, churches that are faced with the most serious, even life-threatening, circumstances because of political, nationalistic, and racial pressures. Our effectiveness will be measured by more than our words; we must communicate our very life, the essence of what we are.<sup>20</sup>

Dennison entertained personal doubts that the OPC would live up to its unique calling. His abiding concern was that the OPC would become increasingly establishmentarian, that it would follow the Protestant American pattern of becoming a bureaucratic and administratively top-heavy denomination. This fear was so deep it even led him to wonder whether an OPC archives, to which he devoted so much of his time and energy, would unwittingly contribute to the rise of centralized power and denominational tyranny.

Finally, Darryl Hart has contributed much to help us rethink how we tell the OPC story from his prolific and iconoclastic pen. I want to focus on his biography of J. Gresham Machen, first published in 1994. This book rescued Machen for the OPC from his exile in the clutches of interpreters who have abstracted Machen from his ecclesiastical context.<sup>21</sup>

19 Ibid., 202–3.

20 Ibid., 203.

21 D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

The Protestant controversy of the 1920s and 1930s has been popularly mistitled as the fundamentalist-modernist debate. That very language assumes a two-party approach to American religious conflict. As Hart ably explained, Machen was an ill-fit in either category. What the categories of “modernist” and “fundamentalist” obscured was the profound dissent that Machen expressed against the impulse, represented in both the left and the right, for a socially active church that would crusade to reestablish a Christian America. If anything, Machen resembled fellow Baltimorean H. L. Mencken in the latter’s withering critique of the sentimentality of American idealism. The church should have no part in this, Mencken so argued, because he was a secularist. Machen agreed for a different reason: to defend the uniquely spiritual character of the church. Church obsession with social transformation and its focus on the temporal was an abandonment of the church’s true calling to witness to the things that are eternal.

As Machen’s sentiment took root in the OPC, the church proved reticent to join social movements conducted by the likes of the National Association of Evangelicals. But this was not the venting of denominational pride. “Orthodox Presbyterian narrowness,” Hart argued, “looked back on Old School Presbyterian practice rather than fundamentalist belligerence.”<sup>22</sup>

### The OPC as Big and Small

The OPC is a doctrinal church in an anti-doctrinal age, according to Woolley, a culture of dissent in an establishmentarian age, per Dennison, and a spiritual body in a politically saturated and culture-obsessed age, writes Hart. If this is a countervailing narrative to the broader and more popular telling, it is not a new story that is being narrated. Rather, this is an echo from our Presbyterian past.

Let us return one more time to 1986 and the failed union vote. As we noted, the vote was

22 Ibid., 166.

perceived as looking backward not forward, inward instead of outward, exclusive rather than inclusive. What is striking about the rhetoric surrounding the union that didn't happen was its similarity to arguments that accompanied a union that did happen, a century earlier in American Presbyterian history: the 1869 reunion between the Old School Presbyterian Church and the New School Presbyterian Church that healed the breach that took place in 1837. That reunion was also accompanied by a pervasive sense that Presbyterians were confronting a forward-looking ecumenical moment that had to be seized. The Civil War had just ended and the fractured Union needed a united Presbyterian witness. Both camps, New School and Old School, generally expressed hopefulness over this opportunity.

Amid the enthusiasm Charles Hodge sounded his dissent, fearing that Old School Presbyterian identity would be lost for the sake of national expedience. Hodge's fears proved accurate. In Lefferts Loetscher's words, the reunion of 1869 produced the largely unintentional consequence of a "broadening church." Within twenty-five years of the reunion, northern Presbyterians began serious efforts at creedal revision, setting the stage for the Presbyterian controversy of the 1930s.

This is not to suggest that a similarly catastrophic future would have confronted the OPC had it merged with the PCA. But what is noteworthy in this comparison is that Hodge refused to concede that opposition to union relegated him to a position of sectarian isolationism. Hodge believed that the Old School Presbyterian Church had a unique role to fulfill. His plea was not a call for an inward, backward, and exclusive church. On the contrary, he believed that Presbyterians could best serve other denominations first by being faithful as confessional Presbyterians.

As reframed, the OPC's "alien" identity, for all its reputation for being isolated and uncooperative, may point in the direction of genuine ecumenicity. The OPC serves the universal church when it is steadfastly and self-consciously Reformed. When we narrate the OPC in this way, we can appreciate better the Reformed catholicity of our small

church. The OPC continues to serve as a leader in shaping Reformed faith and witness for several emerging Reformed churches throughout the world. It is possible for us to imagine, along with Hodge, Machen, and Van Til, a vital ecumenical role for a confessionally precise church.

So who narrates the OPC? This is not a call to silence any voices either within or beyond the church. It is an appeal to listen carefully to all speakers, taking note of the assumptions of the narrators. And it suggests an answer to the protest of twenty-five years ago: the OPC did not lose its story. American pilgrims continue to discover the OPC in their wanderings through the wasteland of Evangelical or mainline Protestantism. Contemporary discussions in the denomination reveal its ongoing commitment to the whole counsel of God. Issues before our recent General Assembly—the character of Reformed worship, the principles of biblical stewardship, and the relationship between justification and good works—reveal a church making the progress that Paul Woolley was actively promoting.

At seventy-five, the OPC still displays a willingness to proclaim to other churches and to a watching world the Reformed faith in all its fullness. To invoke the words of R. B. Kuiper, the OPC on its seventy-fifth anniversary is *still* very small. But it continues to stand for something very big. ☺

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# Is the OPC the Church for Which Calvinists Have Been Waiting?

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by Darryl G. Hart

To borrow a line from the pop band Talking Heads, how did the Orthodox Presbyterian Church “get here”? By here, I don’t mean the destination, Sandy Cove Bible Conference, but instead the year 2011.<sup>2</sup> For instance, why do we conduct the OPC’s business in the English language rather than Latin, Greek, or a modern European language? Part of that answer involves the ability of English colonists to prevail over French, Spanish, and Dutch competitors and eventually form a political body of English speakers. Or, closer to home, why does the OPC, as a Reformed church, use a variation of the Westminster Confession of Faith rather than the Second Helvetic Confession or the Belgic Confession of Faith? It wasn’t because the OPC established a committee to arrive at the best confession for use in the new church. Instead, the adoption of the Westminster Standards is linked to the OPC’s past as an American Presbyterian communion and ultimately to the reasons that led the Synod of Philadelphia in 1729 to adopt the Confession and Catechisms as the doctrinal norm for new world Presbyterians.

The “how did we get here” question that David Byrne sang was also behind the overture that the Presbytery of New Jersey brought to the OPC’s 1972 Assembly which called for a comprehensive history of the denomination. At the time, the OPC was engaged in merger discussions with the RPCES, a body whose roots went back to the Bible Presbyterian Synod. Some New Jersey presbyters

were wondering about the 1937 split between the OPC and the Bible Presbyterians, about its nature, whether its issues were still relevant, and should answers to these questions inform the decision of whether to merge with the RPCES.

“How did we get here” is not the only question that informs historical inquiry. Many people read history for inspiration, and with this rationale comes a high estimation of the past’s “great men.” This accounts in part for the great fascination that Americans have with their nation’s founders. The Presbyterian equivalent of this “great men” approach is the historical fixation on the Westminster Assembly which functions as Presbyterianism’s founding moment. As such, the Westminster Divines become the equivalent of the Continental Congress, the Confession and Catechisms become Presbyterianism’s constitution, and the writings of the divines function as the lens by which to read the Presbyterian constitution—akin to the way the Federalist Papers inform the reading of the United States Constitution.

A better reason for studying the past than either “how did we get here?” or “boy, weren’t those guys swell?” is the question that J. Gresham Machen uttered after climbing to the top of the Matterhorn in 1933. He looked out over Europe, and asked, “Just how depressing is the history of mankind?”

There, in that glorious round spread out before you, that land of Europe, humanity has put forth its best. There it has struggled; there it has fallen; there it has looked upward to God. The history of the race seems to pass before you in an instant of time, concentrated in the fairest of all the lands of the earth. You think of the great men whose memories you love, the men who have struggled in those countries below you, who have struggled for light and freedom, struggled for beauty, struggled above all for God’s Word. And then you think of the present and its decadence and its slavery, and you desire to weep. It is a pathetic thing to contemplate the history of

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=269&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=269&issue_id=67).

2 This article is an edited version of the pre-assembly lecture given at Sandy Cove, Maryland, on June 8, 2011.

mankind.<sup>3</sup>

This approach to history calls for cautious sobriety rather than inspiration or archaeological digging.

To this end I want to survey Reformed Protestant history to see how other communions were faring when they reached their diamond anniversaries. The first churches to consider are the original national Reformed communions to which we are in greatest debt as those who fought and carved out a place for the Reformation in Europe. Next are the Reformed churches in the New World who were generally free from micromanaging civil magistrates while establishing these communions. Finally, come examples from Reformed churches that emerged, as the OPC did, out of protests against liberalism in their midst. These snapshots in Reformed Protestant history are indeed sobering. Ironically, they may also prompt a measure of hope, gratitude, and cheer about the OPC's short but significant past.

### Old World Originals

Reformed Protestantism began the sixteenth century in the feisty cantons of Switzerland and by 1600 could account for churches as far east as Lithuania and as far west as Scotland. As far as the Reformed churches' reach was, the strongest and most influential communions were those in Switzerland, the Palatinate region of Germany, the Netherlands, and Scotland. The city churches of Zurich, Basel, Bern, and Geneva were the earliest Reformed Protestant communions and forged their presence within Western Christianity at roughly the same time—the 1520s and 1530s—that Lutheranism emerged among German speaking peoples. The national churches of Scotland, the Netherlands, and the territorial church of the Palatinate would not begin until the second wave of protest during the sixteenth century, almost four decades after Ulrich Zwingli led the establishment

of the first Reformed congregations in Zurich.

For all intents and purposes Reformed Protestantism began in 1523 when Zwingli persuaded the city council of Zurich to implement *lectio continuo* preaching, that is, preaching through a book of the Bible as opposed to following the lectionary. A year later, the city magistrates approved the removal of images and finally in 1525 Zurich said goodbye to the mass. The Swiss Reformation picked up pace when Berne adopted ten theses that articulated Protestant convictions. A year later, Basel's city council had also embraced the new faith. Thus far the Swiss Reformation was almost exclusively Germanic. But when Geneva called John Calvin in 1536, not only did the Reformed churches include French-speaking Protestants, but it also signaled the theological direction of the most recent addition to the Swiss confederation. Now Reformed Protestantism seemed to be a clean sweep running from Zurich in the northwest to Geneva in the southeast.

Instead, by the time Geneva called Calvin, Zwingli was dead and five cantons in Switzerland harbored strong allegiance to Rome. Religious and political antagonisms among the Swiss produced two religious wars, one in 1529 and the other in 1531, in which Zurich was a chief combatant. In the latter struggle Zwingli lost his life in combat. His death is also an indication of Zwingli's failure to unite German-speaking Protestants. The famous encounter between Zwingli and Luther at the Marburg Colloquy was an attempt to see if Swiss Reformed and German Lutherans could work out a theological compromise that would allow for a Protestant alliance against Roman Catholics and the emperor. When compromise failed at Marburg, cities like Zurich were vulnerable to armed aggression led by imperial forces. One further indication of Zwingli's failure—which is not to say he was any less successful than Luther—was his inability to restrain German radical Protestants, also known as Anabaptists.

The Reformation in Geneva did not remedy the situation. Within two years of his call to the city, Geneva's magistrates were asking Calvin and William Farel to leave thanks to significant

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3 "Mountains and Why We Love Them," in J. Gresham Machen: *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2004), 435.



disagreements over the power of the ministers. Even after a three-year exile, Calvin's path toward a Reformed church was seldom straight. Native Genevans resented the comprehensiveness of Calvin's discipline. Only in 1555 did Calvin finally prevail over his enemies and enjoy enough support to become a citizen. But even then, discrepancies abounded among the Swiss Reformed churches. Calvin's doctrine of predestination was so objectionable that the city of Bern actually burned the French reformer's books. The Consensus Tigurinus, a compromise confessional statement drafted between 1549 and 1551, was supposed to help paper over some of the differences among the Swiss, especially between Geneva and Zurich. But divergent understandings of the Lord's Supper and church-state relations remained.

Switzerland is, of course, one of the better examples of early Reformed success. After the passing of Zwingli and Calvin, Theodore Beza provided vigorous leadership for the Geneva Company of Pastors as did Heinrich Bullinger among the churches in Zurich. By the time of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Zurich—1600—and of Geneva—1610, those cities possessed arguably the most stable Reformed churches in Europe. Still, during the seventeenth century Geneva and Zurich would catch up to the turmoil that aggravated the other Reformed churches. A major source of woe was the institution that had given life and shelter to the churches originally—the magistrate. Swiss Protestants were vulnerable to Roman Catholic forces during the Thirty Years War thanks to the ongoing inability to reconcile with Lutherans. Although the Swiss Reformed churches regained their independence along with the Swiss confederation in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, they were still under-protected. In 1656, the First Villmerger War saw Roman Catholic Swiss cantons triumph over Protestants. This was indicative of the defensive posture of the Swiss Reformed between 1650 and 1750, which was hardly the strong stance the churches needed to stand up to either the ridicule of philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau or the political muscle of Napoleon.

If the Swiss churches celebrated their seventy-

fifth anniversaries free from serious misgivings about decline and contention, in the Palatinate, Netherlands, and Scotland celebrations would be impossible. In Prince Frederick III's city of Heidelberg, Reformed Protestants made remarkable strides thanks to the prince's growing appreciation for Reformed teaching. His faculty at the city's university housed some of the ablest Reformed theologians and supplanted Geneva as the leading provider of Reformed theological training. Frederick also approved laws that required church attendance and that punished blasphemy and superstition. He called for a liturgy and church order that followed the norms prevailing among Reformed churches. And he oversaw the production of one of Reformed Protestantism's instructional jewels, the Heidelberg Catechism.

The emergence of the Dutch Reformed churches was not as smooth as the Palatinate church. Reformed Protestantism in the Low Countries was initially much stronger in Belgium—hence the Belgic Confession (1561)—but liberation from Spain came more readily among the northern provinces and eventual home of the Dutch republic. Consequently, when Reformed Protestant congregations in the late 1550s and early 1560s formed they had to do so clandestinely. Only when the Dutch gained political independence during the rebellion of 1572 and made William of Orange their ruler did the United Provinces of Zeeland, Holland, Friesland, and Utrecht gain autonomy with the Reformed churches as the official faith. Still, the good order of the churches depended on civil authorities and Dutch Reformed Protestantism was never as vigorous or as pure as later Dutch Protestants would lead American Presbyterians to believe.

In Scotland again the cause of church reform depended on political intrigue. But once the Scots were able to rid themselves of French influences and enjoy England's favor under the pro-Protestant Elizabeth, the parliament convening in Edinburgh in 1560 did for Scotland what city councils had done thirty years earlier in Zurich and Geneva. It formally abolished the mass and all other forms of idolatry, adopted a confession of faith, and ap-



proved the First Book of Discipline as the polity responsible for ordering the church. Worship would await the work of the church's future assemblies.

In 1635, roughly seventy-five years after their birth, the situation facing Protestants in the Palatinate, Netherlands, and Scotland was at best risky. In the Palatinate, a region in the crosshairs of the Thirty Years War, Swedish Lutherans ruled Heidelberg and Roman Catholics vied for legitimacy. The latter would eventually see a Roman Catholic prince rule over the city and threaten to make the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism illegal. A pre-assembly conference and a sumptuous banquet was not an option for German Reformed wanting to celebrate their church's origins since the consistory of Heidelberg could not even meet. In the Netherlands, where the Synod of Dort had prevented the Arminians from dominating the churches, universities, and government, a policy of religious tolerance prevailed. This made the Low Countries attractive to as diverse a population as Quakers, Spinoza, Descartes, and Lutherans. Meanwhile, within the churches coherence was impossible and some Reformed Protestants resorted to meeting in conventicles. Meanwhile, in Scotland in 1635 the Kirk was trying to figure out its best response to a hostile monarch in London and archbishop in Canterbury. The Solemn League and Covenant of 1638 proved a successful tool for cooperating with the English parliament against King Charles, but it prefigured a bloody civil war which would see episcopacy restored in Scotland, at least for a season.

### **New World Copies**

As much as the magistrates affected the capacity of Reformed churches in Europe to celebrate their histories, when similar communions emerged in the New World, free from magisterial interference, circumstances were not necessarily any better for anniversary observances. Take the case of the Dutch Reformed churches in North America. The Dutch colonial enterprise that led to the founding of New Netherland in 1614 went without a ministerial presence until 1628. By mid-century

Dutch Reformed churches were operating in five locations around the mouth of the Hudson River under the oversight of the Classis of Amsterdam. When the English defeated the Dutch in 1664, and turned New Netherland into New York, the Dutch Reformed churches retained a privileged position and even enjoyed tax support from the English government. But the Dutch Reformed in the New World would not acquire authority to regulate their own affairs until 1772 when the Classis of Amsterdam allowed the formation of a North American body with most of the powers of a classis. Only in 1792, almost 175 years after the first Dutch Reformed congregation in North America, did a separate Reformed communion come to fruition with the formation of the Reformed Church of America.

American Presbyterians, by contrast, possessed autonomy from the beginning when Francis Makemie moderated the first meeting of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1706. The new presbytery was an example of spontaneous order emerging from the needs of ministers in the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Valley regions. Autonomy did not prevent division, of course, as the 1741 split between the Old and New Side Presbyterians demonstrated. The reunion of 1758 achieved a compromise that reunited American Presbyterians. What was even more unifying was the common enemy of King George and the English Parliament. As such, the War for Independence produced a zealously patriotic Presbyterian Church. But by the time of the Presbytery of Philadelphia's diamond anniversary in 1781, the church showed signs of fatigue. Many ministers were not attending synod, and the American church was a loose collection of congregations, presbyteries, and synods. To restore a sense of mission, church leaders devised the creation of a general assembly, which first convened in 1789. But this national body did little to inject a Presbyterian self-consciousness within the American church, as the 1801 Plan of Union with the Congregationalists, for the purpose of church planting and home missions in places like Michigan, attested. Only with the establishment of Princeton Seminary in 1812 did signs of zeal for Reformed

Protestantism surface in a substantial way.

The coming of the German Reformed Church to North America displayed similar problems. The German Reformed communion was entirely the ex nihilo creation of German settlers northwest of Philadelphia. Their first pastor, John Philip Boehm, functioned for the better part of a decade during the 1720s without being licensed or ordained. And once the consistory of Heidelberg started to send properly ordained ministers, Boehm received a steady barrage of challenges and ridicule from rival pastors. Only when the Dutch Reformed lent a helping hand did Boehm receive formal credentials and the German Reformed communion began to take shape. Having once experienced autonomy, after 1750 the German Reformed were under the oversight of the Dutch Reformed. In 1747 the Germans held their first classis but did not hold their own synod independent from the Dutch until 1793. Even so, the new German-American denomination was in no shape for celebrations. At the time the German Reformed Church consisted of roughly 15,000 members, 178 congregations, and twenty-two ministers. In fact, the first German Reformed anniversary celebration came in 1863 during an international conference to observe the three-hundredth anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism.

### **Conservative Resurgents**

One last group of Reformed and Presbyterian communions to consider are those most like the OPC, churches that were formed to protest the rise of harmful forces within the existing communions. The two examples with which most Orthodox Presbyterian are familiar, so not a lot of comment is necessary, are the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN), led by Abraham Kuyper and the Free Church of Scotland, which looked to Thomas Chalmers for inspiration. The formation of the Free Church was a breathtaking event in the life of Scotland when the ongoing objections to patronage led to the Disruption of 1843. One third of the Kirk's ministers, and as much as half of the laity, left the Church of Scotland for the

Free Church, finally growing tired of the church being subordinate to the laws of Scotland and the United Kingdom. But by the end of the nineteenth century the Free Church was in a shambles. In 1893 it experienced its own disruption, a split that produced the Free Presbyterian Church. And then in 1900 the church union talks that had surfaced throughout much of the Free Church's history with the United Presbyterians finally found enough support to take effect. A majority of the Free Church approved the merger which led to the start of the United Free Church. The Free Church's minority needed to petition the House of Lords to retain rights to their original name.

In 1886 Abraham Kuyper led seventy-five ministers out of the Dutch Reformed Church (HNK) over state policies that forced officers to tolerate ministers who would not subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and to promote the interests of the Netherlands. Like the Free Church's Disruption, Kuyper's establishment of the GKN resonated beyond ecclesiastical politics and extended to the realms of journalism, education, and politics. But, before the GKN could celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary, it witnessed the rise of higher criticism and loosened subscription requirements. It also experienced a split within its ranks, when in 1944 it disciplined Klaas Schilder, who led in founding the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). These theological shifts were partly responsible for the OPC's own wariness about the Christian Reformed Church's tolerant attitude toward the GKN. By 1961 the GKN was not the voice of Reformed conviction that it had promised to be at its founding.

### **Pathetic Church History**

This all too brief tour of the first seventy-five years of other Reformed communions is a good reminder of the dangers that lurk in church history. If Machen thought the history of western Europe circa 1933 was depressing, one reason was his own struggles in the ecclesiastical part of the West's history. The OPC's own history is further evidence of the difficulties that Reformed churches have

experienced since the Reformation. The question is whether these difficulties are part and parcel of Reformed history or an aberration. If part of being the church militant means always experiencing contention, disloyalty, and departure, then the OPC's own struggles are no worse than those that Reformed Protestants have experienced before.

Still, making the case that the OPC is a worthy successor to Reformed history requires being clear about the nature of Calvinism and the Reformation's significance. For the better part of two hundred years the Corinthian temptation has been to regard Reformed Protestantism's importance in cultural and political terms. This was a perspective held not only by Reformed believers. Think of Max Weber and his theory about Calvinism and capitalism, or of Alexis de Tocqueville and Calvinism's contribution to democracy, or of Robert Merton on Calvinism and the rise of modern science. These older arguments do not have the force they once did, but even a couple of years ago at the academic conference in Geneva marking the five hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth, most of the scholarly presentations explored not the sorts of ecclesiastical reforms that characterized Reformed Protestantism but the way that Calvinism shaped the modern world. Such assessments have prompted Reformed believers to think of Calvinism less as a churchly movement than as a religiously-based source for social transformation. Of course, the rise of neo-Calvinism and the inspiring words of Abraham Kuyper have contributed mightily to this estimate of Reformed Protestantism.

But even before Kuyper, the temptation to regard Reformed Protestantism for its political and cultural significance was constant for Presbyterians. How could it not be since the rise of Reformed Protestantism was bound up with European politics. Indeed, the division of Western Christianity that split the Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican communions from the Roman Catholic Church was also part of the confessionalization of western Europe. After 1600 individual nations could be identified by the kind of church and confession they sponsored. This process helped to secure the creation of the nation-state, a form

of government that greatly centralized the economic, legal, educational, administrative, and even linguistic features of territories that had previously been decentralized and diverse. However we estimate the size, scope, and power of the modern nation-state, the reality is that Reformed Protestantism was on the ground floor of the construction of modern Europe and its colonial proliferation, a period that ran from 1600 at least to World War II. No wonder, then, that conservative Reformed believers pine for the days when their faith mattered to the mission of a particular nation. Scottish Presbyterians still long for the days of the National Covenant. Abraham Kuyper endeared himself to Reformed believers by evoking a golden age of Dutch history. Meanwhile, American Presbyterians have their own version of this nostalgia and attempt to construct a Christian founding of the United States even though the very point of the new nation was to bring an end to the pattern of confessionalization that had torn apart Europe (and especially England) during the seventeenth century.

Yet, the question remains whether Reformed Protestants were hoping to remake Europe or reform the church. Thanks to a host of Holy Roman Emperors, from Constantine and Charlemagne to Charles V, thinking about Europe apart from the church was impossible. Even so, the reforms that the original Protestants initiated were overwhelmingly ecclesial and bore directly on doctrine, liturgy, and church polity. Only because the church was part of the established political order did church reform translate into broader social and political developments. The Reformation was first and foremost a religious effort and only secondarily did it affect politics and culture.

If Reformed Protestantism was chiefly an instance of ecclesiastical reform and renewal, then against that measure the OPC may be a worthy heir to the mantle of Reformed Protestantism, even meriting a celebratory toast. To be sure, the history of the OPC is strewn with believers who still want the church to be more than the church, to be at the forefront of maintaining and promoting social righteousness. But just as important to

the OPC's history has been a growing contentment with the church as simply the church. The word "simply," of course, understates this sense because the church's mission is hardly simple or ordinary. But to recognize that the church has a responsibility that no other institution does, and that God has instituted the church uniquely for his redemptive purposes, is the start of a broader sense of restraint and resolve that the OPC, while lacking many of the attributes and features that impress the Corinthian minded, is doing a good and important work no matter how quiet or routine. ❶

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# ✦ Servant Humor

## *From the Back Pew*

Eutyclus II continues the tradition of Eutyclus I, Ed Clowney's pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutyclus (and His Pin)*: “Eutyclus was summoned to his post as a symbol of Christians nodding, if not on the window-sill, at least in the back pew.” Like his namesake, Eutyclus II aims at “deflating ecclesiastical pretense, sham and present-day religiosity.” This nom de plume will remain a cover for this ecclesiastical sleuth—to maintain his anonymity, and thus his freedom to poke fun.

## The Unlikely Case for Standing in Corporate Prayer

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by Eutyclus II

One piece of lore from nineteenth-century American Presbyterianism concerns the experience of Samuel Miller and his wife during Sunday morning worship services. The second professor called by the General Assembly to teach (with Archibald Alexander) at Princeton Theological Seminary, Miller had grown up with the accepted practice of Presbyterians standing for prayer during corporate worship. Much like congregations today when they

rise to sing hymns and psalms, Miller's generation of Presbyterians was accustomed to standing whenever the minister led the congregation in prayer. In fact, at the time, the only alternative to standing was kneeling. But because of Puritan objections to any whiff of Roman Catholic piety, Presbyterians and Puritans stood during prayer instead of crouching on their knees. (As a side note, the oldest Presbyterian congregation in Brazil, a traditionalist church in many respects, continues to this day to stand for public prayer, signaling the Brazilian church's founding in the 1860s, a time when standing for prayer was still common place, at least among the southern Presbyterians who migrated to Brazil during the United States Civil War.) Over time, however, American Presbyterians introduced a third option for bodily posture in prayer—sitting. Miller and his wife believed this was a novelty and disrespectful. After all, would you sit when you addressed a European monarch? If not, why would you do so when petitioning the Lord God of the universe? So Miller and his bride continued to stand even when the rest of their congregation sat. For anyone there who may have been peeking during the pastoral prayer they would have seen the odd sight of one couple on their feet surrounded by the rest of the congregation on their backsides.

I have enjoyed this image of late not simply because of the stubborn conviction and plausible piety that informed Miller's practice but also because of my own experience during the pastoral prayer where my wife and I worship each Sunday. No matter how early I go to bed on Saturday night, I often end up dozing three minutes into the long prayer in the morning service. If this were simply a consequence of late night fraternizing or Sunday meal preparations, then the problem would only be mine. But since I have actually tried to fix the problem by going to bed earlier and receiving eight square hours of sleep, the solution would apparently lie elsewhere. Since taking amphetamines is out of the question, I need to find an organic remedy.

One is to shorten the prayer. As impious as this may sound—and I have not yet summoned up the courage to suggest it (or even admit my problem) to the session—this solution was part of church

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=286&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=286&issue_id=70).

reforms confessed by the Reformed congregations in the city of Zurich. According to the Second Helvetic Confession, the length of prayers was a matter that church officers needed to consider and monitor. Chapter twenty-three reads:

As in everything, so also in public prayers there is to be a standard lest they be excessively long and irksome. The greatest part of meetings for worship is therefore to be given to evangelical teaching, and care is to be taken lest the congregation is wearied by too lengthy prayers and when they are to hear the preaching of the Gospel they either leave the meeting or, having been exhausted, want to do away with it altogether. To such people the sermon seems to be overlong, which otherwise is brief enough. And therefore it is appropriate for preachers to keep to a standard.

There you have it—a good confessional solution to a real human problem. Long prayers make people weary. To keep them fresh and alert for the sermon, make the prayers shorter.

An alternative to shorter prayers is the solution implied by Samuel Miller’s practice of standing. If Presbyterians stood for prayers, the chances of dozing off would be significantly diminished. In fact, standing has real advantages over kneeling for staying awake, since while crouching in the pew a worshiper could conceivably find a position sufficiently comfortable to slumber. But since sleeping while standing is so rare amongst God’s creatures—I can only think of horses resting this way—it would seem to be the easiest way to retain the length of our current prayers and the order of our services.

One last solution is the noisy child whose parents refuse to take the rambunctious tyke out of the service. Not only does the volume of the unruly child’s voice prevent dozing off comfortably, but the anxiety produced by wondering when the parents will intervene also prevents snoozing. Still, this remedy has the disadvantage of distracting worshipers from praying along with the pastor, not to mention being unpredictable—if you can’t count on the child to act up, you can’t expect him

to keep the worshipers awake.

For keeping the congregation awake during its prayer, that leaves the example of Samuel Miller and his wife and the only remedy standing. Ⓢ



# ✦ Servant Reading

## Book Reviews

### Souls in Transition

by Christian Smith with  
Patricia Snell

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2011<sup>1</sup>

by John R. Muether

*Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, by Christian Smith with Patricia Snell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, viii + 355 pages, \$24.95.

The 2005 publication of Christian Smith's study of teenage American spirituality, *Soul Searching*, was particularly noteworthy for the introduction of a new phrase in the lexicon of American religion. "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" was Smith's term for the vague and vacuous spirituality that had become the *de facto* religion of American teens. (See Gregory Reynolds' review, "Soul Searching: Religion among the Teens" *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 136–39.

Four years later, sociologist Smith (having migrated from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to the University of Notre Dame) released a follow-up study, along with Patricia Snell, his associate at the Center for the Study of

Religion and Society at Notre Dame. As thoroughly researched as the teen survey, the premise behind this present work is the identification of a demographic group that describes a new phase in the course of American life: "emerging adults" (ca. eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds). Smith and Snell seek to study the younger half of this demographic (and may devote their attention to "older emerging adults" in a further study).

Four factors shape the character of this new demographic:

1. The growth in higher education: many college graduates are pressured to add years of graduate school to their undergraduate degrees.
2. A delay in marriage: in the past half-century the median age for marriage rose from twenty to nearly twenty-six. As a result, more adults experience an unprecedented number of years as singles.
3. Changes in the global economy: as life-long careers yield to frequent job changes and the need for new training, the effect has been to push young adults into a "general psychological orientation of maximizing options and postponing commitments" (5).
4. Increasing willingness of parents to extend support to their children beyond college years.

All of this has meant that the transition to adulthood today is "more complex, disjointed, and confusing than in the past decades" (6). From this complexity arise six basic religious expressions among emerging adults:

1. Committed Traditionalists: strong religious faith that is actively practiced (15 percent of the population)
2. Selective Adherents: belief in parts of a religious tradition but neglect or rejection of other parts (30 percent)
3. Spiritually Open: mild interest in some spiritual matters (15 percent)
4. Religiously Indifferent: neither practicing

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=244&issue\\_id=63](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=244&issue_id=63).

- nor opposed to religion (25 percent)
5. Religiously Disconnected: little or no exposure to religion (5 percent)
  6. Irreligiously Skeptical: openly antagonistic to religion (10 percent)

An important conclusion of this survey is the authors' observation that emerging adults are equally or perhaps even more religious than their baby boomer counterparts. "We see little evidence," the authors write, "of massive secularization among America's emerging adults" (102). Here they are joining the chorus of voices that have come to dismiss as a discredited sociological theory the once reigning dogma that modernity inevitably leads to secularization.

Another surprising feature is that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, for all its centrality in the previous study, makes but a cameo appearance in the shape of the spirituality of this demographic. It is "still alive and well among the 18–23 year old set," but its effects are somewhat qualified because religious attitudes and practices have more "variety and originality." So if the mind-set of this group is not secularist, its spirituality is at least subjective and pluralistic.

In this regard, *Souls in Transition* invites comparison with another recent and ambitious work by an equally prolific sociologist of religion. In 2007, Princeton University's Robert Wuthnow published *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton University Press), wherein he makes similar observations about delayed adulthood and the ensuing religious uncertainty. Wuthnow also documents how young adults are leaning on a variety of sources in making religious commitments, among the most powerful being the Internet. As a result, they become religious "tinkerers," and religious institutions have declining relevance in the shape of post-boomer spirituality. Wuthnow's prescription for congregations to flourish is their adaptation to these changing cultural conditions, which is hardly a formula for a countercultural approach.

Smith and Snell point their readers in a differ-

ent direction. They underscore the importance of two institutions that endure in their faith-shaping effects, even in the midst of intense cultural pluralism. The first is the family. In the face of "one of the most pervasive and powerful myths about children in America," the authors boldly assert that when it comes to religion, parents are "hugely important" for "young adults" and parental influence still "trumps" the role of peers: "In the long run, who and what parents were and are for their children when it comes to religious faith and practice are much more likely to 'stick' with them, even into emerging adulthood, than who and what their teenage friends were" (285).

Perhaps even more surprising is the role of the church, and this insight is worth quoting at length:

The empirical evidence tells us that it does in fact matter for emerging adult religious outcomes whether or not youth have had nonparental adults in their religious congregations to whom they could turn for help and support... It matters whether or not teenagers have participated in adult-taught religious education classes, such as Sunday school. Adult engagement with, role modeling for, and formation of youth simply matters a great deal for how they turn out after they leave the teenage years. So stated negatively, when adults who have bought into the common myths and stereotypes as a result disengage from the lives of teenagers who are on the road to emerging adulthood, these teenagers are forced to travel that road either alone or only with peers and, more likely than not, end up less religiously committed and practicing as emerging adults. (285)

Out of the mouths of social scientists! For parents who weary in their task of Christian nurture, for Sunday school teachers who fear they have become "irrelevant," for sessions that are tempted to regard their efforts with young people as in vain, *Souls in Transition* offers impressive sociological evidence to the contrary. ☺

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# The Church of God

*by Stuart Robinson*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **John R. Muether**

*The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel, and the Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof: a Discourse in Four Parts*, by Stuart Robinson, edited with a foreword by A. Craig Troxel. Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009, 229 pages, \$10.00.

Among the indirect benefits of the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is that its ecclesiology course occasioned the reprinting of this classic argument for Presbyterian government in an inexpensive yet attractive, cloth-bound format. The author, Stuart Robinson (1814–1881), may be unfamiliar to most Presbyterians today. But the introduction to this book, provided by MTIOPC ecclesiology instructor Craig Troxel, apprises us of the importance of Robinson's contribution. Among great southern Presbyterian ecclesologists, notes Troxel, "Thornwell defended church power in theory, but Robinson defines it in particulars" (5).

The provocative title of this book is sure to raise eyebrows in our anti-ecclesiastical times. Robinson defends this claim admirably. Distancing

himself from Rome on the one hand and rationalism on the other, he argues that the church is anterior to Scripture but not extraneous to Scripture. Robinson's starting point is the biblical and confessional witness that Jesus Christ alone is the head and king of his church. From this premise emerges his emphasis on the church as divinely ordained and not humanly devised. Presbyterians often disadvantage themselves with a pragmatic argument for Presbyterian government, often imitating Winston Churchill's famous commendation of democracy: it is the worst form of government, except for all other forms that have been tried. Robinson's "divine right" Presbyterianism sees the church as a spiritual institution with spiritual means to accomplish spiritual ends. Because it is divinely revealed, we can just as legitimately speak of a regulative principle of government as we do a regulative principle of worship.

Robinson outlines how the spirituality of the church yields two-kingdom conclusions, characteristic of the Old School Calvinism of southern Presbyterianism. After identifying the differences between ecclesiastical and civil power, Robinson concludes: They are two great powers that be, and are ordained of God to serve two distinct ends in the great scheme devised for man as fallen" (67). God's ecclesiastical ordinances, he continues, include three ordinary and permanent offices of the church, which serve in the ministry of doctrine, discipline, and distribution (69).


Robinson's appeal to the centrality of the church is even more relevant in our day than when it was first published. Much more damaging today has been the temptation either toward an anti-evangelical "churchism" on the one hand or anti-ecclesiastical evangelicalism on the other. Ecclesiology, Robinson insists, is required for the coherence of Reformed theology and thus to the future of the Reformed faith: "A Calvinistic theology," he warns, "seldom remains long incorrupt except as held in connection with a Presbyterian theory of the church."

Many Reformed evangelicals today would seek to reinvent the church even while zealously defending Reformed confessions. They will defend

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=247&issue\\_id=63](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=247&issue_id=63).

Christ's doctrine even while denying his ordinances. Robinson writes that this inconsistency will not fly: Calvinism has ecclesiastical consequences. Consider this example: many contemporary arguments on the "doctrine of grace" from a Reformed perspective make the observation that the lower is one's assessment of humanity in the state of sin and misery, the correspondingly higher is one's estimate of the sovereign grace of God. This is true enough, but Robinson's appeal to the divine character of the church ratchets that argument up another notch: the more we are convinced of our depravity, the higher also must be our view of the church. The churchlessness of modern American Protestantism (mainline or evangelical) owes to a functional Pelagianism that lodges astonishing confidence in our individual powers to overcome the power of indwelling sin and to nurture the Christian life.

Another indication of the diminution of contemporary ecclesiological sensibilities is found in Robinson's observation that about one quarter of the seminary curriculum of his day was devoted to ecclesiology. A century and a half later, one is hard pressed to find a seminary curriculum that devotes 10 percent to the doctrine of the church. A good place to begin to overcome that deficiency is for seminaries to assign Robinson's book.

Fully half of this book is taken up with two appendices. First there is a collection of primary documents in Presbyterian polity, including the First (1560) and Second (1578) Books of Discipline of the Church of Scotland and the Form of Presbyterial Church Government of the Westminster Assembly (1645). Secondly, there is a biography of the author, penned by Thomas E. Peck, which originally appeared in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* (1882). 

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# The Shepherd Leader

by Timothy Z. Witmer

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*  
Online March 2011<sup>1</sup>

by William Shishko

*The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*, by Timothy Z. Witmer. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, 268 pages, \$17.99, paper.

Of the multitude of evangelical and Reformed books that are currently coming off the presses, relatively few address in any depth the field of "pastoral theology." Presbyterian ministers, in particular, must rely on classics in the field, e.g., *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter, *The Christian Ministry* by Charles Bridges, all of which are gold mines of information, but all of which also address very different times and situations than ministers must work with today. *The Shepherd Leader* by Dr. Timothy Witmer, Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, is a welcome contribution to this much neglected and important field of study. This well-organized and well-written volume focuses throughout on a view of the minister and the elders that highlights their work as undershepherds who represent the Great Shepherd in all of their biblically given responsibilities.

The book is divided into three parts: "Biblical and Historical Foundations," "What's a Shepherd to Do? A Comprehensive Matrix for Ministry," and "Putting it All Together." Eager readers are well advised not to jump to part three without giving careful consideration to the first two parts. The logic of the last part grows out of the material developed in parts one and two. The book includes a much needed treatment of our modern culture's rejection of authority. Less treatment is given to

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=286&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=286&issue_id=70).

abuses of authority in churches; but the biblically developed responses to each abuse are helpful and to the point.

The author's distinction (developed in chapter 6, "Shepherds Feed the Sheep") between "macro-feeding," i.e., the public ministry of the Word, and "micro-feeding," i.e., the various personal ways of bringing the Word of God to bear on the lives of others, is very helpful. I especially appreciated the emphasis on catechism in the section on "micro-feeding," and the importance of singling out fathers for personal work by ministers and elders. Likewise, it was good to see Witmer build on the historic pattern (beginning with Gregory's *Book of Pastoral Rule*, further developed by Martin Bucer in his *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, and even more fully developed by Richard Baxter in *The Reformed Pastor*) of dealing with different categories of believers, e.g., the young and weak, the declining Christian, the strong, etc.

Witmer, a Presbyterian Church in America minister, has clear affinities with a "two office view" of the eldership, which will make Orthodox Presbyterian ministers somewhat uneasy. However, this should not detract from the book's strength in providing a model for taking the historic Presbyterian and Reformed understanding of the church and its eldership and working that out in our culture. While I think that Witmer is too dismissive of the value of regular elder visits *in homes*, he rightly notes that it is increasingly difficult for churches to carry out such programs as work schedules of both spouses, and the general busyness of our activity-laden culture make the scheduling of these a great challenge. He urges more work to be done by phone calls (which are beginning to pose almost as much of a challenge as elder visits, given the increased reliance on answering machines and voice-mails). While this is certainly preferable to an elder having little or no regular contact with the people he is to be shepherding, we must be careful not to lose the important biblical and theological reasons behind the apostolic pattern of being *with* the people to whom we are representing the Great Shepherd who dwelt among us (e.g., Acts 20:18; Rom. 1:8–12; 1 Thess. 1:5).

The "Action Plans" in part 3, in the chapter "Seven Essential Elements of an Effective Shepherding Ministry," remind ministers and elders that the concepts and suggestions presented in the book are to be put into practice in ways suitable to each local church. Sessions could do few things more important than taking time to consider this chapter and adapt the material for their particular fields of service. We should keep in mind that any volume like this (which is written by a pastor who labors in a mid-Atlantic suburban area) must be contextualized for different situations. There is no "one size fits all" in the specific outworking of the various aspects of pastoral theology.

Part 3 concludes the volume in a way that makes it an outstanding tool for sessions to work through either in an intensive time of discussion of the whole book, or in systematic consideration of chapters as a part of each session meeting. Tim Witmer is to be commended for this fine contribution to assist ministers and elders in the vital work of being conscientious undershepherds who serve the Great Shepherd in a way that will secure the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, 23). May the book get wide usage in our churches. 📖

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# When Helping Hurts

by Steve Corbett and  
Brian Fikkert

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by William Shishko

*When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*, by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009, 230 pages, \$14.99, paper.

In “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” the well-known short story by Hans Christian Anderson, two charlatans promise a vain king the most exquisite suit of new clothes; however, to the foolish or incompetent, the garments will appear invisible. The king parades himself in his “new clothes,” but his subjects are all too embarrassed (or too afraid of being regarded as foolish) to tell the truth — until a young child in the crowd cries out, “But he isn’t wearing anything at all!”

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, in their book *When Helping Hurts*, have the holy temerity to say of so much well-meant assistance to the poor: “The Emperor has no clothes.” Unfortunately, their book is far less pleasurable reading than the delightful Hans Christian Anderson tale. Nevertheless, it is critically important reading for those who truly want to help those who are poor and needy.

Both of these authors speak from a wealth of training and experience. Steve Corbett of Covenant College is the community development specialist for the school’s Chalmers Center for Economic Development and an assistant professor in the department of economics and community development. Brian Fikkert is an associate professor of economics at Covenant College and is the founder and executive director of the Chalmers

Center. He is also the son of the late OPC minister, Henry Fikkert.

With good reason this book has been hailed across the evangelical spectrum. (It is endorsed by Dr. Ronald J. Sider, Joel Belz, Bryan Chappell, and many others.) It has been described as “a clarion call to rethink how we apply the gospel to a broken world,” and as a book that “will transform our good intentions into genuine, lasting change” (Stephan J. Baunam, senior vice president of World Relief). While it may not actually “transform” our good intentions, it certainly provides material for a most excellent first step in that direction. Through riveting real-life accounts, well thought out lessons, and probing questions addressed to the reader, we cannot help but come to the same conclusion as the authors: “When North American Christians *do* attempt to alleviate poverty, the methods used often do considerable harm to both the materially poor and the materially non-poor” (28). We also cannot but come to the conclusion that there are better ways of doing these things.

Part I of the book offers “Foundational Concepts for Helping Without Hurting.” Among the many helpful insights in these three chapters, the authors offer an expansive and illuminating look into the real meaning of poverty, together with how a lack of appreciation of that real meaning of poverty will lead to incomplete or misguided solutions. Unlike so many treatments of the subject, this one offers a forthright biblical framework that shows how the fall of man alters his relationship to God, himself, others, and the rest of creation. This brings an absence of *shalom* into every sphere of life. Any approach that will genuinely begin to address the problem of poverty must take all of this into account. However, the special contribution that Corbett and Fikkert offer in their treatment is to remind us that we too share in the brokenness of a world that has many forms of poverty. Understanding this (and living honestly with that knowledge) will help us avoid that proud paternalism that is often a substitute for true help to the materially poor. I was especially helped by the reminder that genuine ministry to the poor is not

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=257&issue\\_id=65](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=257&issue_id=65).



a matter of “projects and products,” but rather of “people and processes.” It was also most refreshing to read the authors’ clear affirmations that personal reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ and his saving work are the *sine qua non* of all efforts to see true change in the relationship of the poor to themselves, others, and the world around them.

Part 2 presents “General Principles for Helping Without Hurting.” Here the authors helpfully distinguish among relief, rehabilitation, and development, and illustrate situations that warrant each. Most readers (and especially those who serve as deacons) will find this material to be among the most practical and immediately useful in the entire book. It is likewise most helpful that the authors urge us to begin with the assets of those we are seeking to help, not the needs that are apparent. A program for doing this is presented, although helpers will seek to adapt this and simplify it for the more common situations we face in our less complex diaconal cases. The pattern and illustrations for the way helpers and the helped are to work together in assistance projects is likewise very illuminating.

Part 3 gives “Practical Strategies for Helping Without Hurting.” Chapter 7, “Doing Short-term Missions Without Doing Long-term Harm” is easily worth the price of the book. Without dampening the ardor for American groups to do short-term missions (STMs), the authors point out the many well-known problems with such projects, and how they can be avoided. Any church that sends out STM teams simply must read this chapter and resolve to put its wise suggestions into practice. The authors sensitize us to the fact that various forms of poverty are all around us, even in wealthy suburban areas. They present an array of “ministries” that churches or groups of individuals can develop. Again, not all of these will apply in every situation; but the suggestions are still interesting and thought provoking.

This is one of these rare books in which most will find little to quibble about. Frankly, those who are heavily involved in services to help the poor are well aware of the ways in which our well-intentioned desires to help others so often do the

opposite (and, eventually, make us cynical in our service). Any quibbles about particular sections should recede behind the book’s basic tenets: 1. In our work with those in any kind of poverty, we need to think about what we are doing. 2. We need to seek wise counsel before we act. *When Helping Hurts* will help deacons’ boards, individual Christians, and helping organizations to do exactly this.

Kudos to Corbett and Fikkert for this outstanding resource! 

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## Wired for Intimacy

by William M. Struthers

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by William Shishko

*Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*, by William M. Struthers. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009, 196 pages, \$16.00, paper.

It is always useful to read works that intelligently, thoughtfully, and clearly consider the complex relationship between the soul and the body. We only scratch the surface of the glorious truth that man is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) in the image of the infinite and incomprehensible God. We should prize gifted men and women who can help us scratch just a little deeper.

Dr. William M. Struthers, Associate Professor

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=286&issue\\_id=65](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=286&issue_id=65).

of Psychology at Wheaton College, has provided such help in his rich volume *Wired for Intimacy*. Compellingly subtitled “How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain,” the book introduces its readers to basic elements of behavioral neuroscience and the interrelationship of biology and behavior in male addictions to pornographic images. What could be dry and boring when communicated by many, is made lucid and fascinating by Struthers, who writes as a clear and engaging teacher.

The book is divided into two parts: “How Pornography Works,” and “Healthy Masculinity and Sexuality.” While Part 2 is more rambling, both parts are full of quotable sections (I marked my copy enthusiastically throughout), and eminently helpful insights into topic such as: how intimacy is corrupted by pornography (chapter 2), the consequences of exposure and gradual addiction to pornography (chapter 3), the meaning of being made in God’s image (chapter 5), masculinity (chapter 6), and, in a particularly insightful chapter, the male need of intimacy (chapter 7).

I was especially fascinated and helped by chapter 4 of the book, “Your Brain on Porn.” Here Struthers, the expert in neuroscience, and Struthers, the master teacher, combine beautifully. In drawing a memorable analogy between the way pornography works in the male brain and high definition (HD) television, Struthers likens the unique character of pornographic images with an HD signal, the male brain with an HD receiver, and the male nervous system and capacity for imagination with an HD display. “The male brain is built like an ideal pornography receiver, wired to be on the alert for . . . images of nakedness. The male brain and our conscious visual experience is the internal monitor where we perceive them. The images of sensuality grab our attention, jumping out and hypnotizing a man like an HD television among a sea of standard televisions” (82ff.).

The effect of this, particularly with prolonged exposure to pornographic images, forms particular neural pathways in the brain. These become the default pathways through which all interactions with women are directed.

With each lingering stare, pornography deepens a Grand Canyon-like gorge in the brain through which images of women are destined to flow. . . . All women become potential porn stars in the minds of these men. They have unknowingly created a neurological circuit that imprisons their ability to see women rightly as created in God’s image. (85)

Fully granting that there are other aspects of the world, the flesh, and the devil that warp a man’s mind and heart in this great battle for sexual purity, these insights on the neurological level are certainly valuable in understanding and explaining the dangers to men who do not, like godly Job, “make a covenant with their eyes” not to gaze with lust upon women (cf. Job 31:1)—especially women whose images are designed to entice them.

Thankfully, healthy patterns of sight, imagination, and human interaction can alter these “neural pathways” so that men’s habits become more holy in their attitudes toward and treatment of women (cf. Rom. 12:1–2). This is developed at length in Part 2 of the book. Struthers sees the meaning of man as image of God as primarily relational in nature. Hence, all attitudes toward sexuality which are divorced from the healthy interaction of whole people with whole people, i.e. not simply with images, will inevitably be warped and destructive. Here Struthers offers what is, in essence, a theology of intimacy. Given the nature of the book, he makes particular application of this to males and the meaning of masculinity. These sections should be pondered carefully by pastors and by others who work with men who struggle in these areas of male identity and development. I found this material particularly helpful.

Unfortunately, the final chapter (chapter 8) on “Rewiring and Sanctification” is disappointing. Despite many insightful nuggets, e.g. “The process of sanctification is an addiction to holiness, a compulsive fixation on Christ, and an impulsive pattern of compassion, virtue, and love” (189), this section comes short of anything like a satisfactory explanation of the dynamics of true sanctification. This is due, in part, to what seems like a Pelagian

view of sin throughout the book, coupled with deficient views of regeneration and conversion. We must keep in mind that Dr. Struthers is not, first, a theologian. It is also true that the metaphor of “re-wiring” (as common as it is in our modern day) reduces man to a machine. This is hardly Struthers’s position or his intention; but the metaphor lends itself to that.

Much to his credit, Struthers does not shy away from the difficult and delicate issues. The effects of a hook-up culture with its allure of multiple sex partners, masturbation, and the specifics of repentance and confession are all faced head-on by Struthers. This only adds to the value of this enlightening introduction to the world of neuroscience, the philosophy of gender identity, and the paths that warp or heal sexuality in a fallen world. I urge pastors and all who seek to help men in what has been rightly called “Every Man’s Battle” to get this book, read and digest it, wed it to a better theology of sin and sanctification, and make use of it to help themselves and others be healthier whole persons, including (but not limited to) having minds of sexual purity. 🍷

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## The Whole Counsel of God, vol. I

by *Richard C. Gamble*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **Stephen J. Tracey**

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=259&issue\\_id=65](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=259&issue_id=65).

*The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 1, *God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*, by Richard C. Gamble. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009, xxxiii + 718 pages, \$49.99.

This book is about God’s Great Deeds (*Magnalia Dei*). It is the first in a projected three volume series. Dr. Gamble sees his book standing in line with such stalwarts as Calvin’s *Institutes*, Owen’s *Biblical Theology*, Wistius’s *Economy of the Divine Covenants*, and Vos’s *Biblical Theology*. His aim is “to continue discussions of the relationship between exegesis and hermeneutics, and the interpretations of biblical, systematic, and historical theology” (xxxiii). Gamble says:

*The Whole Counsel of God* will attempt to meet the need for a comprehensive theology that is attuned to the methodological advantages of biblical theology, but will also combine that advantage with the strengths of historical and systematic theology. (xxxiii)

Dr. Gamble is certainly aiming high. In one sense it is difficult to assess if he hits the mark because only one-third of the work has been published. That first third of the series, volume one, focuses on the Old Testament. The second volume will cover the New Testament, and the third will “track the church’s theological development in its understanding and explication of the Bible’s teaching through the centuries” (xxxiii).

In this review I will restrict myself to examining whether or not Dr. Gamble moves towards his target in his treatment of the Old Testament. Before launching into the body of his work, Gamble gives a lengthy introduction (Part 1, 1–142) covering the following topics: “The Nature and Method of Theology,” “How Shall We Structure Systematic Theology?” “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” and “An Old Testament Theology.” I found these sections very helpful. Particularly strong is the critique of “three prevailing models” of systematic theology: the biblical theology school, the practical school, and the missiological school. This discussion was not only informative, but, with Gamble’s feast of footnotes, directs the reader to many more

fruitful fields. He then provides a comprehensive and capable introduction to Old Testament theology. I am sure that not all will agree with his arguments in several areas of Part 1, but it is a well-written and informative introduction nonetheless.

What I expected, or perhaps hoped for, in the remainder of the book was an exciting tour through exegesis of key Old Testament texts, with an assessment of their place in the flow of biblical revelation and an injection of key doctrinal subjects to be picked up later in New Testament theology, historical theology, and systematic theology. That is, more or less, what we get in Parts 2 and 3. These sections form the bulk of this first volume.

Part 2 (145–309) deals with “Revelation from Adam through the Flood.” This section is packed with ripe fruit. Gamble covers the debate over the interpretation of the days of creation, creation itself, the nature of revelation, God and evil, the imputation of Adam’s sin, and various other aspects of Old Testament theology relating to humanity. He also carefully introduces the subjects of revelation and covenant.

Part 3 (313–473) examines “Revelation from Abraham to Moses.” Gamble concentrates on the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant, with a useful introduction to the nature of God’s law. This section ends with a helpful discussion of ecclesiology in the Pentateuch.

Part 4 (477–665) looks at the “Prophetic and Wisdom-Poetic Era of Revelation.” Gamble has brief notes on each of the remaining books in the Old Testament. The fruit in this section is not as ripe or seasoned as the previous sections. Several biblical books have only a page or two of notes, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. For a book dealing with the whole counsel of God to cover the exegetical and biblical theology of the major prophets with such brevity is disappointing. Perhaps it would have been wiser for Gamble to give a separate volume to Part 4, in order to trace out the rich themes of progressive revelation after Moses. The deepening theme of the new covenant bursting forward with the increasing clarity of messianic revelation is confined to six pages under the title, “Theology in the Prophetic Era” (626–31).

This little section glances at the doctrine of the covenant and ecclesiology during the prophetic era. In comparison to the weighty Mosaic section, this is lacking in depth.

Part 5 (669–83) seems to stand as merely a postscript, “God’s People Respond to the Magnalia Dei.” Faith and justification are briefly summarized without any reference to the ongoing debate with the New Perspective on Paul. This is surprising given the importance of several Old Testament texts in this debate such as Genesis 15 and Daniel 9. Perhaps the debate with Tom Wright is waiting, like several other issues, for volume 3.

This book will certainly be of use to students beginning to work their way through biblical theological issues. As an introduction to Old Testament theology, this volume is strong in Mosaic revelation and disappointing on the rest of the Old Testament. We must wait for the other buds to bloom before we can assess the success of this bold undertaking. ❶

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## Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns

by *T. David Gordon*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online December 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **Stephen J. Tracey**

*Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal*, by T. David Gordon. Phil-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=252&issue\\_id=64](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=252&issue_id=64).

lipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, 188 pages, paper.

T. David Gordon has stepped into the minefield of music in the modern church. Or perhaps it would be better to say that he stepped into the minefield of modern music in the church. Most office-bearers know this is a minefield where one is apt to lose a limb. Members—not always young and not always disgruntled, as one might imagine—pushing for “missional” music are not likely to be satisfied with “we’ve always done it this way” or “we can’t offend the older folk,” or “we just don’t like guitars, or drums, or words projected on screens.” Nor should they be satisfied with such arguments.

It is not unusual to hear the phrase “use the culture to attract the culture.” The question, however, is what culture? Use what culture to attract what culture? And when the culture is attracted, what then? Change culture? The classic bait and switch, although everyone knows the bait is rarely switched. It just wriggles and grows on the hook.

All too often our answers to “missional” music questions fall short. An example of this appears on the OPC website series of questions and answers. The only question relating to church music includes the following sentences:

Choirs were used in the Old Testament worship of God and are therefore not forbidden, so choral responses reverently executed today are not forbidden. Similarly, special music is referred to and is therefore not forbidden.<sup>2</sup>

The argument that something is not forbidden is not the Presbyterian understanding of the regulative principle of worship. Something needs to be commanded. This lack of carefully nuanced answers contributes to the frustration that swirls around this debate, as well as the awful experience of churches losing limbs; sometimes strong and healthy limbs.

So, Dr. Gordon’s contribution to the question is most welcome. The strength of the book is that it will help church sessions approach the question

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2 *Music in Worship*, Question and Answer, [www.opc.org](http://www.opc.org). Accessed 2.15.2011, [http://www.opc.org/qa.html?question\\_id=126](http://www.opc.org/qa.html?question_id=126).

of church music much more thoughtfully than I suspect is usually the case. Thought is exactly what is called for. Dr. Gordon says:

I am bothered that such a near-total change has taken place in Christian worship in about two decades, without significant theological study. (170)

This issue is not a matter of taste; it is a matter of serious aesthetic, theological, and liturgical principle. To choose contemporary worship music over traditional worship music is to reject the criteria proposed by all those generations of hymn-writers and hymn-compilers. Such a wholesale rejection, without a season of theological (and musical) reflection analogous to that which informed the Reformation, has been a disservice both to the church and the world. (176)

[This book] is designed to describe how we got where we are now, and to make a case that, regarding worship music, where we are now is not so good. (179)

Much of the book consists of describing a variety of cultural forces and implied values of which many people, lay or clergy, are unaware. (179)

This is an important point—it is not easy for us to question our own culture, or to consciously express our values. T. S. Eliot probed in the same direction in his lecture *The Idea of a Christian Society*. He said, “We conceal from ourselves the unpleasant knowledge of the real values by which we live.”<sup>3</sup> Eliot went on to argue that the church’s business was to interfere with the world.<sup>4</sup> He said:

I want to suggest that a task for the Church in our age is a more profound scrutiny of our society, which shall start from the question: to what depth is the foundation of our so-

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3 T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture, The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1939; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1948), 7.

4 *Ibid.*, 71.



ciety not merely neutral but positively anti-Christian?<sup>5</sup>


Similarly Calvin M. Johansson observes that the church, like the children of Israel, found out that culture is not all that neutral. Baal is not dead.... From the folk mass to coke and potato chip communion to gospel entertainment, the church cannot wiggle free from its lovers' quarrel with the world.<sup>6</sup>

That is the issue Gordon wrestles with in this book; the non-neutral cultural issues of church music. He brings a “media-ecological perspective,” and the result is a book that questions the unquestioned assumptions of our culture. Discussing issues of aesthetic relativism, musical form and content, meta-narratives and the concept of sacred music, Dr. Gordon questions the value of contemporaneity as the apparently sole criterion for assessing church music.

Johnny hasn't been persuaded that hymn-singing is wrong; Johnny simply cannot relate to anything that does not sound contemporary. He cannot shed his cultural skin, the skin of contemporaneity, of triviality, of paedocentrism. He thinks he “prefers” contemporary worship music to other forms, but in reality he prefers contemporaneity as a trout prefers water; it is the only environment he knows. In roughly twenty-five years, Christian worship has gone from being serious to casual—not because a case has been cogently or theologically argued that “casual” is more appropriate to a meeting with God, but because the culture itself has become casual, and the church has chosen not to resist the cultural inertia. David Letterman doesn't take anything seriously—why should we? (173)

[Johnny has been] temporarily befuddled by a commercial, paedocentric, contemporane-

ous, pop culture—but biblical light can bring him understanding and clarity in the matter of hymnody, as that light has illuminated in many matters before. (185)

The book is eminently readable. When I received my review copy, two people in my home had read it before I got my pencil to it. Dr. Gordon writes with wit and wisdom. This is not a heavy book, but it is a chewy book. The questions for reflection may prove useful to church sessions and other groups reading together. Dr. Gordon helps us think about music that is biblically sound, not faddish; straightforward, not manipulative. Music that is ascetic, not indulgent; honest, not pretentious; and God centered, not egocentric. Music that is more wholesome and edifying, rather than entertaining. He is not simply defending Old Western Man music but rather he believes we should patiently develop and teach “a biblical perspective on singing praise” (180). 

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## Living by God's Promises

by *Joel R. Beeke and James A. La Belle*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online June-July 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **Kevin M. Kisler**

*Living by God's Promises*, by Joel R. Beeke and James A. La Belle. Grand Rapids: Reformation

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=263&issue\\_id=66](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=263&issue_id=66).

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5 Ibid., 74.

6 Calvin M. Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry, Twenty-first Century Directions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 27.



Heritage Books, 2010, xviii + 172 pages, \$15.00, paper.

If the physical property of density could be applied to truth, then *Living by God's Promises*, though brief, would be as difficult to heft as an anvil. This weightiness results naturally from the transcendent importance of the volume's subject matter, the promises of God, which are "the grounds of our hope, the objects of our faith, and the rule of our prayer" (2). However, the book's unique format also contributes: two contemporary authors, Joel Beeke and James La Belle, team-up to "condense" the unrivaled insights of three Puritan writers (Edward Leigh, William Spurstowe, and Andrew Gray), each of whom wrote extensively on God's promises (xi). The authors' stated goal is to employ contemporary language to make these materials accessible to "the common layperson" (xviii).

The book edifies faith in a number of ways. First, Beeke and La Belle expose the reader to important theological paradigms. For example, they place God's promises within the covenant of grace, thereby exalting Christ as the mediator of the covenant who receives and apportions the promised blessings to those united to him by faith (19).

Second, the authors provide memorable working definitions for vital concepts. They demonstrate that "freeness" is "bound up within the nature of a promise," describe the covenant of grace as the "bundle of all the promises," and summarize regeneration as God "taking eternal possession of a heart by His Spirit" (39, 14, 119).

Third, at many places the writing stirs the soul, as the printed words reproduce Beeke and La Belle's earnest voices as preachers. For example, we are exhorted against abusing God's promises so as to delay penitence because "though true repentance is never too late, late repentance is seldom true" (44). Meanwhile, a right appropriation of the promises by faith recognizes that "what the Lord has given we will surely possess" and that "we have nothing to commend us to Christ but our need and His call for us to come to Him" (102, 125).

Fourth, Beeke and La Belle labor strenuously to show the inherent relevancy of God's promises

to the Christian life, as we are called upon to bring the promises to bear in circumstances ranging from affliction to facing temptation by "believing them, applying them (depending on them), and praying them" (54).

Fifth, the authors demonstrate pastors' hearts by anticipating ways present sufferings make the promises appear uncertain. To this end, they instruct us that "hope is the grace of God that enables us to patiently wait for the Lord to perform His promises, especially regarding redemption and eternal life" and that God "is never late but always on time" (126, 64). Finally, they remind us that God provides himself as the great goal of the promises, so that "the core of the divine promise is not so much the thing promised but God Himself" (15–16). What a glorious recalibration of our understanding of salvation: through Christ, God grants us the most precious and infinitely valuable gift of all—himself.

While these attributes, and others left unmentioned, commend their work, Beeke and La Belle do not entirely attain their goal of presenting this material in a manner accessible to the typical Christian in our day, even one within a Reformed congregation. On the surface, the authors sometimes struggle in using truly contemporary language. They employ the King James Version in the many Scripture citations. They also revert on occasion to bygone language, using illustrations such as "sweet nectar" (85) and constructions like "be our hands ever so full" (53). This is by no means uniform. At moments, such as chapter two's opening, the authors compellingly use personal illustrations, written in contemporary fashion; more such examples would have helped the book's tone.

However, the greatest obstacle to this volume's intended breadth of usefulness is the aforementioned density of the material. There is no doubting that Beeke and La Belle possess studied faculty with their Puritan sources, enabling them to organize vast amounts of data into a coherent and trustworthy whole. But the resulting number of points and sub-points, often contained in numbered lists at the end of chapters, is excessive, giving the feel that the volume is an extended outline.

Can most in our day meaningfully process a list of twenty-seven ways to use the promises for pursuing holiness or twenty-two applications of the promises in the struggle against sin (to cite just two examples out of many)?

Though Beeke and La Belle have “condensed” the material by shortening the manner of its presentation relative to its original form, a more helpful methodology would have been to shine a spotlight on a few core truths under each main heading, using elaboration to encourage understanding and retention. Admittedly, setting aside any truths, valuable in themselves, can almost be painful for the conscientious communicator of God’s gracious ways with men (as preachers experience weekly in sermon preparation). However, too much of a good thing can become a hindrance—almost like trying to drink from an open fire hydrant!

While Beeke and La Belle have generally modernized language, they have not modernized concepts and the overall framework in which these concepts are presented. In that sense, they have expected our contemporary mind-set to adjust to the Puritan comprehensiveness. Interaction with such unquestionably worthy historical fathers of the faith should challenge our present Christian understanding and be a catalyst for growth. But many readers of this volume run the risk of being overwhelmed, of bruising themselves on this well-intentioned little anvil.

However, the book could be used beneficially to guide a study group or Sunday School class, if led by a skillful presenter capable of sifting through the material in accord with the understanding and maturity of those under his direction. In addition, the careful organization and depth of the material—not to mention the authors’ contagious ardor for their topic—would provide a superb motivation and resource for a topical series of sermons on God’s promises. 📖

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# Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ

by *Elyse M. Fitzpatrick* and  
*Dennis E. Johnson*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*  
Online August-September 2011<sup>1</sup>

by **John W. Mallin**

*Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ*, by Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2009, 236 pages, appendices, endnotes, index, \$15.99, paper.

*Counsel from the Cross* will be helpful to anyone interested in counseling.

The purpose of the book is essentially to teach the reader how to apply the gospel. On page 12 of the preface, Johnson writes: “Elyse Fitzpatrick and I want to lay before you a provocative claim: the cross of Christ and the gospel that proclaims it really are ‘the power of God for salvation [comprehensive rescue] to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 1:16).” And he goes on to write:

So we invite you to join us in a venture of exploration to discover the power to defeat sin and sadness, conflict and bitterness, and self-pity and self-contempt, not by walking *beyond* the gospel that first brought us in to the favor and family of God but rather by moving more deeply *into* that same gospel. And we invite you to notice the many ways in which the inspired human authors of God’s inerrant Word, the Bible, bring their readers back, again and

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=270&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=270&issue_id=67).

again, to what Jesus has done for us through his obedient life and sinless sacrifice. They address a whole spectrum of interpersonal conflicts and intrapersonal captivities. (14)

Following the preface, acknowledgments, and introduction are nine chapters, four appendices, endnotes, and an index. The book reflects biblical scholarship and counseling experience.

Chapters 1 through 4 unpack the gospel as God's declaration of his love to hurting, guilty, trapped people. Calling for a gospel-centered response to this declaration, the authors provide the important cautionary note: "None of us lives every day in the light of the gospel as we should" (82).

Chapter 5 begins an exposition of the counseling process. The authors define gospel-centered counseling:

Very briefly, gospel-centered counseling, as we are defining it, is the process of one Christian coming alongside another with words of truth to encourage, admonish, comfort, and help—words drawn from Scripture, grounded in the gracious saving work of Jesus Christ, and presented in the context of relationship. The goal of this counseling is that the brother or sister in need of counsel would grow in his or her understanding of the gospel and how it applies to every area of life and then respond in grateful obedience in every circumstance, all to the building up of the church and for the glory of God. (91–92)

Chapter 6: explains "gospelized sanctification" (113); i.e., progressive sanctification governed by our belief that we are in union with Christ, making the points that the gospel is as necessary to sanctification as it was to our initial justification and that joy in the Lord is the strength needed for growth in obedience, for the war against sin. Chapter 7 tackles the controversial and difficult subject of the emotions. The discussion of emotions as "mirrors of our hearts" is helpful in applying the gospel in response to feelings. Chapter 8 expounds the importance of relationships, analyzes the impact

of forgetting the gospel in marital and parental relationships, and illustratively describes gospel-centered parenting. Chapter 9 seeks to counter the tendency to seek self-made glory, perfection, even by living in the light of the gospel or by uncovering idols.

Each chapter is followed by questions to aid reflection on the chapter. The appendices are helpful complements to the book. The endnotes are not merely citations, but additional comments, which might have been more helpful as footnotes. The index is full, including coverage of the appendices and endnotes.

The cross from which we are to counsel means the whole gospel, the entirety of the work of Christ. The authors take sin seriously, at the heart level, not merely the behavioral level. The illustrations support this effectively.

The counseling model presented is not simple, formulaic or routine, but complex. Of course, the Bible is not formulaic and life is neither formulaic, simple, nor routine. Counseling is a very personal process that involves counselor and counselee, both complex sinners, as well as the triune God, all in relationship.

One discordant note. While chapter 2 devotes attention to the importance of the use of the means of grace and has helpful things to say about the Word preached, the sacraments, and fellowship gets similar attention in this context, prayer is not treated at all. Similarly, Chapter 4 closes with a paragraph (89) that begins: "We believe that it is your Father's desire to convince you of his love and that he yearns for you to believe it. Let him speak to you through his Word, through the sacraments, and through other believers." This is a curious omission which gives rise to the question, why was prayer omitted (although references to prayer are occasionally made)?

The book has more the quality of a basic textbook than that of a popular topical book or of a manual. It is brief, not exhaustive, and does not cover everything that might be covered in a textbook, nor say everything that might be said about what is covered. It is not designed for quick reading and easy answers, but for reflection on

God and self with the book's guidance. Although not difficult reading, those who do not have the patience to think about implications and applications to their own hearts will find it inaccessible. Regrettably, this means that, not unlike the gospel itself, the book will be put down by some who might most benefit from it. But it serves as an effective reminder of what counseling should be.



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# ✦ Servant Reading

## Book Notes

### The Life and Thought of Augustine

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2011<sup>1</sup>

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The fathers of the ancient church are thankfully being read among us—well, at least to some degree. And if we learn anything from the Reformers, it is their deep respect—albeit never slavish—for the theologians who have gone before them. Among those most revered stands the giant Augustine, whose shadow is still cast over all of Western Christianity, mostly for good, but sometimes for ill. The range of his thought, his interaction with the thinking of the world in which he lived, together with his superior rhetorical skills are almost unprecedented.

As with Calvin and most theologians up until the Enlightenment, his doctrine was hammered out on the anvil of pastoral experience. This also tempered one of Augustine's greatest weaknesses, a tendency toward asceticism that diminished embodied life—a remnant of his earlier Manichean and Neoplatonic thinking.

Unlike some in the emerging church movement, we must not read the ancients as an evasion of the Reformation or post-Reformation theology, but rather as a way of understanding our Reforma-

tion roots.

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*Augustine of Hippo: A Life*, by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, xx + 177 pages, \$19.95; 2010, \$16.95, paper.

Posthumously published, this little gem is the best short life of Augustine in print. It is pithy and poignant. The narrative moves the reader along the trajectory of Augustine's life in a lively account. Chadwick seems never to waste a word, and so at the end of this brief work one feels as if the book had covered 500 pages of important material. The comprehensiveness of Chadwick's grasp of the vast Augustine corpus makes him a master of his subject. Precise, abbreviated (Latin) references fill the text at every main point. It is no wonder another Augustine master, Peter Brown, writes the foreword.

Chadwick's summaries of Augustine's thought reveal some remarkable insights, especially as they bear on contemporary issues. For example, Augustine's respect for the natural sciences combined with his intense study of Scripture lead him to deplore "theologians, orthodox in intention, who try to treat the book of Genesis as a source-book for science without realizing the very different purpose of the sacred book" (86). More well-known is the Donatist controversy (98–115) in which Augustine opposed the separatist rigorism of this "alternate church," (vastly outnumbering Augustine's Catholic congregation in Hippo for the early decades of his ministry, as in most of Numidia) established as a reaction to the compromise of some bishops during the Diocletian persecution (AD 303–5). One will find in the Donatists a healthy opposition to church establishment, which Augustine unfortunately inherited from Constantine, along with a dangerous militancy and perfectionism that dogs the church to this day. Augustine, when at his best in this controversy, is a model of the practical, pastoral application of theology—the doctrine of the church and the nature of Christian virtue.

Chadwick whets the appetite of the reader to read Augustine for himself—besides the obvious *Confessions* and *The City of God*, less familiar

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=286&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=286&issue_id=70).

works like *On Christian Doctrine* (or *Teaching* as Chadwick translates *De Doctrina Christiana*), *The Teacher* (*De Magistro*), and *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*). Chadwick also brings to light very obscure works of interest such as *On Catechizing Simple People* (*De Catechizandis Rudibus*, 88). While many of Augustine's commentaries are not exegetically satisfying for the Reformed preacher, his *Expositions on the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) are loaded with penetrating discernment.

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*Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, x + 134 pages, \$11.95, paper.

This book is a brilliant, succinct, and accurate introduction to the thought of Augustine. Like Chadwick's biography, this very short introduction to the theology of Augustine is unequalled in the quality of its conciseness.

The content bears some similarity to Chadwick's biography in that the last three chapters deal with the Trinity, *The City of God*, and grace, respectively. However, this *Very Short Introduction* is more explicitly topical, beginning with a chapter titled "The Formation of Augustine's Mind: Cicero, Mani, Plato, Christ." Like his biography, this book makes the reader want to read more of Augustine and those who influenced him. As with Calvin, we observe a giant intellect enlisted by our Lord, against his natural tendency to be a scholar, to serve him in his church.

\* \* \*

*Saint Augustine: Confessions*, translated with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, xxix + 311 pages, \$29.95; 2009, \$7.95, paper.

This is an especially lucid translation by one of the greatest twentieth-century Augustine scholars. I bring this to your attention simply because of the stature of the translator as an Augustine scholar of the first rank. Brown observes (in the biography below, 487) that Chadwick's "fresh rendering ... has caught the precise flavor of Augustine as a philosophical writer steeped in an austere Pla-

tonic world-view that is notoriously hard to catch in modern words."

\* \* \*

*Augustine of Hippo: A Biography: A New Edition with an Epilogue*, by Peter Brown. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000, xiii + 548 pages, \$24.95, paper.

This has remained the benchmark for Augustine biographies since its first publication in 1967. However, this new edition has an extensive reconsideration of key elements in the biography based on new discoveries of Augustine manuscripts, principally sermons and letters (known as the Dolbeau letters and the Divjak sermons), and the maturity of Brown's own thinking over more than three decades since the publication of the first edition. Add to this much new evidence, yielding a more nuanced view of the world of Augustine. For example, the picture of Ambrose's Milan now reveals a more hostile relationship between Platonism and Christianity among Milanese intellectuals than Brown had previously described in 1967 (485–86). So also, more has been discovered about Augustine's key theological opponents, the Donatists and Pelagians. Thus, some early ideas have been confirmed and others altered by these additions to the Augustine corpus.

As with Chadwick, Brown is an intellectual biographer, dealing fully with the thinking of Augustine as it changed throughout his long life.

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*Augustine through the Ages*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, O. S. A. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, xlix + 902 pages, \$75.00.

The size of this volume is proportionate to the influence of its subject on the history of Western religious thought and institutions. The editor, Allan Fitzgerald, presently edits *Augustinian Studies*, a semi-annual journal on Augustine and his influence (sponsored by Villanova University). He is also a tenured faculty member of the Istituto Patristico Agostinianum, Rome, Italy. Fitzgerald along with four associate editors and an impressive array of over 140 scholars has compiled an ency-



clopedia of over 400 entries. Several scholars will be familiar in our circles, like Richard Muller of Calvin Theological Seminary and Ronald Nash of Reformed Theological Seminary in Florida.

The range of entries is impressive. There are major articles on scholars who have been strongly influenced by Augustine, from Boethius to von Harnack; as well as those who influenced Augustine such as Porphyry and Ambrose. There is even a fine five-page article on Calvin. All of Augustine's major works are covered under their Latin titles.

Jaroslav Pelikan provides an excellent foreword. The complete bibliography (15 pages) of Augustine's works, along with a fine general index, makes this an incomparable and indispensable tool for all who would know Augustine and his influence.

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While it is folly to seek to make Augustine one of us—a theological anachronism since he never fully extricated himself from his Manichean and Neoplatonic past—it is equal folly to ignore his profound influence on our Reformation theology (important in Calvin alone, not to mention Post-Reformation theologians). Thus, our great debt to God for him. And should we be tempted to envy the scope of his life and thought, we should remember the humility which led him to write *Retractions* (*Retractiones*) near the end of his life—*tolle lege!* ☺

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# ✦ Servant Reading

## Review Articles

### Weighing the Weight of Glory

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2011<sup>1</sup>

by Stephen Migotsky

*Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn. Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2004, 560 pages, \$24.99.

The topic of heaven is under appreciated by most Christians. Meditating on the future life and meditating on heaven are important means of grace. The Christian's life is strengthened by thinking about the life to come. Books on heaven can help us to "not lose heart" in our pilgrimage by "weighing the weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:16–18). Misleading books on heaven can also do much damage to the Christian.

#### Strengths of the Book

Alcorn is concerned that believers have misunderstood heaven. He thinks that most believers are influenced by the false idea that to be physical—in a physical body and in a physical world—is "worldly." Alcorn believes that this idea leads believers to think that heaven is not really physical. Alcorn is correct as he describes the goodness of creation in a prelapsarian state which included

physicality. The author gives useful examples of wrong thinking about heaven among Christians and Christian authors, which have their source in denying the goodness of God's creation.

Alcorn uses some Reformed theologians and the Westminster Confession of Faith to support his study of heaven. In his process of analyzing the weaknesses of much writing about heaven, he invents a term that is used repeatedly—"Christoplatonism." His term refers to Christianity being wrongly influenced by false ideas from Plato that physical bodies are a hindrance to the good life. Christoplatonism results, Alcorn believes, in some Christians viewing physical activities in heaven as unspiritual (e.g., eating, drinking, even talking). He presents the physical nature of Eden, this current earth, and the future glorified heaven and earth as all being good, enjoyable, and physical.

Alcorn presents the goodness of the physical nature of things starting with God's pronouncement on the creation as "good." Adam and Eve had real bodies before and after they sinned. Jesus had a real body before and after his resurrection. Much of Alcorn's analysis is correct about other aspects of heaven—it will be like paradise, like the current earth, and have human relationships. He compares the new earth to this current earth and to prelapsarian Eden, each of them being "earthly" or physical. Alcorn argues that the continuity of the current earth with the eschatological earth and heaven is like the relationship between our current bodies and our resurrected bodies. Our resurrected bodies will be different, yet they will still be *our* bodies. After the resurrection we will still be who we were, but glorified and transformed. So, too, the new earth will be the same as the current earth. Alcorn draws out the implications of the continuity between this world and the next world.

When the author is good, he is very, very good. The following quotes are examples of many excellent parts of *Heaven*:

If I were dealing with aspects of Heaven in their order of *importance* [emphasis his], I would have begun with a chapter about God

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=239&issue\\_id=62](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=239&issue_id=62).

and our eternal relationship with him ... *Our longing for Heaven is a longing for God* [emphasis his] ... Being with God is the heart and soul of Heaven. Every other heavenly pleasure will derive from and be secondary to his presence. God's greatest gift to us is, and always will be, himself. (171)

Later in the book, Alcorn gives an excellent description of the purification of our thinking and desires which will occur in heaven:

Because our hearts will be pure and we'll see people as they truly are, every relationship in Heaven will be pure. We'll all be faithful to the love of our life: King Jesus.... We'll love everyone, men and women, but we'll be in *love* [emphasis his] only with Jesus. We'll never be tempted to degrade, use, or idolize each other. We'll never believe the outrageous lie that our deepest needs can be met in any person but Jesus.

Often we act as if the universe revolves around us. We have to remind ourselves it's all about Christ, not us. In Heaven we'll see reality as it is and will, therefore, never have to correct our thinking. This will be Heaven's Copernican revolution—a paradigm shift in which we'll never again see ourselves as our center of gravity. Jesus Christ will be our undisputed center, and we won't want it any other way. (314)

### Weaknesses of the Book

Despite the book's excellent parts, there are weaknesses that sometimes become dangerously misleading. First, Alcorn uses the books of Daniel and Revelation and many parables as sources for his study of heaven. These are easily misinterpreted. Revelation itself is a genre that primarily uses symbolism to communicate truths. Parables are difficult and ones which seem to be about heaven may not really be about details of heaven. In general, Alcorn's exegesis is too literal.

Another major weakness is that Alcorn blurs the distinction between a good and necessary deduction from the biblical text and fantastic specu-

lation. There are many examples in the book of wild speculations that begin with a biblical truth, but then Alcorn's vivid imagination takes it too far.

For example, it is clear from Scripture that angels are real and are present on earth now ministering to people. Alcorn states that "every once in a while I say "Thank you" out loud" or "I look forward to meeting you" to an angel that may be in the room with him (284). No one in the Bible ever practices such behavior, nor is it ever encouraged in Scripture. Alcorn has no biblical warrant to do or say such things to angels who may be present in his room.

In another example, Alcorn is extremely imaginative in his belief that ancient civilizations, such as ancient Babylon and Rome, will be resurrected—not only the people, but their civilization—so that you can "walk among redeemed [ancient] civilizations" (383).

The author has similar speculations about dinosaurs and pets being in heaven. His weakness is that he does not limit his interpretation of Scripture to truths deduced "by good and necessary consequence" from it (WCF 1.6).

### Dangers of the Book

Alcorn briefly warns of our sinful tendency toward idolatry, but he does not apply his brief warning to himself, or throughout the book (177). Because he does not consistently see the idolatrous nature of indwelling sin, he writes that our desires now are God-given and are good, and our current desires will continue in heaven and will be purified and satisfied in heaven (160). Alcorn never states that many of our desires now are sinful and should not be satisfied at any time, but should be mortified now and will be eliminated in heaven. He knows that in heaven people won't have to "worry about putting people or things above God" (177), but he fails to show enough concern about people now having sinful desires that should be discouraged. He does not see the broad, idolatrous nature of human desire and worship of creation and creatures that Paul teaches in Romans 1:22–23.

Without any cautionary statement about sinful desires and sinful thinking—especially as it applies to our imagining heaven—Alcorn presents some extreme speculations about heaven.

We know God will put one world under his children’s authority—Earth. If the rest of the planets and the entire universe fell with and will rise with mankind, I can easily envision our inhabiting and governing other resurrected planets. (263)

Alcorn follows up this extreme speculation with the statement that “God has built into us the longing to see the wonders of his far-flung creation. The popularity of science fiction reflects that longing” (264).

Alcorn quotes C. S. Lewis favorably, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (166). However, a sinful desire may never be fully satisfied in this world, and it may prove that the sinner was made for hell, not heaven. Desires in themselves are not a proof of anything. God warns us not to believe lies or have sinful desires. Sadly, Christians often do both (Rom. 1).

### **Hermeneutical Problems with the Book**

Alcorn’s literal interpretation of Revelation is a persistent problem, and he acknowledges this in the book. Also, his use of parables is not sensitive to the special interpretive problems with parables. A literal interpretation of all details of a parable is usually not the best interpretation.

The author over emphasizes the continuity between this earth and the new earth of Revelation. There are biblical passages that describe the destruction of this earth which he does not fully pursue as evidence of discontinuity (i.e., 2 Pet. 3:13–15). As a result, Alcorn tends to see too much continuity between this present earth and the new earth and little discontinuity between this world and the next. This is most evident in his wild speculations about the new earth of Revelation.

According to Alcorn, almost anything you can

imagine or dream of doing, you will do in heaven (429). He encourages Christians to imagine God fulfilling whatever dreams they have now. Instead of having wild imaginations, many Christians should repent of their dreams, rather than hope God will fulfill their dreams in the world to come.

For a thoughtful Christian there are at least three questions that this book does not raise, but should have:

1. What limits should there be on the use of the imagination in thinking about heaven and the eternal life in heaven?

2. Where is the line drawn between continuity and discontinuity between this earth and the new earth?

3. What effect does our current sin nature have on our thinking about heaven?

These are difficult but important questions to ask and ponder. Alcorn does not directly address any of them. In fact, he encourages limitless use of the imagination.

The author doesn’t describe sexuality in heaven, but let me use human sexuality as an example of how one might be confronted with the above questions. Human sexuality was part of human nature for Adam and Eve before the Fall. They were told to be fruitful and multiply as male and female. We can assume, correctly, that they had guilt-free sexual pleasure, but we are not explicitly told that they did. After the Fall, we know that human sexuality continued and that it was still intensely pleasurable and good within marriage. The Song of Solomon, as well as Paul encourage us to delight in sexual pleasure and fulfill sexual desires through marriage. Indeed, Paul suggests that one should marry in order to satisfy sexual passions if one cannot control them (1 Cor. 7:9). There is only one biblical passage that contradicts what seems like a good and necessary deduction that human sexuality continues in heaven. This passage is Jesus’ teaching that marriage does not continue in heaven. This teaching is a valid corrective to speculation about human sexuality in heaven (Matt. 22:28–30).

This raises an important question: How many human desires have undergone change from pre-

Fall to post-Fall? Answer: All human desires are corrupted by sin now. Follow-up question: Which specific human desires will cease at the resurrection? Answer: No one knows exactly which will cease, but we know that all desire will be free of sin. However, we know that one desire will continue and intensify for believers—we will continue to enjoy God now and forever (WSC 1).

## Conclusion

Sadly, *Heaven* has more of Alcorn's imagination about heaven than sound biblical thinking. Reading *Heaven* must be undertaken with several serious warnings in mind.

1. Don't imagine your wildest dreams will come true in heaven. All dreams are corrupted by sin.

2. Don't believe all the literal interpretations of Revelation, Daniel, and the parables.

3. Don't believe the highly speculative ideas about heaven.

In *Heaven*, there are many sections that are weak and some that are dangerous. The remaining sections I could enthusiastically recommend to any person. Parts of this book are very, very good, but when it is bad, it is dangerous. ☹

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# Crowd Control: Managing Electronic Distraction

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Hamlet's Blackberry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*, by William Powers. New York: Harper Collins, 2010, xv + 267 pages, \$24.99.

*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, by Nicholas Carr. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010, 276 pages, \$26.95.

Amid the plethora of recent books expressing concerns about the effects of the new media environment,<sup>2</sup> I have chosen two that stand out for their balance and astuteness. Many Christians, of course, will succumb to the temptation to write these off as mere hand-wringing—the predictable reaction of an older, literate generation. As Americans we are excessively touchy about having our inventions criticized. We are eager to appreciate and applaud the benefits, but loathe to admit the liabilities, of the latest technology. At worst it may be thought that only turf-protecting Luddites, curmudgeons, and cultural elitists engage in such folly. But Carr and Powers are, what I would call, sympathetic critics, sophisticated users of the technology they critique, and so eminently worth listening to.

The dispersion of concentration and attachment is a major theme of both books and, thus,

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=245&issue\\_id=63](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=245&issue_id=63).

2 Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2008); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); a positive approach to the subject of focusing is Winifred Gallagher, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

something to consider in our own media lives. There are so many things vying for our attention. Long before the advent of the Internet, electronic devices have been distracting us. The telegraph and the newspaper designed around it have filled our lives with disconnected and contextless information. The telephone is a constant source of interruption, even with the antidote of voice mail. Radio and television have been drawing us randomly into other worlds for several generations now. Electronic distraction—I'm tempted just now to check my email, but closed the program so as not to be distracted—has spawned the new work ethic of multitasking, a not so subtle form of denial of an addiction. Perhaps one of the worst effects is Attention Deficit Disorder and its ilk (although this is surely not the only cause). As both authors assert, attentiveness is not natural, and so must be cultivated—one great argument for the benefit of reading a book or codex. Since inattentiveness is our natural tendency, it is simply stimulated by the connectedness of the electronic environment. It tends to spread us over thin surfaces, lacking profundity and undermining thoughtfulness—becoming mental peripatetics. The ubiquity of electronic screens and sounds threatens to drown out all serious thought. For church officers and Christians in general this is an ocean that requires serious navigation skills. As sociologist Jacques Ellul once sagely observed, “people manipulated by propaganda become increasingly impervious to spiritual realities.”<sup>3</sup>

A central strength of both books is their rejection of what C. S. Lewis called “chronological snobbism,” by using the history of technology and its effects to help us understand our relationship to it in the present. Powers does this more than Carr. Surrounded by information, we are glued to the present and thus unlikely to learn much from the past, whose lessons are invaluable, especially on matters of our inventions.

Both books also interact with the latest findings of neuroscience, which is presently all the

rage. But Carr does this much more than Powers, and he cautions us that the evidence is in constant flux. Yet, while we must not overestimate the “findings” of this nascent field of research, some important evidence is already available to consider as we craft ways of navigating the digital environment. It is worth noting that Maryanne Wolf writes blurbs for both books. She is a professor of child development at Tufts University, and the author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*.

Both books are also clearly attuned to the media ecology of Marshall McLuhan and his ilk. The authors have really understood this critical perspective. This is the source of their greatest strength and value.

### **Powers: From Socrates to McLuhan**

The intriguing title *Hamlet's Blackberry* serves as both metaphor and technological reality. We learn that Hamlet did have a kind of Elizabethan Blackberry. The human penchant for recording ideas and information is as old as cuneiform. In Act I of *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, when Hamlet encounters the ghost he reacts oddly to the phantom's haunting greeting by saying,

Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe.

Hamlet is reflecting on his own mind, his skull, the “distracted globe,” with not a little punning about Shakespeare's famous theatre and the very world itself (143). Then he proposes to solve his distractedness by “wiping away all trivial fond records” from the “table” of his memory (144). But, what is a “table”? It turns out, according to Powers, to be a “piece of technology”—an early handheld device. “Table books” or “writing tables”—we would call them tablets—were pocket-sized almanacs with specially coated blank pages that could be erased with a sponge (145–46); a simple way to help bring order to one's globe. But then I've begun this fascinating tale of technology in the middle.

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3 Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 229.



Powers sets the stage for his proposed digital philosophy by warning us that digital crowding is robbing us of depth (4). He immerses us in this danger in the first four chapters, beginning with chapter 1 “Busy, Very Busy: In a Digital World, Where’s the Depth?” (9–19). In sum, the efficiency of connectedness is “eliminating the gaps, when we should be creating them” (31). The gaps are the mental resting spots between tasks, suited for reflection and contemplation—the Sabbaths of the mind, if you will. So, asks Powers, does the “hyperconnected life” take us where we want to go? (32). The “digital maximalists” expound a particular philosophy of technology when they insist that the more connected you are the better off, and the less connected the worse off (35). The balance between privacy and participation is sacrificed to the “deeply compelling force” of digital connect-edness (43). Powers reflects anecdotally on his own seduction by connectedness and its consequent distractedness, as well as his experiments with isolation. Many have noticed, somewhat ironically, that as Powers says, “I got some of my best thinking and writing done” when flying (47). The conclusion is best summed up with Power’s observation, “Screen life became more rushed and superficial, a nonstop mental traffic jam” (48). He finishes this section by lamenting the disconnectedness of his constantly connected family, and the disruption of the workplace enveloped in a fog of digitopia—the perfect setup for a solution. Chapter 4 briefly discounts several proposed technological solutions as ineffective, and ultimately disingenuous.

Powers asserts, “the best place to find a new philosophy for a digital world—the door to a saner, happier life—is in the past” (5). So he proposes seven philosophers who are “screen equivalents,” in the ways they connect to the wider world (79). He begins with Plato, suggesting that Athens was the screen for Plato and his mentor Socrates—the place of interaction with the crowd. Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus* explores concerns over the effect of the new technology of writing, based on the invention of the phonetic alphabet, on the life of the mind, especially the memory, and the art of conversation so important to Socratic inquiry

(83–89). Powers observes that Socrates “judged the new tool exclusively through the lens of the old” (94). His student, Plato, was more perceptive and learned to assess the new invention in terms of the way it changes our relationship to the crowd (97). “Distance makes all the difference” (99).

Next, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a contemporary of Christ, was the quintessential philosopher statesman. In the midst of a very busy public life, Seneca managed to control the crowd of busy Rome and cultivate a rich inner life (108). Surrounded by the paperwork of Roman government bureaucracy, he practiced his own sage advice, “Measure your life: it just does not have room for so much” (113). Or as Winifred Gallagher invites us to do, treat “your mind as you would a private garden ... being as careful as possible about what you introduce and allow to grow there” (113). Reading books in codex form and writing letters exemplify technologies that foster focus and minimize distraction.

Johann Gutenberg promoted the inwardness of reading by turning a wine press into a book manufacturing machine (128). By 1500, just half a century after the first book printed with moveable type came off the press—the Bible—there were over thirty thousand different titles totaling over eight million books (132). Conclusion—immersed in a book the crowd falls away, whereas the

point of the new reading technologies, it often seems, is to *avoid* deep immersion, precisely because it’s an activity the crowd can’t influence or control and thus a violation of the iron rule of digital existence: Never be alone. Deep, private reading and thought have begun to feel subversive. (135)

Philosopher number four is the Bard’s mouthpiece, Hamlet. The handheld device used by Elizabethans, referred to above, is closer to the popular Moleskine notebook, than a Palm Pilot or a smart phone. But the principle of keeping personal information to help navigate the world is the same. Handwriting flourished in the “round hand” we call script (150). Erasable pages were an early version of deleting. Unlike our screens the pages of

notebooks are blank, inviting us to fill them (152). “Like tables, my notebooks are a pushback against the psychic burden of a newly dominant technology” (152). The presence of writing on paper is a kind of “embodied interaction,” affirming our individual existence (153–54).

Hamlet’s inwardness is the essence of the play’s power, and when he takes out his tables, inward is where he’s headed. Having received a jolt from the outward world (of which the ghost, being otherworldly, is a perfect representative), it’s where he needs to go. (155)

Enter Ben Franklin, the doyen of self-improvement. If you want to change yourself for the better, then your interests must be served. In this way, moral perfection is achievable (167–69). Powers’s application is self-discipline to curb email consumption (170–71), “less screen time yielding more time for other highly desirable pursuits” (173).

Then comes a philosopher who could be considered the first media ecologist, since he was first to critique the first electronic medium, Henry David Thoreau. He understood that the telegraph, the Victorian Internet,<sup>4</sup> was a major invasion of the most effective sanctuary from the crowd—the home (178, 185). Resistance by maintaining distance from the crowd was essential to the Emersonian Transcendentalism of Walden Pond’s denizen. He was protecting a “zone of inwardness” on the edge of society (189).

Powers brings us to the beginning of an extensive and serious critical reflection on the electronic environment with his final philosopher, the Canadian media savant Marshall McLuhan. He represents “the missing piece” (194), by providing major tools for media navigation, the most important of which is our inner selves (195). Culture is shaped by our tools, each of which is a message, as an extension of ourselves (197). “The medium is the message (the famous book title is actually *The Medium is the Massage*)” means that “Technol-

ogy rules!” (200). Humans have the capacity to discern the patterns of things, like the fisherman in Edgar Allan Poe’s “A Descent into the Maelström,” in order to navigate their way out of being overwhelmed by the environment (202–5). Awareness is everything.

The last section of Powers’s book summarizes the lessons learned from the seven thinkers. In the end, it’s all a matter of crowd control. At the heart of this is Powers’s proposal for an “Internet Sabbath.” Powers wisely advises that technology is neither good nor bad, but must be controlled in order to protect the social spaces in which healthy communities thrive. I would add that the visible church has all the tools for serious crowd control, but it must use them wisely.

Let me mention a few criticisms of Powers’s book. It is a mystery why such a book, so chock full of information, has no index. More importantly, Powers identifies motivation as the heart of the solution of “building a good life in the digital age.” He overlooks the effects of sin, as well as inattention, being the default position of the human souls. In his world, Ben Franklin perfectly exemplifies this positive, practical approach to life, attacking negative character traits with good reasons to change (161). Not that the latter cannot be overcome by the presence of common grace or the former cannot be held in check by the same preserving power. But these are topics that require more exploration.

### Carr: Navigating the Shallows

Carr starts with a McLuhanesque bang, quoting McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*, technologies alter “patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance” (3). We tend to be immersed in the electronic environment like fish in water, taking the “numb stance of the technological idiot” (4). Carr follows with his own true confession of being just such an idiot. He found that he could not concentrate for long periods, and quotes well-educated men who confess to not reading books anymore. We have become a generation of skimmers and scrollers (8). After giving himself

4 Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century’s On-line Pioneers* (New York: Walker, 1998).

completely to Internet 2.0 (the new stage of social networking) in 2005, he became an ardent social networker and blogger until in 2007 “a serpent of doubt slithered into [his] info-paradise” (15–16).

Friedrich Nietzsche, Carr notes, discovered that the Malling-Hansen Writing Ball—an early typing machine—played a major part in forming his thoughts as he wrote (19). Combine this observation that technology effects the way we think with nineteenth-century American psychologist William James’s observation that the human brain is endowed with “a very extraordinary degree of plasticity,” and you have a tool to help navigate the technological terrain. In 1950, British biologist J. Z. Young lectured on the BBC on the brain’s adaptability to new tasks (21), challenging the reigning materialistic view that the brain is like a machine (23).

In 1968, pioneering neuroscientist Michael Merzenich began mapping the brain and discovered its ability to reorganize in response to the stimuli of experience. Thus began a radical challenge to the dominant deterministic concept of the hard-wired brain (24ff.). Purely mental activities, as well as physical action, alter neural circuitry, sometimes in dramatic ways (32). So, “We become, neurologically, what we think” (33). However, the changing pathways of the brain can become rutted by habit, changing only by a new habituation (35).

In chapter 3, Carr explores “Tools of the Mind,” explaining that technologies change the way we view ourselves (43). They are, as Walter Ong observed, transformers of consciousness (51). Ong focuses on the “intellectual technologies” that “extend and support our mental powers” (44). Linking these tools to neuroscience, Carr posits a bold proposal:

Neuroplasticity provides the missing link to our understanding of how information media and other intellectual technologies have exerted their influence over the development of civilization and helped to guide, at a biological level, the history of human consciousness. (48)

Beginning with the earliest examples of reading and writing, Carr guides us on an engrossing tour of the history of technology. His knowledge of the literature on this subject, as with neuroscience, is impressive. He concludes that the development of writing and reading “required complex changes in the circuitry of the brain,” which in turn enhanced the depth of reading and the attentiveness required for such depth (63). Quoting Wallace Stevens’s remarkable poem “The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm,” Carr extols the virtues of such reading and laments the radical rerouting of the mind currently under way (75–77).

Enter computing and its bidirectional, multimedia connecting intrusion into print reading space; it is like adding lions to the landscape—it changes everything, especially our attachment to a single text, and thus our concentration. An “ecosystem of interruption technologies” has been created (90–91), with undoubted benefits, but hidden liabilities that unnoticed may undermine the very institutions we think they are enhancing.

Chapter 6 is an intriguing look at the advantages of the book. Carr claims that these advantages have made it the most resistant of all media to the Net’s worst influences (99). Its simplicity and lack of electricity make it easy to read and very navigable, not to mention the enjoyment of the aesthetics of the book as a cultural artifact. Finally, the disconnectedness of the book tends to concentrate the mind in deep reading (108). The Internet boosterism of critics like Clay Shirky provides “the intellectual cover that allows thoughtful people to slip comfortably into the permanent state of distractedness that defines the online life” (112). Carr concludes, “We have cast our lot with the juggler” (114).

The next chapter explores the effects of the Internet on brain circuitry. Carr opines, “The Net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli ... that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions” (116). “[T]he Net seizes our attention only to scatter it” (118). The Net does enhance the decision making portions of the brain, while undermining the linguistic, mnemonic, and visual

pathways essential to deep reading (120–22). Carr’s numerous references to research are themselves an information overload of the old fashioned sort, but all to make the important point that we are opting for distraction, with constant interruption as a form of immediate gratification (133–34).

Chapter 8, “The Church of Google” is one of the most compelling. Efficiency pioneer Frederick Winslow Taylor fanned the flames of the modern worship of efficiency in every area of life (149–50). Google exemplifies this efficiency. This is Neil Postman’s “technopoly,”<sup>5</sup> a culture promoting “cognitive efficiency” above all else (151–52). “Google is, quite literally, in the business of distraction” (157). “The strip-mining of ‘relevant content’ replaces the slow excavation of meaning” (166).

Chapter 9 explores the relationship between book reading and memory, and the importance of memory to intellectual life, quoting William James, “the art of remembering is the art of thinking” (181). Reading enhances memory, whereas the “Web is a technology of forgetfulness,” because the “key to memory consolidation is attentiveness,” the very thing the Net so adeptly undermines (193).

In the final chapter, Carr takes on artificial intelligence. In the 1960s, MIT computer scientist Joseph Weisenbaum invented a program he called ELIZA, seeking to simulate human conversation. In the end, Weisenbaum concluded that what “makes us most human ... is what is least computable about us—the connections between our mind and body, the experiences that shape our memory and our thinking, our capacity for emotion and empathy” (207). Our pretentious attempts to create artificial intelligence tend to flatten the intelligence we have. We “program our computers and thereafter they program us” (214).

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Contrary to contemporary usage, a “Luddite” is not someone who questions technology, but rather someone who seeks to destroy it in order

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5 Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

to protect his livelihood.<sup>6</sup> A media ecologist, on the other hand—which I firmly believe every Christian ought to be—is a prudent steward of all human inventions, assessing their benefits and liabilities so as to use them suitably, and to know when not to use them. As I concentrate on this review, I have turned off all other applications. It has helped. I have rejected neither word processing nor the Internet. But I do seek to understand their tendencies and try to act accordingly.

Christians should beware of the chronological snobbery of moderns who assume superiority based on technological advance. Part of being spiritual warriors is to heed Paul’s directive: “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3–5). The thought-forms of our age are in large measure embodied in our gadgets. Our inventions are each ideas that help define what is believable or relevant to our lives, part of the fabric of our cultural assumptions (“plausibility structures”). Jacques Ellul warns, “The psychological structures built by propaganda are not propitious to Christian beliefs.”<sup>7</sup>

If we uncritically give in to these cultural assumptions, in the end we may be left with nothing more than the chimera of accomplishment. Refusing proudly to learn the craft of navigation will leave us with our sophisticated vessels adrift and disoriented in a sea of electronic distraction. ☹

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6 Ned Lud was born in Leicestershire, England, in 1789. In the early nineteenth century, during the Regency period, he and his followers smashed labor saving textile machinery, due to the threat it posed to their weaving guild. Thus, ever since, those who are opposed to technology have been labeled as his followers.

7 Ellul, *Propaganda*, 229.

# The Culture War Is Over

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*, by David VanDrunen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010, 208 pages, \$16.99.

In 1974, I was first exposed to the question of Christ and culture in a course taught at Covenant College, titled “Philosophy of the Christian Faith,” which was intended to assist students in integrating the liberal arts curriculum. There I read H. Richard Niebuhr’s landmark taxonomy of this question, *Christ and Culture*.<sup>2</sup> It was heady stuff for a student who had recently been immersed in Eastern mysticism. My new appreciation for history and embodied existence lured me toward a Kuyperian account of the solution to this question. Since then, over the last three decades, I have accumulated quite a library of books on this question and have been revisiting the Kuyperian idea from an amillennial hermeneutic. This, in turn, has moved me to a more distinctly two kingdom (hereafter 2k) position, although I did not early on have a label for it. Coincident with my own change in thinking was the development within the Reformed academy of a renewed appreciation for post-Reformation dogmatics. On top of all this, I have been impressed that, despite the fact the Puritans were often still captive to a Constantinian account of this dilemma, the Westminster Confession equates the kingdom with the visible church. “The visible church . . . is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ” (WCF 25.2). It is from within this renewed intel-

lectual climate that David VanDrunen’s work on the 2k theology has emerged over the last decade.

As an ethicist, VanDrunen has been laying a foundation of natural law scholarship for more than a decade. His first serious research was connected with his graduate school dissertation from 1999 to 2001. In 2003 he began research for his seminal historical account *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (2010),<sup>3</sup> laying the foundation for future studies. *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (2006)<sup>4</sup> served as an appetizer for the biblical foundation of the 2k doctrine. In late 2007, he turned his attention to the constructive, biblical-theological part of his project, resulting in the publication of *Bioethics and the Christian Life* (2009),<sup>5</sup> and the present volume under review, demonstrating the practical implications of the 2k doctrine for the Christian life.

VanDrunen approaches his subject like a skilled lawyer facing a jury squarely, all the while realizing that they come to the courtroom largely hostile to his case. This is why he repeats the main tenets of his argument incessantly throughout the book. If his earlier books were shots across the cultural transformationist bow, this book is a direct hit. While this martial metaphor is appropriate regarding the substance of the book, in his mode of arguing VanDrunen is irenic, exemplifying the ancient saying, loved by Cornelius Van Til: “*Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*” (gentle in manner, strong in deed or substance).

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VanDrunen’s exploration of the cultural mandate, and the covenant of works associated with it, being fulfilled by the Second Adam makes a unique contribution to the discussion of Christ and culture. He insists that Scripture teaches that culture is not being redeemed by God but is rather

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=286&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=286&issue_id=70).

2 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

3 David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

4 David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, 2006).

5 David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life: A Guide to Making Ethical Decisions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).



being preserved in order for the citizens of the second Adam to be redeemed and gathered from among the nations. These citizens of the new creation are the subject of God's redeeming activity, while culture is not (15).

The introduction gives a nice summary of the proponents of the idea that Christians are called to redeem or transform culture, from neo-Calvinists to the emerging church (16–24). VanDrunen maintains that the transformational view is usually presented as the only alternative to a world-denying pietism (25). Twentieth-century Calvinism in particular has largely ignored the doctrine of the natural law/2k alternative, once almost universally present in post-Reformation dogmatics. The 2k doctrine, according to VanDrunen, posits redemption not as “creation regained” but “re-creation gained,” while the “*divinely ordained common kingdom*... is legitimate but not holy” (26).

The most eye-popping conclusion that VanDrunen comes to—he does so early in Part 1 (“First Things and Last Things,” pages 33–71) of the book—is that the culture war is over, although he doesn't use these terms. How so? Fulfilling the cultural mandate, the second Adam has done what the first Adam failed to do, thus inheriting the glory represented in the Tree of Life for his people. Through his obedient life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, he has entered into the Sabbath rest in the heavenly places, which the triune God entered on the seventh day upon completing his creation (40–41). The Lord Jesus passed the probation that the first Adam failed, thus fulfilling the covenant of works on behalf of his covenant people in order that they might inherit glory in the new heavens and the new earth (42–43). The failed dominion of Adam's progeny awaited the appearance of the royal heir of the kingdom, Jesus Christ, who would win dominion for God's elect in his consummation glory that he already inhabits as the exalted king (44–47). This section is a *tour de force* of covenant theology, nicely parsed for popular consumption.

So then, in Christ, explains VanDrunen, the believer finds his true destiny.

Christians will attain the original destiny of life in the world-to-come, but we do so not by picking up the task where Adam left off but by resting entirely on the work of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who accomplished the task perfectly. (50)

The Christian's task in the present world, which is passing away, is a “grateful response” (51) to the perfect accomplishment of Jesus Christ. VanDrunen then unpacks Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, and sections of Hebrews to convincingly prove his point that there are two kingdoms, one eternal and the other temporary (51–60). “The goal of Adam's original cultural commission has been achieved,” and the Lord Jesus has been resurrected to enjoy the reward (53). He has not done this for himself alone, but as the mediator of a new creation (56). “We pursue cultural activities in response to the fact that the new creation has already been achieved, not in order to contribute to its achievement” (57). This has direct bearing on the doctrine of justification by faith, because a

Protestant doctrine of justification is ultimately incompatible with a redemptive transformationist view of culture along the lines of neo-Calvinism, the New Perspective on Paul, or the emergent church. (58)

The goal of redemption in Christ is not the renovation of this present order, the restoration of the original creation (62). “In his resurrection Christ was not resuscitated to life in this world but raised up to life in the world-to-come.” It is our present access to this world that Hebrews emphasizes (59). In the second coming of our Lord all the “products of human culture will perish along with the natural order” (64). VanDrunen is quick to point out that this does not mean that there will be no continuity between this world and the next (66). For example, we will have recognizable, but glorified bodies—that is are? heavenly, as opposed to earthly (1 Cor. 15:40). Nor does this mean that present cultural activities have no goodness or value, only that they are not the objects of redemption and are temporary (68–69).



Having laid the exegetical and theological foundation for the two kingdoms, VanDrunen proceeds to its implications for living in two parts: Old and New Testament sojourners (73–128); and Christian living in the church and the world (129–205). The latter is divided into education, vocation, and politics.

A common complaint about the 2k idea is that it blunts the antithesis between the Christian and the world. VanDrunen puts this complaint to rest by demonstrating the compatibility of “spiritual antithesis” and “cultural commonality.” In turn, the two kingdoms are founded by two covenants, one redemptive covenant with Abraham and the other common, cultural covenant with Noah (75–76). Believers and unbelievers share the activities of the common kingdom, while only believers participate in the spiritual kingdom in which their allegiance stands in antithesis to the loyalties of unbelievers. Another common complaint, related to concern for the antithesis, is that the 2k idea is essentially antinomian. VanDrunen asserts otherwise:

*God himself established and rules the common kingdom.* It exists under the Lordship of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The common kingdom is not in any sense a realm of moral neutrality or human autonomy. (81)

A brief portrait of believers as citizens of the redemptive kingdom in the midst of the common kingdom focuses on their identity as exiles and sojourners (82–88). VanDrunen then contrasts this with the unique situation of God’s people under the Mosaic covenant (88–97). In this covenant, redemption and culture are temporarily merged. But, far from being a prescription for redeeming culture, it presents a picture of the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of the world-to-come. The subsequent exile reminds us that the kingdom had not yet come. But then, when it does come in Jesus the Christ, we may be tempted to think that exile is over. Yet the language of the New Testament makes it clear that believers are still exiles and sojourners (1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11, p. 99). The remainder of the book describes the

situation of the church in this present age, clearly distinguishing the two kingdoms and describing the proper activity of the believer in each.

In keeping with the Westminster Confession’s identification of the kingdom of God with the visible church, VanDrunen asserts, “the church is the *only* institution or community in the present world that can be identified with the kingdom proclaimed by Christ” (101). He goes on to demonstrate from the New Testament that the church and the redemptive kingdom are identical, and that the church follows the pattern of the Abrahamic covenant, except now it is tasked with spreading the good news of the redemptive accomplishment of Jesus Christ to all nations (102–6). At this point, VanDrunen takes on the theonomic exegesis of Matthew 5:17–21. He does so with great finesse and yet oddly without mentioning Greg Bahnsen, who, as far as I know is the major theonomic exegete of this passage, which many believe to be the interpretive linchpin of theonomy as an ethical system (108–12). He demonstrates the uniqueness of the ethics of the new covenant as they apply to the Christian as a member of the kingdom of heaven still living in this world, and not to the world or its governments. Consequently, “the church is the community of the citizens of the kingdom.... The kingdom of heaven is *not* to be found in the social-political communities of the broader world” (114). The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are only possible for citizens of the new creation, to whom it is clearly directed (115). VanDrunen does admit to a kind of overlap in the institution of the family between the redemptive and the common kingdoms (119, 121). This is an institution about which much more discussion is needed.

Especially helpful in this chapter is VanDrunen’s discussion of the Christian’s attitude toward the common kingdom, its citizens and activities (123–28). The perspective of Ecclesiastes enjoins the believer to enjoy the blessings of common culture as God’s gifts, not simply hostile territory of which to be suspicious. However, VanDrunen cautions that cultural activities are not the focus of the New Testament (124). This insight implies several corollaries. So, rather than viewing

our unbelieving neighbors as our opponents we should seek to love and be a blessing to them in our cultural involvement, instead of being culture warriors seeking to conquer culture (124–26).

On the other hand, cultural participation is not meant to deny the antithesis. So, Christians must be vigilant and beware of the idolatrous tendencies within all fallen culture, which may undermine our longing for the world to come as pilgrims (126–28).

Part 3 gets down to the specifics of Christian involvement in the two kingdoms. The order of this section is very important. The church comes first, because it is the central institution in the Christian life (131–60). While there are many excellent books on the church and its worship and life, VanDrunen makes a unique contribution to the Christ and culture debate by introducing the importance and centrality of the church. The church alone is the place where people are nurtured in the realities of the new creation in Christ. One will not find a more theocentric explication of the doctrine of the church, the distinctiveness of her ethics, the abundance of her spiritual fruits, and the purity of her spirituality. Thus, “it is entirely inappropriate to identify the church with any institution or community of the common kingdom” (148). The church must stick to the mission given her in the New Covenant.

The final chapter (7) explores ways in which the 2k doctrine plays out in the three hotly debated arenas of education, vocation, and politics. To say that the culture war is over in terms of the cultural mandate, the covenant of works, and the accomplishment of Christ, is not in any way to imply that spiritual warfare is over. No, in fact, this section of the book is a reminder that the weapons of our warfare are not from the common kingdom, but from the spiritual. So, appropriately VanDrunen enjoins Christian cultural activity to be joyful, detached, and modest (163ff.). Although Christians are not called to take up the original cultural mandate, cultural institutions are God’s temporary blessing and must be supported by and participated in by believers (164–65).

We often hear Christians speak of their in-

volvement in various cultural activities as if their participation makes the activity itself unique, or uniquely Christian. VanDrunen corrects this as a mistaken notion:

The normative standards for cultural activities are, in general, not *distinctively* Christian.... The standards of excellence for cultural work are generally the same for believers and unbelievers.... And there are usually *many possible* ways in which Christians could pursue such activities. (168–72)

It would, therefore, be wise to “discard familiar mantras about ‘transformation’ and especially ‘redemption.’ Nowhere does Scripture call us to such grandiose tasks” (171).

Education is, according to VanDrunen, an area, like all others, where 2k theory does not claim to have all the answers. But it helps to clarify many aspects of the task by suggesting helpful guidelines. Except for theology, which interprets special revelation,

the primary concern of all other disciplines—whether in the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences—is to interpret and explain natural revelation, that is, the truth revealed in creation, as upheld and governed by God through the Noahic covenant (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:19–20; 2:14–15).... These considerations suggest that Scripture says crucial things about *the big picture* of all the academic disciplines, while it is silent about nearly all the *narrower, technical details* of these disciplines (except theology). (174–75)

Thus, parents have primary authority over the education of their children and are free to choose among any number of educational institutions, including public schools. But, because Christ has entrusted the keys of the kingdom to the church, pastors and teachers have the primary authority over instruction in theology. In every discipline the Christian must remember that “*study and teaching are never religiously neutral*” (179). However, “we impoverish our children educationally if we unduly cut them off from the accomplishments and

contributions of unbelievers” (184). VanDrunen applies similarly sage advice in his consideration of vocation, warning us to respect the disciplines developed for each earthly calling in common culture, while being faithful to our Christian calling in the pursuit of these (187–94).

Finally, “*politics is a matter of the common kingdom*” (194). VanDrunen succinctly sums up the 2k perspective on politics:

Christians must strive neither to deny the importance of politics—since it has great bearing on the justice, peace, and prosperity of this world—nor to exalt politics as a means of ushering in the redemptive kingdom of heaven. (194–95)

Because the justice and order that civil government provides is temporary and provisional—not to mention imperfect—Christians should participate with modest expectations and seek to assist in the limited but important goals of God’s institution, “seeking the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7, p. 199). Most important of all, Christians need to be careful not to make ethical absolutes out of policy positions and candidates that they favor where Scripture is silent on these things (198–203).

One can only hope that VanDrunen will write separate books on each of these and other areas of common concern. Throughout the book, VanDrunen interacts in helpful and fair ways with numerous other writers on the subject of Christ and culture. Thus, it is a shame that there is no subject-author index. This book should become a staple in the adult education programs of our churches. It is a splendid little book whose message is in desperate need of a wide hearing.

The entire book is redolent of the theology of Geerhardus Vos and Meredith G. Kline. While that theological connection and VanDrunen’s articulate 2k position will raise the ire of some, I hope that his work will receive the thoughtful attention it deserves. Any construction of the church’s role in the world or the Christian’s task in culture that strays far from the 2k doctrine will tend to dissipate the energies needed to be the ambassadors we have been called to be. ☺

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## Christ the Transformer?

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by **Richard M. Gamble**

*Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History*, by C. C. Pecknold. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010, xxii + 174 pages, \$23.00, paper.

*Republicrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative*, by Carl R. Trueman, with a foreword by Peter A. Lillback. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, xxvii + 110 pages, \$9.99, paper.

*Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, xx + 326 pages, \$19.99, paper.

Sixty years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) published *Christ and Culture*, by some measures a modern classic in the sociology of religion. A professor of Christian ethics at Yale Divinity School at the time, Niebuhr popularized what became, for good or ill, the dominant framework for interpreting the relationship between Christianity and culture. *Christ and Culture* remains in print after six decades. I have used it myself in college faculty reading groups and in undergraduate seminars. Recently, when I pulled it off my shelf and began rereading my scrawled marginalia, I was surprised (and relieved) to see how bothered I had been by Niebuhr’s system. My frustration may

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=249&issue\\_id=64](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=249&issue_id=64).

simply have reflected the difference between how a sociologist thinks and how a historians thinks, the one more interested in patterns, the other in exceptions. To be fair, Niebuhr never offered his categories as anything more than a way to systematize tendencies within Christian thought. But it struck me then and does so even more now that his classification of Augustine and Calvin as cultural “conversionists” fails to do justice to their theology. The category “Christ the Transformer of Culture” seems to place the wrong accent on Augustine’s and Calvin’s theology regarding the church and the world and to miss how profoundly modest and restrained their expectations were for cultural renewal. They might attempt to “baptize” the culture for the church’s use, but that undertaking did not entail remaking the whole culture. Certainly, such a transformation would not prove the church’s success in fulfilling its unique mission.

Three recent books offer the opportunity to revisit perennial questions raised by the problem of Christ and culture: first, Christianity’s proper relationship to politics, and second, John Calvin’s reputation and legacy as a transformer of culture. C. C. Pecknold’s helpful, short volume, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History*, draws heavily on the work of Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac (primarily his *Corpus Mysticum*) and Princeton political theorist Sheldon S. Wolin (primarily the expanded edition of his magnum opus, *Politics and Vision*). The author’s tendency to follow current fashion and overuse the words “construction” and “imagination” ought not to detract from the valuable synthesis and application he provides of Lubac and Wolin. Lubac argued that the *corpus mysticum* (the mystical body), once confined in Catholic theology to the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, “migrated” in the Middle Ages to the Catholic Church as a whole and then as a way to understand the unity of Catholic society in western Europe. Wolin, according to Pecknold, picked up this insight and carried it further to ask whether the mystical body had “migrated” beyond the ideal of the Christian church and society to the modern nation-state and its institutions.

Pecknold argues that the modern nation-state can hardly be called “secular” because it owes so much to Christianity. The distinctive vocabulary Scripture applies to Christ and his church “migrated” to (or, perhaps more accurately, was appropriated by) the nation-state over the past few hundred years, affecting both church and state. Pecknold leaves no ambiguity: “A new construction of politics arose in the modern period, a politics actively engaged in re-constructing a Christianity that could serve the purposes of national politics.” “Modern politics,” he continues, “did not simply ‘secularize’ the world—the last five centuries of modern politics have constructed a purpose-built faith that scholars have come to call ‘civil religion’” (xiii). This provocative idea ought to capture the attention of anyone who wrestles with the dual challenge of an American political theology that expects Christianity to participate in a generic civic “faith” and a church all too eager to cooperate in the effort to tame and instrumentalize Christianity into a useful prop for civil religion.

Evidence abounds in the history of Europe since at least the sixteenth century, and of America since at least the seventeenth century, that emerging nation-states quickly got into the habit of talking about themselves in language once reserved for Israel and the church, including, most obviously, the notion of a chosen people. Pecknold’s interpretive framework could be applied in many fruitful directions. Careful historical research remains to be done into the way the nation-state, both consciously and unconsciously, “borrowed” (to use Pecknold’s word) the Christian identity. Of particular concern in such research would be the way in which the nation-state tries to fulfill the longing for Christian community within a substitute political body of Christ. America might turn out to be among the worst offenders in this case. For four hundred years, prominent preachers and politicians have had trouble telling the difference between their nation and their church. One of the “borrowings” has clearly been Americans’ fondness for a providential history that mimics the Bible’s redemptive narrative to the point of obscuring all distinction between sacred and secular history,

jumbling it into one bizarre story that flatters our national self-understanding but compromises the uniqueness of Christ's atoning work. Recognizing these "migrations" would equip us to spot the blasphemy inherent in any talk of an American "Gethsemane" or "Calvary," no matter how tempting the metaphors might be in times of crisis. Christianity retooled for use by American politics might still be called "Christianity" and might still resemble it, but it will be an idolatrous Americanism and not the faith once delivered to the saints.

Pecknold's treatment of Calvin as a transitional figure in the political history of the West covers a lot of ground in a few pages. He recognizes Calvin's continuity with the natural law tradition, his complex understanding of church and magistrate as complementary institutions for the sake of social order, and the degree to which Calvin still resembled the medieval world. Although he may be guilty of presentism in stressing the degree to which Calvin "mobilized mass sentiment" for political action (110). At times, Pecknold himself seems to lose sight of the crucial distinction between the church as a community and the state as an earthly democracy. By the end of the book, he seems to forget that Christ gathers his chosen people in particular and not "humanity" in general. Christ is betrothed to his bride and not to any generalized "people" living in a political community. And this profound difference calls into question any prospect for "a genuine Christian politics" (141). Any political theology that confuses the church and human communities poses a threat to the good order of both.

Pastors and other leaders in the church cannot be reminded too often of these boundaries and the need to make them as clear as possible to their congregations as appropriate opportunities arise. To this end, Carl Trueman's new book tries to shock complacent American Christians into rethinking the line between their faith and their politics. *Republocrat: Confessions of a Liberal Conservative* offers a Brit's-eye view of the cozy but troubling relationship between Christianity and right-wing politics, even among Trueman's fellow Orthodox Presbyterians. He takes on Fox News,

the Second Amendment, American exceptionalism, national health care, and the embarrassing *Patriot's Bible* to ask politically conservative Christians to reexamine what they defend and why they defend it. Primarily, he seeks to move partisan politics of the Right and Left out of the pulpit and pew for the sake of preserving the church's integrity and unique calling in the world. More to the point, "conservative Christianity does not require conservative politics or conservative cultural agendas" (xix).

As I began reading *Republocrat*, my mind went back immediately to the early 1990s when I was fairly new to the Reformed faith and brand new to the OPC. One Sunday, after the morning service, I happened to mention my reservations about George H. W. Bush's foreign policy. I was immediately rebuked and warned to take care because "this is a Republican church." At the time, I had been thinking a lot about J. Gresham Machen (again, brand new to me) as I worked on my doctoral dissertation. I was struck that day by the distance between Machen's political theology and the one that confronted me in an OPC congregation. Admittedly, I never should have discussed politics in the first place on the Lord's Day and certainly not in such close proximity to worship. Ever since, I have tried hard to keep politics out of church for the sake of both kingdoms. Similar experiences led Trueman to write this timely book.

While faulting the Left for politicizing the faith, Trueman takes aim primarily at self-styled conservatives as the most immediate and least recognized threat to theologically orthodox churches. Trueman affirms an "old-style, just-left-of-center politics" that once addressed basic concerns about "poverty, sanitation, housing, unemployment, [and] hunger" (1). And he laments that that "original vision" has been "hijacked" by radical, post-modern, identity politics in which everybody is a victim. Members of the Old Left, he laments, find themselves with "nowhere to call home" (19).

Trueman provides a helpful and needed reminder about the limits of politics, the power of political ideology to invade the church, and the danger of alienating the lost by implicitly add-



ing politics to our confession of faith. He calls on Christians to be good citizens, to resist the oversimplifications of the media, and to keep our hope for this world modest. “We are stewards who should do the best we can,” he writes, “not utopians making heaven on earth” (103). More to the point, “You can talk theonomy, theocracy, or Christian nation if you wish, but in the real world of the here and now, Christians have to cast their votes in terms of the situation, as we currently know it” (107). This advice ought to provoke a much-needed conversation among confessional Christians about how to be faithful citizens simultaneously of the temporal and eternal cities.

Such a conversation needs to move beyond Christianity and politics to confront the wider problem of the church and culture. *Calvin and Culture: Exploring a Worldview*, the final volume in the series of five hundredth anniversary books on Calvin, edited by David W. Hall and Marvin Padgett, shows why. The best of the essays in this final volume, such as Paul Jones’s on “Calvinism and Music” and Darryl Hart’s on Calvin and the practice of history, do the hard work of combing through Calvin’s sermons and commentaries to look at what the Reformer actually taught about the arts, providence, economics, politics, and so forth. Some of the other essays, though written by capable Reformed scholars who know their fields of expertise, rely more on plausible supposition than painstaking demonstration to connect Calvin to his legacy (real or imagined) in the modern world. They tend to assume the very things they ought to be proving. Surely Ed Payne’s sweeping claim “that all the best of modern science and medicine is a direct legacy from Calvin” (254) attempts too much.

Though not the intention of this volume, these essays raise a few fundamental questions about our whole approach to Calvin and his legacy. They point first of all to the difference between extrapolation from scanty (or absent) evidence on the one hand and the hard work of historical reasoning from sources on the other. Limiting ourselves to surviving evidence, we might have to make more modest claims about Calvin

and his legacy and resort less to the strategy of saying that a certain tendency is “Calvinistic.” We would be more likely to resist seeing things we favor in the modern world (such as democracy, limited government, free-market economics, and the wonders of modern science) and tracing them back to Calvin—or, conversely, seeing things we lament in the modern world and attributing them to a “falling away” from Calvinism. Is it really fair to John Calvin to make him comment on everything we happen to be interested in whether he did so or not? Do we end up genuinely understanding him, his achievement and, yes, his limitations, if we turn him into a progenitor of so much? History is not an unbroken, cumulative story of “contributions” to the modern world. We need a Calvin in context and not simply a Calvin as precursor to us. We need more than a plausible genealogy that leads from Geneva to modern America.

Secondly, are these ideas distinctively Calvinist or even more generally Protestant? It would take much effort to sort this out. We ought to keep in mind that Calvin was one mediating point between the Europe that was and the Europe that was coming to be. Paul Jones’s chapter on music again in this instance shows the benefits of a more nuanced approach to Calvin and his world. He sifts through evidence for what Calvin borrowed, adapted, built, and then left as a legacy. Calvin modified *existing* forms. And if this was the case in the arts, it is reasonable to expect to find this same intricate pattern of influence, adaptation, and transmission in political theory, theology, economics, and science. History presents us with a highly complex set of relationships, and we must be sensitive to the complex interplay among past, present, and future.

Thirdly, these essays raise the problem of how we ought to judge Calvinism’s success in the world. With an eye on the future, Hall asks in his conclusion, “What worked and what didn’t for Calvinism over the last half a millennium?” But before we can talk about anything “working,” we have to ask by what standard we measure success in the church. Do we judge our faith and practice by the world’s standard? Do we do so by the extent



of our power and growth and revolutionary impact on the world? Or does Christ demand faithfulness of us whether or not “success” in his service is visible? Christ calls his disciples to take up their cross daily, to bear his shame and reproach, and to suffer with him in certain ways. None of this looks like success to human eyes. The gospel itself brings division in this world. God’s work often remains hidden and even disguised as failure. Hall, however, concludes that a successful “faith . . . will win cultures and triumph over human evil” (301). But where in Scripture or our confessions do we find the mandate to “win cultures” or the promise that in this world we will “triumph over human evil”?

Fourthly, these essays provide an opportunity to reconsider the state of Calvinism as a “worldview” in twenty-first-century America. The idea of worldview is meant to hold these essays together (the book’s subtitle is “Exploring a Worldview”), and some of the writers emphasize this theme more than others. Hall zeroes in on Calvinism as a worldview in the last chapter. His claim that Calvin meant to “project a unified worldview” and that Calvinism as a worldview has a bright future seems to assume that framing Calvinism as a worldview in the first place was and remains a good idea. The whole concept of “worldview” may soon appear to have been a time-bound artifact of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. We may outgrow it as we have other ideas. And Reformed Christians need to be ready to think about Calvinism outside of that framework no matter how useful it might once have been.

Worldview found its way into Reformed circles in America via the Scottish theologian James Orr and the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper. Orr made his case for Calvinism as a worldview in his Kerr Lectures in 1890–91, and Kuyper, who read Orr’s lectures, did so in 1902–3 in his celebrated Stone Lectures at Princeton.<sup>2</sup> Both Orr and Kuyper consciously adopted the vocabulary and architecture of worldview from German theologians

and philosophers who popularized the idea in the nineteenth century. And they did so in part for apologetic purposes, intending to arm Christianity (and Calvinism in particular in Kuyper’s case) to fight modernism. Their logic seemed to be that Reformed theologians needed to battle the host of wrong worldviews armed with the sole true one. As effective as that might have been, were there also costs to turning the Christian faith and Calvin’s theology into a system in an age of system-builders? Systems are by their very nature reductionist, radical simplifications of reality, though they claim to be comprehensive. In the midst of all the dangerous “isms” of the nineteenth century, was it wise to turn Calvinism into an ideology, into a system among systems, even if we claimed it was the one right system that defeats all the competition?

Related to the problem of worldview, it would be worthwhile to look at what Calvin actually said (or didn’t say) about cultural transformation, specifically about the church as “salt and light” and about the “creation mandate” given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Calvin sounds far more restrained and modest than modern transformationalists out to conquer the world in his name. In his commentary on Matthew 5:13, for instance, Calvin sustains the historic understanding of Jesus’s salt metaphor as applying specifically to the Apostles and the teaching ministry of the Word and therefore of general benefit “to all the flock of Christ.” Absent here is any agenda for cultural renewal. Regarding the creation mandate, Calvin in his *Institutes* (1.15.22), and in his commentary on Genesis 1:26 and 2:15, draws attention to God’s goodness to man manifest in his bountiful provision for him in creation and man’s responsibility to make “frugal and moderate use” of that creation as a good steward. Calvin here sounds more like Wendell Berry than like a modern scientist or capitalist. It is difficult to find a transformationalist manifesto in Calvin’s writings in the very places where it ought to be easiest to find, especially if Niebuhr were right to tag the reformer as a transformer of culture.

Niebuhr was right in 1951 to highlight the church’s perennial challenge to relate Christ

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2 For Kuyper’s debt to Orr, see Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 88–96.

to culture with wisdom and discernment. Over the past two thousand years, shifting political, economic, and social institutions have kept the culture a moving target, and the church has had to renegotiate the degree of antithesis and commonality possible and necessary in its constant struggle to remain true to the gospel. The right answer to the “Christ and culture” problem was not the same under Roman persecution as within modern America’s religious free market. Each generation of Christians, living in the world under unique circumstances, has had to reconsider what faithfulness demanded in a particular time and place. Though the Scripture equipped the church with sufficient guidance to frame the problem correctly, a definitive, one-size-fits-all answer to the problem of Christ and culture proved elusive over the centuries for the simple reason that the culture continued to change. Church leaders, now as always, will have to remain vigilant to keep the proper boundary between Christ and culture. ❧

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## Qohelet: Evangelist or Pastor?

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by **Meredith M. Kline**

*Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes*, by Sidney Greidanus. Foundations for Expository Sermons series. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, xvii + 340 pages, \$26.00, paper.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=250&issue\\_id=64](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=250&issue_id=64).

This book is a useful resource for any preacher who desires to prepare Christ-centered expository sermons from Ecclesiastes. The emeritus professor of preaching at Calvin Seminary has researched serious scholarship on Ecclesiastes, built on his experienced expository practice, and applied his theorizing about preaching Christ from the Old Testament to what “may be the most difficult biblical book to interpret and preach” (1).

Greidanus begins by discussing academic issues, presenting scholarly options, and taking common positions: non-Solomonic authorship, Persian period dating, A. G. Wright’s two-part structure based on the location of repeating phrases, and an apologetic or evangelistic understanding of the message which sees Qohelet’s negative thoughts as the perspective of an unbeliever from which one needs to be converted to a reverent relationship with God in order to enjoy divine gifts (1–29). The bulk of the book divides Ecclesiastes into fifteen portions, presenting the reasoning behind the selections, discussing the passage’s exegetical issues, developing its primary thrust and sermonic theme, and presenting various possible Christological connections. The book concludes with appendices on steps for preparing sermons, model sermons on texts from Ecclesiastes, a bibliography, and indexes.

This volume builds on the system for preaching Christological sermons expounded in the author’s *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), where he presented seven possible roads leading to Christ that can pass through a passage: redemptive history, typology, promise-fulfillment, New Testament references, “longitudinal” themes, analogy, and contrast. In addition to the traditional focus of developing Old Testament connections to Christ’s person and redemptive work, Greidanus added the teaching of Christ as material to relate to Old Testament passages. The latter is especially pertinent for Ecclesiastes which has minimal material for messianic promises, typology, or New Testament references. “Analogy” and “contrast” focus on the relationship of the message of Ecclesiastes to Christ’s teaching.

The latter two categories seem unnecessary since any comparison of biblical passages, which should include Christ's teaching, for redemptive historical and biblical theological developments will involve similarities and differences, as Greidanus's examples for these categories on pages 27–29 indicate. Greidanus contrasts Qohelet's idea that work is in vain and Paul's idea that work in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). What this contrast reveals, however, is that Greidanus's seven avenues from Ecclesiastes to Christ are influenced by his interpretational framework for relating Qohelet's negative and positive components.

Qohelet's negative is seen in the many things he assesses as "vanity" (there is lack of agreement on the negative force of the Hebrew *hebel* which is also translated as "futile," "meaningless," "absurd," "enigmatic," "ungraspable," "transient," "vapor," etc.): envy (4:4), dissatisfaction with wealth (4:7–8) or rulers (4:13–16), dissipating wealth (2:18–21; 5:9–10; 6:1–2), painful, anxious, and profitless toil (2:11, 22–23), that death overtakes the wise as well as the fool (2:15–16) and humans as well as animals (3:19), joy (2:1), life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9), inequities of divine providence (8:14), even "everything" or "the totality" (1:2; 12:8).

Qohelet's positive is seen in life's benefits which he counsels his audience to enjoy (2:24–26; 3:12–13; 3:22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–10): pleasure in productive labor, family life, and contented dining.

How is Qohelet to be perceived, based on his presentation of these negatives and positives? Is Qohelet a pagan Greek philosopher whose negative is skepticism and positive is hedonism and whose ideas have been hijacked by a pious Israelite editor as ideology to be avoided in favor of God-fearing Torah observance? This interpretation contrasts Ecclesiastes as a whole with other biblical literature.

Or, on Greidanus's position (22), is Qohelet a Sadducee (not believing in a resurrection or a final judgment) who is trying to convert a Greek philosopher into a God-fearer by abandoning his skepticism (Qohelet's negative presented for argument's sake) and by fearing God "in order to turn

a vain, empty life into a meaningful life which will enjoy God's gifts" (Qohelet's positive presented as motivation)? This evangelistic interpretation contrasts Qohelet's negative and positive elements as representing different worldviews.

Or, is Qohelet an Israelite sage urging a covenant youth to be a wise, justified publican instead of a foolish, self-righteous Pharisee? Are both Qohelet's negative and positive a realistic, believer's view of the common miseries and mercies of earthly existence? This pastoral interpretation contrasts Qohelet's explicitly death-dominated, earthly realm with his implied kingdom of heaven and perceives Qohelet as exhorting covenant members to persevere in contented faithfulness despite the covenant Lord's difficult providence.

Greidanus's "evangelistic" approach does not do justice to the predominance of death and the resulting negative *hebel* assessment in Qohelet's thought. The *hebel* assessment occurs as an *inclusio* (1:2 and 12:8) surrounding all of Qohelet's words, his positive as well as his negative ideas. Indeed, *hebel* characterizes the totality of one's earthly existence (6:12; 7:15; 9:9). Even enjoyment, which is always part of his positive, earthly benefits, is assessed as *hebel* in 2:1–2 (cf. 9:9). Greidanus evades the force of this assessment by arguing that the phrase "under the sun" is code indicating a worldly, ungodly perspective exists in the context (43) so that its occurrence in 2:11 means the "joy" in 2:1–2 should be understood as pleasure sought apart from God (62). But closer to 2:1–2 is the phrase "under heaven" (2:3), and God dwells in heaven (5:2), so God is actually in view in the passage. Even in 2:10, next to 2:11, joy is called a "portion," which is a positive concept in Ecclesiastes. Also, the phrase "under the sun" is not restricted to "skeptical" contexts since it occurs in 8:15 and 9:9, passages which Greidanus takes as a God-fearer's wisdom (216, 234–35), so he actually does not consistently restrict the phrase to passages expressing a materialist's mind-set.

Instead of understanding "under the sun" as hinting that a skeptical perspective exists in the context, it and "under heaven" and "on the earth" delimit the boundaries in which Qohelet's inves-

tigation takes place. In terms of realms, “under the sun” and “on the earth” refer to planet earth, the habitation of living Adam-kind, which is also “under (the invisible) heaven” and thus contrasted with the dwelling of God (5:2) as well as with Sheol, the grave, home of the dead (9:10). Both Qohelet’s negative and positive apply “under the sun” to Adam-kind, to existence in the earthly realm of believer as well as unbeliever.

The difference between an “evangelistic” and “pastoral” approach to the force of “under the sun” can be seen in their interpretations of 1:3–11. Does the occurrence of the phrase in 1:3 and 1:9 indicate the passage presents the foolish thinking of the godless or does the passage portray the failure of the cultural mandate and the hardships of the common curse experienced by all humanity? The question is answered by an attentive reading of the poetry of 1:3–5. Greidanus observes “under the sun” in 1:3 and reads 1:4–7 as a secularist’s depiction of the pointless, perpetual cycling of sun, wind, and water which contradicts Psalm 19’s praising God for the beauty of nature (44). Instead, the verses highlight the sun’s continual starting over on its circuit at sunrise in order to compare the sun in 1:5 to the human race in 1:4. Because of the death of each generation, the human race continually starts over, trying but failing to produce death-defying generations to produce an ever-growing Adamic family. The shroud of the common curse of death darkens not only the secularist’s sun but also that of the God-fearer.

Whether one follows an evangelistic or a pastoral interpretation of 1:3–11 does make a difference in sermonic and theological application. Greidanus thinks 1:3–11 applies to a secularist’s labor, so he correlates Qohelet’s message with Jesus’s question in Matthew 16:26 about what profit people have from gaining the whole world but forfeiting their life and with Jesus’s parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16–20 who has filled his barns but will not enjoy the bounty because death will strike unexpectedly (47–48). Greidanus appropriately correlates these passages with the toil of fools when commenting on Ecclesiastes 5:9–10, 12–14, and 6:1–2 (144, 151), but in 1:3–11 Qohelet is

talking about the labors of Adam-kind, humanity in general, wise as well as fool.

Greidanus also compares Ecclesiastes 1:3–11 with Matthew 6:19–21 and John 6:27 with their contrast of people laboring for earthly and heavenly treasures, understanding “earthly” work as unprofitable because performed without considering God, but as not in vain according to 1 Corinthians 15:58 if done as service to God (48, cf. 37, 39, 121). A subtle shift is involved here from “earthly” being a secularist’s efforts in one case to being a believer’s efforts in the other. Greidanus thinks Ecclesiastes 1:3–11 is talking about a secularist’s vain, earthly toil which he then contrasts with an implied believer’s earthly toil which is not in vain. But if the passage is describing even a believer’s toil in the kingdoms of earth, then it should be contrasted with work done for the implied kingdom of heaven. Is the passage presenting the futile toil of a fool as a foil for promoting the fulfilling earthly labor of the wise or is this text picturing the failure of the earthly cultural mandate which is to be contrasted with the success of the heavenly great commission?

The creation mandate was not only to produce ever-increasing-generations, a globe-filling Adamic family (Gen. 1:28), which Ecclesiastes 1:4–5 pictures as a failure, but also to guard (rather than the translation “to tend”) the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15), another failed task. The post-Fall common-mercy and common-misery cultural task (Gen. 3:16–19), the futile earthly kingdom work, is what Ecclesiastes depicts as applying to all generations from beginning to end of earth history (3:10–11), from Adam’s expulsion from Eden to earth’s final cataclysmic consummation (a possible interpretation of 12:1–8).

Overlaying the ambivalent, earthly, cultural endeavor of Qohelet, whose attempted paradise replication is in vain as depicted in Ecclesiastes 2:1–9, is his implication of the great commission of the kingdom of heaven (labor for which is not in vain), the building of the family of the Second Adam, who guards the heavenly, holy paradise from evil intrusion, whether demonic or human. Earthly culture cannot produce the righteousness-

glory, cherubim's-fire-sword-retarding clothing necessary for advance into the divine presence (cf. 5:1). According to Ecclesiastes, earthly human culture cannot be transformed to produce the required protection from the divine, righteous wrath or to construct the paradise from which Adam was expelled or the New Jerusalem which will descend from heaven. Ecclesiastes counsels patient contentment under God's uncertain providence amidst the frustrating inability to fulfill culture's original goal.

As Christological application of 1:3–11, Greidanus applies the “nothing new” of 1:9–10 in terms of the progress of redemption whereby in Christ the believer can experience gain in (earthly) toil (1 Cor. 15:58) since God makes all things new (37, 46). Rather, the idea of something new can be developed not by jumping immediately from Ecclesiastes to Isaiah or New Testament teaching but by exploiting Qohelet's inherent contrast between the kingdom of earth (where there is no gain as he has pictured it in 1:4–8 as Adam-kind producing a fractured race which cannot comprehend God's mysterious ways, cf. 8:16–17) and the kingdom of heaven (as developed by Matthew) with its non-futile building of Christ's family. Instead of the vision of the passage being restricted to profit from economic gain (36) in the earthly realm, it widens to the possibility of death-conquering heavenly labor. Qohelet wants us to contrast people whose memory is erased by death (1:11) with the death of a heavenly savior which is remembered as life-giving. This heavenly savior, in contrast to seen and heard words which do not satisfy (1:8, contrast Isa. 53:11), is the Word of Life who has been heard and seen and gives complete joy (1 John 1:1–4). A correct reading of Ecclesiastes 1:3–11 is crucial for understanding the whole book and determines which depictions of Christ's person, work, and teaching will be unveiled in the text.

The other significant difference between the “evangelistic” and “pastoral” interpretations is whether Qohelet believes in a final judgment, which Greidanus denies (99, 164, 284). Greidanus takes the mentioning of divine judgment in 11:9 along with the statement in 3:17 that God will

judge the righteous and the wicked as relating to pre-consummation providence (96, 99). But that contradicts 8:14 which highlights the apparent inequities of divine providence in a verse which begins and ends with the *hebel* assessment. Also, the judgment in 3:17 takes place “there,” which despite common exegetical oversight refers to “there” in the previous verse, the place of the righteous (divine) judgment, the palace of the Great King. In addition, Ecclesiastes is an exhortation to God-cognizant youth to be wise instead of foolish. What characterizes the wise is that according to 8:5–6 they know there is an ultimate “judgment time” (the point is obscured by the common translation of “time and procedure”).

Since many interpretations minimize the importance of the concept of an eschatological judgment in Ecclesiastes (restricting it to an editor's addition in 12:14), it is instructive to observe how this factor relates even to Greidanus's defining of passage boundaries. The foundation of his homiletical method is to determine the borders of his text and to ascertain its conceptual focus. For preaching a series through a book, the extent of a chosen passage will hopefully be congruent with textual units. However, this can be difficult with Ecclesiastes because there is a lack of consensus about the precise location of textual boundaries. Because Greidanus, like most commentators, relies primarily on conceptual continuities to determine his fifteen sections (even while utilizing Wright's outline based on stylistic repetitions and being aware of possible concentric patterning of the text) and because he does not believe an eschatological judgment is in Qohelet's purview, he subordinates 3:16–17 by including it in a section extending to 4:6 with a sermon focus on oppression and envy (97).

Similarly, in 11:7–12:8 his sermon theme, based on “remember your Creator” (12:1), is “before it is too late, remember your Creator in order to truly enjoy life” (285). But there is a concentric artistic overlay in 11:7–12:8 which highlights 11:9 as the center of the passage: “But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” Because the prominence of the artistic organiza-



tion in 11:7–12:8 is missed, the force of the passage is weakened. For Greidanus the focus becomes God as the creator, the giver of gifts to be enjoyed, if one will convert from a pagan to a God-fearer. The concept of God’s judgment is reduced from being directed primarily at ungodly, youthful behavior to being reproach for not enjoying the creator’s blessings (287–88). Instead, Qohelet highlights God as the judge of moral wickedness rather than ungratefulness, as the giver of the common curse *hebel* (cf. 1:13; 3:10; 7:13–14), the coming dark years described in 12:1–7 that are to be remembered (11:8) and are, along with youth, assessed as *hebel* (11:10). But in Greidanus’s interpretation, the concept of God as conveyer of the common curse and as eschatological judge is secondary while God as creator and benefactor is primary.

Interpretation of Ecclesiastes is more difficult if Qohelet warns that there is an eschatological judgment, since it heightens the issues of salvation and theodicy, which are minimized in Greidanus’s approach (207).

If Qohelet teaches that God will judge the righteous and wicked (wise and fool), and he also states in 7:20 that there are no sinless righteous on earth, how can any be justified in the divine court (6:10–11)? For Greidanus the question does not arise because he interprets 6:10–11 as a creature disputing with the creator about providence (168–69) rather than as a sinner futilely mounting a defense before the divine judge. Instead, Qohelet intimates a solution to his more serious question in his “under heaven” framework which implies that what enables the transcending of earthly vanity and joy is the intrusion of a heavenly savior, someone new-as-good (2:26), a person whose death would be remembered (1:9–10), as vicariously submitting to the Zion-guarding cherubim-sword (5:1) but justified by shedding the death shroud for the protective Glory-Spirit covering shared with those united to him by faith. The major route from Ecclesiastes to Christ should be via an implicit contrast between the profane kingdom of earth and the redemptive kingdom of heaven, both of which church members have citizenship in as they are

engaged in the conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, both internally wrestling with the Holy Spirit and externally contending with the wicked and foolish, whether in cultural institutions or in ecclesiastical congregations which, until the consummation, are subject to the covenant lawsuits of Revelation 2–3.

Thus, in the earthly kingdom contemporary Christians can experience Qohelet’s cultural eating, drinking, and rejoicing that characterized the blessing of the Solomonic kingdom (1 Kings 4:20), yet is evaluated by Qohelet as a constituent of *hebel*-existence. At the same time, Christians transcend Qohelet’s positive, earthly sustenance by participating in the Lord’s Supper and receiving heavenly nourishment. The path to such a message is not via allegory, the eisegesis of the church fathers which horrifies contemporary homileticians (24), nor is it via Greidanus’s method of treating Qohelet’s “wrong,” negative message as a foil or contrast to New Testament gospel truth. It is through Qohelet’s inherent contrast between the visible, earthly kingdom and his implied, invisible, mysterious, heavenly kingdom, the details of which are fleshed out in the written new covenant words which reveal the full wonders of the mystery of the redeeming incarnate Word

The exhortation of Ecclesiastes is not just to be a theist, a God-fearer, to believe in the existence of a blessing-bestowing God, since even the righteous and wise experience on earth the wrath as well as love of God (9:1), but to be a God-lover, to rely on him as the deliverer from the divine death penalty and to rejoice even in suffering for his name. The artistically emphasized center of Ecclesiastes is 5:4–5 about vows (which Greidanus correctly defines but then misleadingly applies to promises, 133–35). Vows were pleas to God with no guarantee of fulfillment to produce or preserve life in the context of the first, temporal death (for example, reproductive death for Hannah or impending military death for Jephthah). Despite the fact that Qohelet knew Adam-kind were defenselessly under the penalty of the second, eternal death before the divine judge (6:10–11), he knew a class of righteous existed (3:17; 8:12–13) whose



hearts would be revealed as pure (in Christ) at the eschatological judgment.

Qohelet teaches in 5:4–5 that despite the seeming distance of a deity whose providence is inscrutable, God may personally and immanently provide requested life for the earthly “dead.” Qohelet’s framework implies that the wise should appeal to the gracious deliverer for heavenly life that transcends and transforms the death-dominated earthly realm and enables one not only to fear the divine judge and keep his commandments but to love the heavenly savior and obey his commands.

While Greidanus’s arguments and exegetical conclusions regarding Ecclesiastes need to be assessed carefully when producing sermonic food for the flock, that would be true of any resource for this difficult book. Because of its profitable homiletical focus and academic depth, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* is a valuable, initial resource for a time-pressured pastor grappling with the text’s hard interpretational issues and looking for direction to Christocentric application. ❧

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# Flying with Wax Wings: The Secular Quest for Happiness

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

*Perpetual Euphoria: On the Duty to Be Happy*, by Pascal Bruckner. Translated by Steven Rendall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010 (2000 French edition), x + 244 pages, \$29.95.

*Exploring Happiness: From Aristotle to Brain Science*, by Sissela Bok. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, 218 pages, \$24.00.

Where to begin? Happiness is such a vast subject, the terrain of which each of the authors under review has made extensive coverage, in their own very different ways. Neither of these works is by a Christian, although they each address to some extent with the Christian literature that deals with happiness. I have found it extremely useful to my ministry and life as a believer to read the best thought of unbelievers on important subjects. Thoughtfully read, these tend only to enhance faith, and often inform us in helpful ways. Because of common grace we can often learn a great deal from unbelievers, who are also under God’s sovereign control.

Pascal Bruckner, born in France in 1948, writes in the tradition of the great French essayist Montaigne. He is part of a movement known as the New Philosophers (*nouveaux philosophes*), which broke with Sartre’s Marxism and is critical of postmodern multiculturalism. Bruckner has defended the Enlightenment’s use of reason and self-criticism. He gives us a nuanced and mature reflection on the nature of happiness in light of past reflections and cultural criticism of the West.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=260&issue\\_id=66](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=260&issue_id=66).

His book is a critique of the reigning Western view of happiness, which he contends has moved from being something we are free to seek, to a moral imperative—you must be happy! Hence, the subtitle, “on the duty to be happy” (5, 46). Bruckner artfully explores this transition. *Perpetual Euphoria* is an insightful and scathing critique of the Western quest for happiness, especially in the last half of the twentieth century, even if his own solution is predictably inadequate. Similar to media critic Neil Postman, Bruckner calls us back to the Enlightenment to quench the fires of post-modern relativism and multiculturalism. He may also remind the reader of sociologist Christopher Lasch’s trenchant analysis of radical individualism in *The Culture of Narcissism*,<sup>2</sup> especially when Bruckner sites his own example of extreme self-devotion with Jennifer Ringley instead of Lasch’s “Sheilaism” (76).

Bruckner interacts more seriously with Christian thought than Bok does, albeit with some serious misunderstandings of Protestantism in general and Calvinism in particular (113, 126). He deals with Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal—presumably after whom he was named—with mention of Christian (I use the term broadly) writers like John Bunyan, G. K. Chesterton, Dante, Søren Kierkegaard, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The Catholic Church, of course, is a major topic. Bruckner’s misunderstanding of Protestantism is probably largely due to his Roman Catholic context.

Right off the bat Bruckner deals with his understanding of the Christian view of happiness by quoting seventeenth-century French Catholic theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, “A Christian is a man of the other world” (9); then Pascal, “there was once in man a genuine happiness of which only the mark and the empty trace now remain to us” (10). No wonder he titles the chapter “Life as a Dream and a Lie” (9). Bruckner concludes, “All our sufferings can find their reward

in the beyond if we have led lives pleasing to God. Pass or fail: paradise is structured like a school” (11). The lack of grace in his account is breathtaking, but not surprising given the intellectual atmosphere of Catholic theology which surrounds him—not to mention his own Enlightenment aversion to it. To Bruckner “Christianity remains the doctrine of a relative and reasoned devaluation of the world” (17). He accurately depicts the Christian account of unhappiness as rooted in the Fall. But adds that the churches “make life a matter of atoning for a sin that stains us all from birth” (20). Thus, Christians of all communions are attracted to pain and unhappiness, indulging in a “sadism of piety” (21–22). “With religion the goal was to atone for one’s sins and win salvation” (71).

Bruckner is a master of perceiving contradictions and ironies. “The theme of happiness comes from Christianity, but it flourishes against it” (26). To top off the irony of this, the Enlightenment rehabilitates pleasure and well-being only to be co-opted by a new commandment to be happy. One cannot escape the covenant of works. Now paradise is clearly located in this world—a paradise of man’s own devising, demanding that he create it now (27–31). “The idea of progress supplants that of eternity” (30). Ironically, transferring hope to the earthly future oddly resembles the Christian hope. The terrible difference is that because it resides in another world the latter can never be disproven, whereas the failures of human progress are evident for all to witness (33). The foolish promise to rid the world of evil has led modern people to an increased aversion to suffering and embracing of pleasure. “The Enlightenment assigned itself an immoderate goal: proving itself worthy of Christianity at its best” (38).

From this point on Bruckner explores and critiques the post-Enlightenment quest for happiness as a worldly ideal toward which we are driven as a civilization. It joins technology and science in the list of our “promethean exploits” (42). Where once happiness was rooted in morality, now “it is being unhappy that is immoral” (49). “There is a whole *ethic of seeming to feel good about oneself* that governs us and is supported by the smiling

2 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978).

intoxication of advertising and merchandise” (50). His critique is often trenchantly humorous, as when he observes that the quest for perfect health has reduced once delightful dining to a “form of medication” (53); or observes that belief in God and doing good to your neighbor have health benefits (56). The “idol of happiness” has made us “galley slaves of pleasure” (66).

The next chapter, “The Bittersweet Saga of Dullness,” asserts that our liberation from God has fostered banality, “under house arrest here below” (71), ruled by time, and thus without a destiny, whereas “the Christian drama of salvation and perdition is the counterpart of the secular drama of success and failure” (72–73). This, in turn, leads to “tension without intention” (79). The exploration of banality goes on through the next two chapters, the latter of which is brimming with shrewd insights. “Someone who hopes to embrace every possibility is likely to fully embrace none” (110). The lie that anyone can become president must be replaced by the aphorism that hardly anyone can become president. Happiness is much more likely when we avert unnecessary disappointments. “What makes most discussions of happiness so insipid is that they deliver one and the same message: accept your fate, moderate your desires, want what you have and you’ll have what you want” (114).

Bruckner’s Part III, chapters 7–9, is perhaps the most brilliant sociological analysis in the book. He takes up a major theme articulated in his most significant work to date, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (2006),<sup>3</sup> which consummates his earlier *The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt* (1983).<sup>4</sup> He takes on the Romantic critique of the *petit bourgeois*. He chastens the critics by pointing out—with no small sense of delight—“The fact that we are all bourgeois in one way or another is shown by

our religion of the economy raised to the rank of supreme spiritual good” (142). So, socialism failed to eradicate any of the long list of problems that it pointed out in the bourgeois. Rather, it multiplied problems (185). He takes on the inevitable egalitarianism engendered by democracy, “To endure democracy needs its own antithesis.” Hence, a return to manners is called for (157–58). This would be a small example of the solution to the present happiness imperative of the West: instead of seeking money we need to seek a different kind of wealth, “creating new kinds of opulence for the majority of the people, free time, poetry, love, the liberation of desire, the sense of everyday transfiguration.” Among other luxuries the Christian can warm to: “silence,” “slowness,” “studious idleness, the enjoyment of the major works of the mind” (177).

The final section explores the flight from suffering, which is the major hope of modernity. Rights are multiplied and the status of victim is exalted (191–92). Instead, Bruckner poses engagement with sufferers, rather than revolting against suffering (219–24). Thus, a new “culture of caring” and a “new art of dying” (220) can be developed through “an unprecedented syncretism” of religions (222–26) and the expertise of science (219), “without hope of a beyond” (218).

*Perpetual Euphoria* is seasoned with numerous, and usually very interesting, excursions, ranging from discussions of cultural phenomena like an analysis of the phrase “How’s it going” (18–19) to “The Utopia of Fun” (91–92). The former is an example of places where the original French text’s age shows. Sometimes the connection with the main text is unclear, leaving the impression of a *non sequitur*. But they also offer an occasional poignant aphorism such as, “Life always has the structure of a promise, not that of a program” (153).

As with so much cultural criticism, this book is long on criticism, and very short on solution. In the end, for Bruckner himself, enjoying the simple, but fleeting, pleasures of ordinary life is the best an unbeliever can do. “The greatest felicity is perhaps the one that is highly arbitrary, that is never expected or calculated, and that falls on us

3 Pascal Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010; French edition 2006).

4 Pascal Bruckner, *The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt*, trans. and intro. William R. Beer (New York: Free Press, 1986; French edition 1983).

like a gift from heaven” (126). Sounding almost like the writer of Ecclesiastes, Bruckner observes, “everything done to achieve happiness can also drive it away” (173). Finally, he concludes, “it is perhaps time to say that the ‘secret’ of a good life is not to give a damn about happiness: never to seek it as such.... To happiness in the strict sense, we may prefer pleasure, as a brief moment of ecstasy stolen in the course of things” (230–31). Seeking happiness for its own sake is doomed to disappoint. This reminds me of John Updike’s clever comment, “Happiness. Is it a subject? It is best seen out of the corner of the eye.”<sup>5</sup> Doomed to Kantian exile from contact with the transcendent, Bruckner ends up trying to put a happy face on ultimate despair. Now I understand Bruckner’s quote of François Mauriac after the dedication page, “There are people who are assailed by happiness as if it were a misfortune, and it is.”

But at least he has exposed the utter nakedness of the emperor of the modern West. Bruckner is well worth reading, especially since he cannot and has not escaped framing his entire book in the Christian categories of Augustine, Thomas, and Pascal. A recent Christian account of happiness has been provided by Ellen T. Charry, Margaret W. Harmon Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, in *God and the Art of Happiness* (Eerdmans, 2010). In the latest Mars Hill Audio (#107) Ken Myers interviews her. From the interview, it seems that her book attempts to correct the pietistic error of devaluing life in this world (Bruckner’s critique of Christianity), without holding out a false hope for ultimate happiness in this life (Bruckner’s critique of modernity).

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Sissela Bok, born in Sweden in 1934, is a moral philosopher, presently a senior visiting fellow at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies. Bok does not interact with any serious Christian theology except Augustine’s, a section on

<sup>5</sup> John Updike, *Self-consciousness: Memoirs by John Updike* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 254.

Pascal’s wager, and passing mention of people like Aquinas, Theilhard de Chardin, Thomas Merton, Desmond Tutu, and Teresa of Avila.

She tips us off as to her presuppositions at the beginning with a chapter on “magical luck” (1). Interestingly, the etymology of “happiness” has to do with happenstance (21). Bok gives the “two aims of the book” (3–4, 173). The first, and I think most useful, is a topical survey of what philosophers, poets, religious thinkers, and natural and social scientists think about happiness. The second is to consider, against the background of the survey, the “limits imposed by perennial moral issues about how we should lead our lives and how we should treat one another.” Like Bruckner, she is both descriptive and didactic. But unlike him, she seems almost to embrace the happiness imperative of the modern West. Oddly, she does not interact with him at all. Bruckner returns the favor. Unlike Bruckner, she presupposes Darwinism (13, 19, 21–22, 106, 112).

In the second chapter on experience, Bok discusses Robert Nozick’s “experience machine” (25–28). The machine creates any desired experience in your mind. The test question for this thought-experiment is: Should you plug in to this machine for life? Nozick answers no, because an illusion is no substitute for real life, and there is more to life than experience, especially when illusions involve only the dreamer.

Bok then looks at the variety of definitions of happiness by introducing (35) eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope’s long poem on the human condition, *An Essay on Man* (1733).

Oh, Happiness! Our being’s end and aim!  
 Good, Pleasure, Ease, Content! Whate’er thy  
 name:  
 That something still which prompts th’eternal  
 sigh,  
 To which we bear to live, or dare to die,  
 Which still so near us, yet beyond us lies,  
 O’er-looked, seen double, by the fool, and  
 wise.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Johnson took umbrage at Pope’s views of happiness,

In the end, after surveying numerous definitions, Pope despairs of defining happiness:

Who thus define it, say they more or less  
Than this, that Happiness is Happiness?

Bok's own survey from Aristotle to modern ethicists, while very interesting, fares no better. But, in discussing John Kekes, she observes two helpful considerations in considering how various claims and definitions of happiness are to be judged: 1) "whether people's evaluation of their own happiness is based on true facts" and 2) "judgment brings to bear some outside standard thought indispensable for happiness, such as the possession of virtue or of particular religious convictions" (41). Bok believes that while subjective experience of happiness takes priority, "an outsider's perspective [is] needed for fuller understanding" (43). Sadly the ultimate outsider, God, is not considered. Nor is life after this life. Thus, happiness is confined to this present evil age—sad folly of the highest sort!

The place of virtue in happiness is then considered beginning with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as a template (43). Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1780) dethroned happiness (49). All that those before him believed to be linked to happiness, such as virtue and talent, were delinked. The moral life is to be sought for its own sake, whatever the cost (50). The problem is that, because an afterlife cannot be proved, it must be merely postulated in order to motivate. The "categorical imperative" ends up being hopelessly captive to human imagination and initiative. Not surprisingly, Bok ends the chapter asserting that "there is no one definition of happiness, I suggest, that should exclude all others, much less be imposed by force or indoctrination" (58).

The next chapter "On the Happy Life" (IV) explores religious views, beginning with the Stoic Seneca's essay *De Vita Beata* (59 AD, 59–66), and then with Augustine's essay by the same title (386 AD, 66–69). While the brilliant Seneca worked

daily to reduce the number of his vices (60), Augustine concludes, "whoever possesses God is happy" (68). This possession is solely a matter of God's grace.

This chapter closes with an interesting juxtaposing of Pascal's famous wager (76–80) and an Enlightenment hedonist physician, La Mettrie, who staunchly opposed Seneca's linkage of happiness to virtue (80–82). As admirable as Pascal's *Pensées* (1670) are, I have never found his "wager" compelling. Out of the context of Pascal's theology it sounds little better than Kant's categorical imperative, except that Pascal believed firmly in the afterlife based on the infallible testimony of Scripture. The problem with the wager is that "if you lose, you lose nothing" is simply not biblical. "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). The unbeliever might temporarily enjoy the very things Paul sacrificed for Jesus. Bok perceptively gets this point when she observes that the wager must change his entire way of life (79).

What galled Enlightenment *philosophes* and apparently galls Bok is Pascal's insistence that ultimate and true happiness can only be found through Jesus in the triune God of the Christian faith (79). Voltaire opined that we cannot know enough to wager in one direction or the other (79).

Bok then takes up the question of measuring happiness. From Jeremy Bentham's "greatest happiness for the greatest number" (84–89), to John Stuart Mill's more expansive method of calculation (89–92), to Francis Edgeworth's "hedonic calculus" (92–96), Bok explores the modern penchant to formulaic control. Out of this milieu come the new discipline of neuroscience as well as psychology, both of which seek to discover the components of well-being, including the hopes and fears connected with religious faith (101). Nothing, in my opinion, is better calculated to produce unhappiness than the unhappy notion that happiness is rooted in neural pathways and brain chemistry. This new form of determinism leaves us com-

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expressing them in *Life of Alexander Pope* and his own poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749).



pletely at the mercy of the elements. Bok wisely chides the “science of happiness” for not including literature, the arts, and virtue (105), which, I might add, cannot be measured by science. She explores this in a fascinating chapter (VI), “Beyond Temperament,” in terms of melancholy and sanguinity, resilience and empathy (121). I especially enjoyed the section connecting happiness with retirement, leisure, and solitude (124–31).

Bok’s penultimate chapter (VII) asks the question, “Is Lasting Happiness Achievable?” Freud says no, Bertrand Russell says yes. Both were atheists, thus limiting their discussion to this life (132–33). Perhaps Freud’s less sanguine view was rooted in his Jewish background. Bok goes on to discuss the place of heredity in happiness—the old nature-nurture debate (144). While both Freud and Russell challenged common assumptions about happiness in terms of illusion and delusion, Bok provocatively asks, “Why shouldn’t a Christian, for example, reject Freud’s and Russell’s atheism as similarly deluded?” (154).

Finally, Bok discusses illusion in chapter VIII, bringing the reader full circle back to Robert Nozick’s “experience machine.” The dangers of seeking happiness in virtual pleasures disconnected from reality are considered. Bok ends by placing her confidence in the maxim of the ancient philosopher Mencius, “There is no greater joy than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself” (172).

Bok is well worth reading. She is erudite, chock full of information, and raises important ethical questions (e.g., 121, 136). While she does not deal as explicitly with Christian theology as Bruckner does, her pages are haunted by Christian truth.

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Both are captive to the relativist’s, Post-Kantian, earth-bound perspective that dominates modern epistemology. Both are in need of the biblical message. While both refer to the ancients, neither spends any time with the biblical writers. The writers of Ecclesiastes, the Psalms, Gospels, and epistles come immediately to mind.

As to the physical properties of the books, Princeton’s aesthetic production is light-years ahead of Yale’s. The typography, the margins, footnotes instead of endnotes, all conjoin to make the Yale book look pedestrian. Both have excellent indexes, but only Princeton places the notes where they belong at the bottom of the page one is reading.


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In its crudest form the positive secularist embraces the popular notion expressed by Kip Garre, skier, killed in an avalanche near the Split Couloirin Pine Mountain, California, on April 29, 2011, “This is life, and it’s supposed to be fun. So just enjoy the good times.” A cynical retort might be that of Dilbert, that denizen—or should we say prisoner—of the high tech office, “I’m considering becoming an idiot so I can get the health benefits of happiness.”

But the greatest impediment to defining, or better yet, achieving happiness, is the failure to take the fall of humanity into sin through the first Adam, and the redemption achieved by the Second Adam, into account. Ecclesiastes teaches us that due to sin happiness eludes us by God’s design and will continue to do so until we find our happiness in God through his gift of Christ. Happiness, as we have seen, comes from the root meaning “lucky” in Middle English—haphazard. Happiness eludes us because it can only be found in God himself, as our Shorter Catechism so beautifully sums this up, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever” (WSC 1). Alexander Pope alludes to this, “Which still so near us, yet beyond us lies, O’er-looked, seen double, by the fool, and wise.” Biblically, happiness is passive, looking to God as the author and giver. The unpredictable nature of happiness and God’s blessings in this life is, among other things, a reminder that every blessing is a gift, not calculable by human formulas or earned by human merit.

In the end the quest for happiness is self-defeating because, when sought for itself, it proves to have wings of wax like Icarus, if not immediately, always at death. When found in God, it lasts.



Like Sabbath rest—first God’s, then ours—a deep and abiding enjoyment of God and his works *is* the happiness we will enjoy for eternity in Christ. “Happy is that people whose God is the LORD” (Ps. 144:15 KJV). 

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## To Render unto Caesar or Baptize Him: Is That the Question?

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

*Politics according to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*, by Wayne Grudem. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010, 624 pages, \$39.99, cloth.

*Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*, by Peter J. Leithart. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 373 pages, \$27.00, paper.

The vast literature on religion and politics summons up Qoheleth’s oft-quoted remark, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body” (Eccl. 12:12). Remarkable indeed is the amount of published material on questions surrounding church and state, at least in the United States. For instance, in 1960, when despite strong anti-Catholic prejudice John F.

Kennedy prevailed over Richard Nixon as the first Roman Catholic president, the number of books published on church and state ran to eighteen, up from five titles during the previous year. Figures returned to 1950s levels until 1976 when the bicentennial primed the pump of scholarly output. In 1976, publishers produced seventeen books. The presidency of Ronald Reagan and the presence of the Moral Majority would help to sustain the market: in 1980, eighteen and in 1981, fifteen books were devoted to church and state themes. By 1984, when the critique of secularism was taking hold, the number of books rose to thirty. Since then the numbers have only escalated: forty-seven in 1990, seventy-four in 1996; forty-four in 2000; eighty-one in 2004, and 188 in 2008. Obviously, if dinner conversations unravel when interlocutors introduce religion and politics, and if controversy sells, then publishers hoping to generate a return on their investment in an author, paper, cover art, and advertising might look to religion and politics as a valuable topic. Still, doesn’t Qoheleth have a point? Hasn’t all this publishing wearied the subject, if not the readers?

The good news is that the titles under review demonstrate that more can be said, even if readers debate whether it needed to be. (For what it’s worth, these were two of sixty books published in 2010 on religion and politics.) Wayne Grudem’s *Politics according to the Bible* is textbook in size and arrangement of material, running from basic principles (about one-quarter of the book), to specific issues (about two-thirds) ranging from American foreign relations with Israel to farm subsidies, and concluding observations (one-eighth). Peter Leithart’s *Defending Constantine* is part biography of the first Christian emperor, assessment of his policies, and apology for Constantinianism (more below). Leithart is specifically intent to defend Constantine from the sort of criticisms leveled and made popular by John Howard Yoder, the Anabaptist ethicist who coined the term Constantinianism to highlight the ways in which the church’s entanglement with the state leads to unfaithfulness and even apostasy.

The cover art for each book is revealing. For

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=267&issue\\_id=67](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=267&issue_id=67).

Leithart's the image from a reproduction of Constantine in an act of worship tells readers where the book is headed—a portrait of the emperor as a Christian one. Grudem's book features the dome of the U.S. Capitol building with a U.S. flag flying in front. What each author ends up doing is baptizing his subject. In Leithart's case, Constantine is a model for Christian politics. For Grudem, the United States and its ideals of freedom and democracy are fundamentally Christian versions of civil polity; he even includes the full text of the Declaration of Independence in the chapter on biblical principles of government. The result is two books, published in the same year, written by two white men of conservative Protestant backgrounds in the United States, equipped with biblical and theological arguments, both making a case for Christian politics from wildly different political orders—one a Roman emperor, the other a federal republic. Readers may reasonably wonder if these authors are letting their subjects—the United States and Constantine's empire—determine Christian politics or are basing their arguments on biblical teaching and theological reflection.

Grudem's book gives the impression of starting from biblical and theological ideals before moving to application. Few will disagree with his distillation of biblical teaching about civil government. Grudem argues that governments should punish evil and reward good, God is sovereign over all earthly powers, Christians have a duty to submit to the powers that God has ordained, and that magistrates should recognize the limits of their power to change human hearts. Less certain is Grudem's contention that popular sovereignty, democracy, and liberty are political ideals taught by Scripture. His explanation of these points is not necessarily wrong, but neither are his arguments extensive—Grudem's desire for a comprehensive account of the subject means that he must sacrifice depth for breadth. And when he does explain a biblical principle, the ideal looks less like a good and necessary consequence of Scripture than it does an expression of Grudem's own political outlook. For instance, he objects to regulations that would force the use of paper instead of plastic grocery bags and

uses this illustration to show that any *“increase in governmental regulation of life is also an incremental removal of some measure of human liberty”* (94, emphasis Grudem's). Examples like this suggest that Grudem is approaching Scripture—as we all do—looking for justification of previously held convictions. But this is much more of a temptation for the topic of politics, because the New Testament—at least—has so little to say about the nature and obligations of civil government after the fall of Israel. Christ and the apostles had another government in mind.

Another reason for Grudem's failure to distinguish carefully between personal convictions and biblical teaching is his decision to begin a book—purportedly “according to the Bible”—with a discussion of the right view of Christianity and politics. In his organization of material, Grudem places “biblical principles” in chapter three behind “wrong views” about Christians and government and his own “better solution.” This arrangement suggests that the author may be setting the agenda for the subject rather than Scripture itself. The wrong views include: government should compel religion; government should exclude religion; all government is evil and demonic; do evangelism, not politics; and do politics, not evangelism. Instead of these, Grudem proposes significant Christian influence on government as the biblical solution. Biblical support for the idea that Christians should seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards comes from the examples of Daniel in the Old Testament and John the Baptist in the New. Grudem also finds inspiration from the example of Martin Luther King, Jr. These examples, along with relevant biblical, historical, and theological reflection, lead Grudem to conclude that pastors have some responsibility to teach and preach on significant moral issues at stake in elections and that Christians have an obligation to be well informed and vote intelligently. Since Grudem himself includes sections on Cap and Trade legislation, the CIA, and farm subsidies by the federal government, readers might well surmise that pastors have permission to teach and preach on as many issues as Grudem treats in

his account of biblical teaching on government. Yet, some readers would also be befuddled to find where Scripture actually speaks to governmental regulation of electronic media implicitly or explicitly.

Leithart is more direct in defending Constantine than Grudem is in affirming the American form of government, but whether the former actually advocates imperial rule as the Christian norm for politics is debatable. Leithart, as mentioned earlier, is especially eager to defend Constantine from the charge, popularized by John Howard Yoder, of Constantinianism. According to Leithart, who summarizes Yoder, Constantinianism refers to “the wedding of piety to power,” or the “notion that the empire or the state, the ruler of civil government rather than the church, is the primary bearer of meaning in history” (176). This “heresy,” as Yoder referred to it, could happen at any time and he, as an Anabaptist, was inclined to regard the magisterial Reformation as Constantinian. But because the church first gained a position of dominance through the civil rule of Constantine, he bears the name for this particular affliction.

Leithart’s book is less a defense of Constantine per se than the political theological compound of state-sanctioned churches. To be sure, the book helpfully sets Constantine in the context of imperial politics and offers a series of charitable readings of the emperor’s activities and policies that other historians have judged to be un-Christian or cynical. Leithart himself sounds fairly cynical toward the end of the book when he summarizes Constantine’s career:

He liked to see the big picture and could be impatient with details. He had a strong sense of justice, and when aroused by what he believed unjust, he could be imperious, brutal, hectoring. He was aggressive and ambitious but was a strategist with the self-restraint to wait out an opponent. . . . He enjoyed the kitschy gaudiness of the court and its adornments; the flowered robe rested easily on his shoulders, he liked his jeweled slippers, and he did not think a golden throne too much.

But he also knew that he should treat it with disdain, and that disdain was sincere too. He was an imperial performer who liked performing but knew he was assuming a role. . . . His religion went to the edge of superstition; he was a dreamer and visionary and never quite gave up the expectation that examining a liver or the stars might yield a clue about the future. He believed that the Christian God guaranteed the success of his wars and that God had called him to support the church. (301–2)

But if Leithart judges Constantine a mixed bag, he is impressed by Constantine the emperor. Crucial here is the idea that Constantine “baptized” Rome. Leithart is not referring to washing persons with water as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace but to what Constantine did to end the sacrificial system within the Roman Empire. Of course, Israel had its own pattern of sacrifices, and the pagan religions of Greece and Rome had their own rites of animal sacrifice. But with the end of Rome’s religious sacrifices, Leithart argues, came the announcement of the gospel to the empire’s political order. And in the same way that baptism begins the Christian’s life of faith and repentance, so Constantine’s “baptism” of Rome started the empire and its successor (Christendom) on an era of Christian history. “For millennia every empire, every city, every nation and tribe was organized around sacrifice,” Leithart writes. “We are not, and we have Constantine to thank for that” (329). And the basis for this end of sacrifice was Constantine’s determination to welcome the church into his realm, the one political order that had already been “de-sacrificed” thanks to the final and ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

Lacking in Leithart’s important point about the end of religious sacrifice is a notion that also eludes Grudem’s grasp—namely, that the New Testament, Christ, and the apostles offer no prescriptions about civil polity other than that believers should submit to the established authorities. They did prescribe a spiritual polity—the church—and in that order the sacrifices of both

the Jewish and pagan peoples came to an end. But the Christian church was an adaptable institution that could exist—even despite persecution—in a variety of political orders, whether a pagan empire or a federal republic. In which case, both books assume what they do not prove. Each author in his own way suggests that for a kingdom as substantial as Christ’s to be great, it must have a civil expression. Leithart even says in his very last sentence that if modern civilization is to avoid “apocalypse” it must also come forward to be baptized the way Rome was (342).

In point of fact, Constantine’s baptism of Rome could not prevent the empire’s fall any more than restoring a Christian influence in the United States will avert the American republic’s demise. Christ died for his church, not for political orders. The only way for civilians to avoid judgment is not through the policies of Christian rulers but by being baptized and joining the body of Christ. No matter where such Christians live, no matter what the political order to which they submit, their future is secure if they belong to the king who is also a prophet and a priest. ☉

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## KJV 400: An Enduring Influence

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

*The Holy Bible: Quatercentenary Edition, An Exact Reprint in Roman Type, Page for Page, Line*

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=276&issue\\_id=68](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=276&issue_id=68).

*for Line, Letter for Letter, of the King James Version, Otherwise Known as the Authorized Version, Published in 1611, with an Anniversary Essay by Gordon Campbell.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 1520 pages, \$79.95. Bound in burgundy bonded leatherover boards in a burgundy cloth slipcase with gold blocking, printed on 50 gsm Chinese Thinprint, gilt edge, with ribbon markers and a gift presentation plate.

*Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011*, by Gordon Campbell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, xiii + 354 pages, \$24.95.

*The Legacy of the King James Bible*, by Leland Ryken. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011, 265 pages, \$15.99, paper.

*A Visual History of the King James Bible: The Dramatic Story of the World’s Best Known Translation*, by Donald L. Brake with Shelly Beach. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011, 285 pages, \$24.99.

An article on the *King James Version* of the Bible in *Vanity Fair*?<sup>2</sup> Who would have guessed? The range of coverage of this KJV anniversary is a testimony to the enduring influence of this remarkable translation.<sup>3</sup> There is even an iPhone and iPad app

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hitchens, “When the King Saved God,” *Vanity Fair* (May 2011): 114–20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for books, besides those reviewed in this article: David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press); Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, eds., *The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Cf. for periodicals: Verlyn Klinkenborg, “The King James Bible at 400,” *The New York Times* (NY ed. January 9, 2011): WK9; Robert Alter, “The Good Book’s Great Prose Lessons,” *The Wall Street Journal* (March 5–6, 2011): C12; Charles McGrath, “Thou Shalt Not Be Colloquial,” *The New York Times* (NY ed. April 24, 2011): WK3; Mark Noll, “A World without the KJV: Where Would We Be without the Most Popular English Bible Ever?” *Christianity Today* (May 2011): 30–37; Barton Swaim, “God’s English: The Making and Endurance of the King James Bible, 1611–2011,” *Touchstone* (May/June 2011): 23–28; Barrymore Laurence Scherer, “Four Centuries of Love and Suffering for the Word,” *The Wall Street Journal* (August 3, 2011): D5; Leland Ryken, “How We Got the Best-Selling Book of All Time,” *The Wall Street Journal* (August 27, 2011): A13.

created in cooperation with Oxford University's Bodleian Libraries titled, "The Making of the King James Bible."

In the absence of believing the anachronism that "if the *King James Version* (KJV) was good enough for Paul then it's good enough for me," there are many excellent reasons for church officers to be familiar with, and appreciate, the KJV.

First, is its pervasive and continuing influence on the English language. No one can claim to be well educated without a knowledge of the KJV.

Second, is its oral excellence. I have recently read the KJV for a "Lessons and Carols" service and can attest to its effectiveness. When the title page says "Appointed to be Read in Churches," it meant read aloud, not silently and privately. It is clearly translated to accommodate this primary function. Its rhythm and power have never, in my opinion, been equaled among English Bible translations. It had the advantage of being translated at the apogee of English, both oral and printed, as the Shakespearean corpus attests. The Bard died just five years after the publication of the KJV, and the famous *First Folio* of his works was published in 1623.<sup>4</sup> Reading the KJV aloud, even if never used in the modern pulpit, is a useful exercise for young preachers. As Gordon Campbell so well puts it,

The rhythm of its sentences and its punctuation are designed to facilitate reading aloud, and the pulse of its prose, together with the simplicity of its vocabulary, make it the translation most easily committed to memory.<sup>5</sup>

Third, and most important, is its strong influence on the best modern translations. Because of its continued life in the mind of the English speaking church, translators have left much of its language intact, apart from obvious archaisms,

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4 For those interested in facsimile editions of important English printed books, see *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, a facsimile edition prepared by Helga Kokeritz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954). Later printings are readily available on the used market.

5 Page 4 of the concluding essay. The pages are not numbered since they follow the unpaginated text of the King James Bible.

especially in the most familiar passages. Psalm 23:1 is identical in the modern English Standard Version, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Only the punctuation is different—the 1611 KJV having a comma instead of the semicolon. As I have read Psalms and Ephesians it is notable that the cadences of the KJV have been largely retained in the best modern translations, like the ESV. The eleven page "The Translators to the Reader," after the dedication to the king, provides a wealth of information on the theory of translation employed by the translators.

The text of this Oxford quatercentenary edition is from the first printing of the first edition and is the most authoritative text printed since then.

The text of the 1611 edition differs from modern editions of the King James Version in thousands of details, and this edition is the most authentic version of the original text that has ever been published. It follows the 1611 text page-for-page and line-for-line, reproducing all misprints rather than correcting them. The volume also reprints the large body of preliminary matter, which includes genealogies, maps, and lists of readings, as well as the translator's preface to the reader. The text features an easy-to-read modern font instead of the black-letter type of the original, with the exception of the original decorative letters and early page ornaments, which have been reproduced.<sup>6</sup>

The first edition is well-known for several obvious typographical errors, the most noteworthy of which gives the first printing its famous name, the "Great He Bible." Ruth 3:15 misprints "he" where it should be "she," referring to Ruth: "and he went into the citie." Subsequent printings are referred to as the "She Bible."

Oddities retained in the text for authenticity will be of interest to the historian and will take getting used to for the reader. Campbell goes into great detail enumerating the most important

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6 <http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Bibles/?view=usa&ci=9780199557608>.



examples in his essay and his book about the KJV, reviewed below. As an antiquarian book collector, I barely notice the “s” printed like an “f” (only with the cross bar on the left of the letter’s stem, not on the right).<sup>7</sup> Then there is the “u” printed as “v” and vice versa. An extreme example of this quirk is “vniust” for “unjust” in Psalm 43:1. A few pages of reading and the possible annoyance disappears. Also, spelling is very irregular, since no standard dictionary had yet been published in 1611, although many were in existence at the time the KJV was published. These tended to focus on obscure and difficult words, rather than present usage. It would not be until Samuel Johnson published his fabled *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1746 that a comprehensive lexicon of English would be available.

So, for example, in Psalm 33:10–11 counsel is spelled in two quite different ways, “counsell” and “counsaile.” Then there are the Roman numerals, providing good mental exercise for those who have forgotten the simple math involved in deciphering them. But watch out for the number “4,” it is not “IV,” but rather “IIII.” The pleasure is well worth the effort.

Few words have actually been changed. One example is Psalm 55:6 where the 1611 has “O that I had wings like a doue; *for then* would I flee away and be at rest,” whereas the 1769 version has “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.” Most grammatical changes are minor. In Psalm 83:2 the 1611 has “have lift up,” where the later revision has “lifted.” Other curiosities include the future of the verb to be included in a single word. In Psalm 87:5 “shall be” is “shalbe,” and “will be” is “wilbe” in Psalm 84:4.

Readers may be thankful that the text is not in the black-letter type of the original. The original

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7 There is a minor inconsistency in the 1833 Roman Type facsimile of the true first edition of the KJV. In the original Gothic type is used for the text of Scripture, but Roman type is used for chapter summaries and marginal notes and references. In these where “s” is printed like an “f” it occurs everywhere but the final “s”. This is typical of this period of printing. This is also the case in the Gothic text, but a detail not reflected in the 1833 facsimile, as far as I can tell, except in the headers on each page.

1611 was printed in black letter type—German as opposed to the Roman letters we are used to. The first edition printed in Roman type was the 1613 (New Testament 1612) edition printed in quarto size rather than the larger folio or pulpit size. Black-letter type was also known as Gothic script, the common type of Western Europe at the time. Note the photographs of two pages of the first edition below in Gothic type. The edition under review is unique because the text is the 1833 Oxford edition in Roman type, precisely duplicating every word and letter of the first 1611 printing (known as the “He Bible”) for research purposes, but incorporates the decorative initial capitals, which had been left out in the 1833 edition.

What most readers of the KJV today do not realize is that the 1611 text changed many times, until 1769 when it reached the form in which it is most commonly published today. One example demonstrates that some of these changes affect the meaning. In Matthew 16:16 the 1611 version has “Thou art Christ,” whereas 1769 has “Thou art the Christ.”<sup>8</sup> This change in emphasis may be subtle, but it punctuates the importance and uniqueness of Jesus’s mediatorial office.

The physical properties of this facsimile edition are nothing less than exquisite, designed to delight bibliophiles. Its dark brown leather covered board covers enclose the 1520 signature bound pages. The best of the printer’s craft is exhibited in the gilt tooled binding and slip case, with a lovely gilt tooled Oxford insignia *Dominus illuminatio mea* (The Lord is my light) on the front cover, red cloth head and tail pieces, and two red ribbon markers, one for each testament. Collectors, and those interested in typography, will especially enjoy the original decorative letters and early page ornaments, often called printer’s devices, throughout. For example, Luke’s Gospel “opens with an initial F that shows the evangelist sitting at his desk, beside which sits an ox, Luke’s traditional emblem.”<sup>9</sup> The handmade look of early printing—1611 was

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8 Page 9 of the concluding essay.

9 *Ibid.*, 4.



a mere century beyond the incunabula period—is aesthetically delightful. The paper is a fine quality 50 gsm Chinese Thinprint, gilt edge three sides.

The page size of this edition is 8" × 10 ½" with the original being 10 ½" × 15 ¼"; with the text 5 ¾" × 8 ¾" with the original being 9" × 14 ¼". The large original size, commonly called a folio, because it was a single folded printer's sheet, is a reminder that this was not a Bible intended for private reading, but to be read in the pulpit. Curiously the size given by Oxford is 6 ½" × 9 ⅞". It is not specified what this refers to, but buyers should be aware that this book is roughly the size of most pulpit Bibles. The cover is 10 ⅞" × 8 ¾" with pages 10 ¼" × 8 ⅝".

The informative, concluding essay on the first edition of the King James Bible is by Gordon Campbell, professor of Renaissance Studies, Department of English, University of Leicester.

For those interested in an aesthetic and historical treasure, the late Lewis Lupton's (1909–95) twenty-five volume *A History of the Geneva Bible* (London: Fauconberg Press; The Olive Tree, 1966–94) is worth purchasing. Lupton was an artist who began by designing the original volume and adding more and more art work with each volume, until in volume eight he began doing the entire text in calligraphy, and so for the remaining volumes.

The following three books under review, one a legacy, and two the story of the KJV, each in different ways elucidate the three benefits of familiarity with this great translation stated above.

## Translation History

The companion volume to the Oxford four hundredth anniversary edition of the KJV is Gordon Campbell's *Bible: The Story of the King James Version, 1611–2011*. Campbell is an expert in Renaissance studies and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His book is a detailed history of the transmission of the KJV text, especially focusing on its subsequent history.

While briefly covering the precursors of the KJV, Campbell focuses in great detail on the

actual production of the translation. An appendix details the six companies of translators, as well as giving brief descriptions of each translator (276–94). Campbell explores such details as the "Instructions and Procedures" required by Bishop Bancroft (35–42). Of special importance is the attitude of the translators expressed in the "Translators to the Reader" by Miles Smith. The aspiration of the translators was not "to make a new translation, nor yet to make a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better" (65).

The intention was to revise the Bishop's Bible, strengthening the king as divinely appointed, and the position of the episcopacy, as evidenced by the inclusion of words like "bishop" and "church." The strict exclusion of interpretive notes, which distinguished the Geneva Bible as a kind of first study Bible, was intended to blunt Puritan ascendancy. The presence of the KJV in the extensive proof texts of the Westminster Confession of faith and catechisms over three decades later proved that the Puritans could not be so easily thwarted.

The remaining 60 percent of the book goes on to chronicle the revision of the KJV, culminating in the 1769 edition being printed today, and its influence in the English speaking world. After 1660 the KJV was accepted by Protestants of all persuasions (127). Campbell is especially expert in covering the history of the printing of the KJV, focusing on the famous university presses of Oxford and Cambridge.

Campbell concentrates on the influence of the KJV on American religious history. He corrects assumptions such as the place of the Geneva Bible in the colonial era. He claims that the "famous Mayflower Bible of 1588 now in the Harry Ransom Library at the University of Texas is a fake" (194). He goes on to assert that, whichever Bible they settled with, the KJV was the only version available by the mid seventeenth century. The KJV was perfectly suited to the emotional revivalism of the two Great Awakenings (195–96). His brief, wide-ranging survey covers the political influence of the KJV to the present day, as well as uniquely American phenomena like the King James Only movement.

The remainder of the book covers revisions and various editions, especially in America, including the Scofield Bible, with a brief, but very intriguing coverage of the KJV as literature (248–58). He concludes this section with T. S. Eliot’s and C. S. Lewis’s impassioned insistence that the KJV is first and foremost the Word of God (255–57).

Donald Brake’s *A Visual History of the King James Bible* is—for those who enjoy such things—the most aesthetically pleasing of the three volumes. It is printed on fine paper, bound in signature, with beautiful graphics—much of which are in color—and typography, including many lovely illustrations by the illustrator Lewis Lupton, whom Brake memorializes (69). Baker is to be commended for this exceptional tribute to the enduring KJV translation.

Brake’s book is also a great story, well told. The text is interspersed with well-placed asides and illustrations. It is a wealth of information with numerous charts and chronologies, many comparing various translations with the KJV. Brake’s own passion for Bible collecting is artfully interwoven with the history of the KJV.

The background story Brake provides is unique to the three books reviewed, especially in the development of the English language through its three periods. His coverage of predecessor translations, giving due place to Tyndale (which all three books do well) is the most extensive of the three books.

As to the translation of the KJV itself Brake gives coverage as extensive as Campbell on the companies and the individual translators, as well as the prescribed translation principles given by Bishop Bancroft. Brake’s chapter on the use of the original languages favors the *Textus Receptus* (the Greek text used by the KJV translators), but makes for interesting reading. As Ryken points out, the differences between the *Textus Receptus* and the modern eclectic text are relatively minor (64).

The history of the initial printing and especially the formatting and typography described in chapter 9, “Maps, Margins, and Mythology: The Formatting of an English Treasure,” as well as his coverage of subsequent editions, is substantially

enhanced by the plethora of photographs of the originals.

Unlike Ryken, Brake ends up endorsing the KJV as appropriate for the modern reader, without seriously considering other modern translations, although he does mention the New King James Version (222–24). He favors the criticism of the NKJV that the language is “neither seventeenth century nor twentieth century” (223). But, as Ryken points out neither was the KJV entirely in sync with contemporary usage. Oddly, Brake claims that the NKJV translators used the “dynamic equivalence” theory of translation. This is simply not the case. Ryken does what I think more prudent in demonstrating the pedigree of the English Standard Version as a direct descendent of the translating principles of the KJV and thus worthy of our contemporary use. He properly places the NKJV in this lineage.

### Translation Philosophy and Influence

Leland Ryken, professor of English at Wheaton College for the past forty-three years, has focused on the English Bible, its translation and influence, for most of that span.<sup>10</sup> Few are better qualified to assess the translation theory and ecclesiastical and literary influences of the KJV.

Whereas Campbell and Brake recount the history of the KJV, Ryken concentrates on the influence of the KJV on Bible translation, and the language and literature of the English speaking world.

Even in recounting the history of translation

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10 Leland Ryken, *The ESV and the English Bible Legacy* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); *Understanding English Bible Translation: The Case for an Essentially Literal Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009); contributor to *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); *Choosing a Bible: Understanding Bible Translation Differences* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005); *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002); coauthor of *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); *The New Testament in Literary Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

in Part One, Ryken sets out on his didactic mission: to demonstrate the principles of excellent Bible translation (27–29). Faithfulness to the “actual words” of the original languages along with the use of “standard formal English” is critical. Throughout the book Ryken cautions the reader against the reigning translation philosophy of “dynamic equivalence,” as well as vernacular style, convincingly and relentlessly upending the conventional wisdom on what constitutes good popular style. Early on Ryken lays down the gauntlet by stating that there is

an important principle of Bible translation at stake here, namely, continuity with the main stream of English Bible translation versus the quest for originality and novelty (a deliberate attempt not to be like previous English translations). (57)

And, one might add, often motivated by marketing analysis to increase sales. As the preface to the 1611 edition indicates, the KJV was a refinement on the excellent work that preceded it, especially in the work of Tyndale, Coverdale, and the Geneva translators (57–58).

The KJV was “preeminently a translation for public use” (60). Thus oral style that would be heard in worship as “authoritative and beautiful . . . *dignity and eloquence*” (60–61) was paramount in the work of the translators. The “effect was oracular” (61). Ryken’s immersion in English literature shines through in passages dealing with literary style. But his commitment to plenary verbal inspiration is equally evident as he pleads for a translation principle of “verbal equivalence” (61). He puts the lie to the fallacious idea—which becomes one side of a false dichotomy—that literal adherence to the original languages gives birth to a wooden style. Leaving interpretive choices that reside in the ambiguities of the original to the preacher and reader, along with “retention of theological vocabulary” (80), set this tradition apart from the majority of modern translations. This lineage leads directly from the KJV to the Revised Standard Version of 1952, the New King James Bible of 1983, and the English Standard Version

of 2001. Ryken underplays the complaints many have had with the sometimes obvious liberal bias of the RSV translators in texts such as Romans 9:5. However, this does not undermine Ryken’s point about the importance of translating the actual words of the text instead of “destabilizing” the text with dynamic equivalence, as is the pervasive modern tendency. Ryken nicely labels the conservative approach “essentially literal” and “complete equivalence” (76–77) to distance this approach from the woodenly literal—reading poorly aloud. Precision of translation is first, then “majesty of style” must follow.

Quoting from Alister McGrath, Ryken shows the need for modern translation, “Translations eventually require revision, not necessarily because they are defective, but because . . . language changes over time” (73).<sup>11</sup>

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the KJV influence on language, education, religion, and culture. This makes for fascinating reading, especially the inclusion of a section on the KJV influence on non-western cultures (87–89). The remainder of the book explores one of Ryken’s favorite subjects: the literary value of the KJV and its influence on English literature. Ryken brilliantly asserts that the nature of the Bible itself is literary and thus a good translation simply preserves this.

The idea of the Bible-as-literature can be traced back to the Bible itself. The writer of Ecclesiastes gives us a self-portrait of the writer as a self-conscious composer, very interested in form and style as well as content: “Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth” (Eccl. 12:9–10). (121)

The KJV is the only literary masterpiece to be produced by a committee (actually six committees

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<sup>11</sup> Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Language, a Nation, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor, 2001).

and forty-seven translators), although that was not their aim (123). The explanation for this is the literary context of high humanism in which each translator had been nurtured. Clarity and beauty were highly esteemed. Aesthetic standards existed (124–27). Ryken sustains a detailed discussion of the prose and poetic style of the KJV. It seems that the modern penchant for the language of the street sets up a false dichotomy between abstract academic language and everyday speech. Ryken is especially superb in these sections of the book, bringing many examples to bear on his crisp assertions, to demonstrate that the banal flatness of modern translations does a great disservice to the high voltage of the language of the KJV, especially its poetry, which makes up a third of the Bible. “Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest” (New Century Version, 1986, 151). Many modern translators are the bland leading the bland. Ryken sums the problem up nicely before launching into the solution:

One of the tricks that modern colloquializing translators try to play on a gullible public is to claim that the simple vocabulary of much of the Bible proves that translations should sound like everyday colloquial speech. But this does not follow at all: simple can be a form

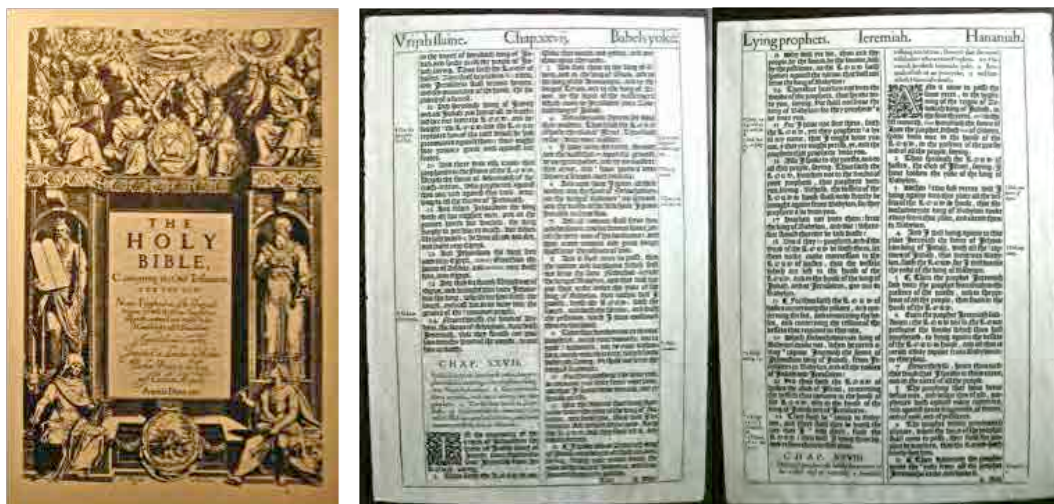
of beauty and elegance as well as the low and common. (154)

Literary critic Northrop Frye says it well, “The simplicity of the Bible is the simplicity of majesty, not of equality, much less of naïveté: its simplicity expresses the voice of authority” (154). Similar appreciations are enumerated by Ryken followed by an extensive display of literary influence from the sixteenth century to the present. This is very instructive and pure pleasure. But in the end, all of this is placed in the service of the Scripture as the Word of God. This is evident in the conclusion in which Ryken laments a threefold loss. The loss of a common English Bible has led to the loss of the Bible’s authority, which in turn has led to a decline in biblical literacy (230). So we must hold on to what is excellent about the KJV (231).

Further reading at the end of each chapter, as well as thorough general and Scripture indexes, make the book very accessible. End notes—a pet peeve of mine—at least have page ranges in the header.

## Conclusion

The importance of this anniversary, and the translation we are celebrating, for our ministries as church officers cannot be overstated. First, among the plethora of modern translations—forty-eight in



The title page with two pages from Jeremiah in the Gothic typeface of the first edition of the KJV. Photographs of the two pages from Jeremiah by Gregory E. Reynolds from his library.



the United States since the translation of the *Good News Bible* in 1966<sup>12</sup>—officers need to teach congregations what constitutes a good translation and why, demonstrating the weaknesses of the translation philosophy of dynamic equivalence and its “vulgar, trivial, and pedantic” progeny. “It would ... be good if those who have authority to translate a dead language could show understanding and appreciation of their own.”<sup>13</sup> Preachers, for their part, should learn the power of the oral structure, the rhythms, and cadences of the King James English, translated primarily to be read aloud in churches. The beachhead of the war on biblical illiteracy is first and foremost in the public reading and preaching of the Word of God. ❁

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12 Hitchens, “When the King Saved God,” 120.

13 T. S. Eliot, “A Scholar Finds the Beauty Rung Out of New English Bible’s Verses,” in D. G. Kehl, ed. *Literary Style of the Old Bible and the New* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 54, 57. Eliot is commenting on the *New English Bible*.

## Inspired with Errors: An Oxymoron

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by **Sidney D. Dyer**

*The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage*, by Andrew T. B. McGowan. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007, 229 pages, \$22.00, paper.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=274&issue\\_id=68](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=274&issue_id=68).

In reviewing this book, my primary concern is to safeguard the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture against those who, like Andrew McGowan, advocate infallibility without inerrancy. Therefore, I am compelled not merely to review his book, but to offer rebuttal. While Dr. McGowan offers some helpful material, nevertheless, the primary focus of his book requires a critical response.

McGowan’s introductory chapter makes it clear that he desires evangelicals to avoid criticism regarding their view of Scripture. He tells us that he had “gradually become concerned that some of the ways of defining and using Scripture within evangelicalism are open to serious criticism and could do us more harm than good if we continue to maintain them in their present form” and that “through a failure to engage with biblical scholarship, and sometimes through sheer obscurantist and anti-intellectual approaches, evangelicals have often damaged rather than helped the case for a high view of Scripture” (11). Critics will not stop criticizing us because we have modified any of our beliefs to please them. They will only stop criticizing us when we cease to be evangelical. So why should evangelicals be concerned about criticism coming from unbelieving biblical scholarship?

McGowan claims that “we should opt for the word ‘infallibility’ in lieu of the word ‘inerrancy’ ” (48). He presents his concept of infallibility, which is not particularly helpful, with these words, “The argument for ‘infallibility’ is that the final authority for the Christian is the authority of God speaking in and through his Word and that the Holy Spirit infallibly uses God’s Word to achieve all he intends to achieve” (49). In the first part of the statement he has God speaking infallibly in and through his Word while allowing that he spoke errors, slandering the character of God. The second part offers no support for his view. We agree that the Holy Spirit infallibly uses God’s Word, but he uses whatever he chooses to use infallibly. While we would not argue that any of our English translations are inerrant, we would argue that the Holy Spirit uses them infallibly as he chooses. Notice carefully that McGowan does not actually argue for the infallibility of the Scriptures themselves, but the Holy

Spirit's infallible use of the Scriptures, which leads into his refutation of inerrancy in chapter 4.

In that chapter, McGowan presents three points against inerrancy. The first involves the definition of inerrancy, arguing that since the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy used around twelve pages to define the term, "surely there must be a better word we can use?" (106). He adds, "Any word that requires so much definition, qualifications, affirmation and denial must surely have questions raised as to its value" (106). He is confusing the choice of a word and the choice of a concept. The concept is important, not the word used. Utilizing twelve pages to give a full understanding of the concept does not undermine the concept, nor the word used to represent the concept. Those twelve pages affirm the importance of the doctrine and the need for precision.

His second argument deals with the autographs. According to him, since inerrantists only apply inerrancy to the original autographs and at the same time recognize that "there are errors in the extant manuscripts and translations" (109), why insist that the originals could not contain errors? He actually gives the correct answer by quoting Greg Bahnsen to show that Bahnsen "insists that we must hold to inerrancy because God's veracity is at stake" (109). McGowan refuses to accept that his view impugns the character of God.

The third argument involves what he calls textual issues, "such as conflicts and contradictions" (112). He uses the old claim of scriptural contradiction by referring to the differences between Matthew's account of Jairus and his daughter (9:18) and those of Mark (5:23) and Luke (8:42). Matthew tells us that Jairus told Jesus that his daughter had just died, whereas Mark tells us that Jairus told Jesus she was at the point of death. Luke simply tells us that Jairus came to Jesus because his daughter was dying. Matthew has obviously given us an abbreviated record of the incident. Mark 5:35 and Luke 8:49 both record the message of those from Jairus's home that his daughter was dead. Matthew left this detail out because he chose to immediately introduce the death of the daughter into his account. Because

Matthew and Mark record Jairus's words to Jesus and each gave a different account of what he said regarding his daughter, it appears that Matthew put words in Jairus's mouth that he did not actually utter and we must conclude that we have a contradiction. This is to assume that Matthew and Mark intended to give us all that Jairus said to Jesus. Jairus did not know for sure the physical state of his daughter when he came to Jesus. He obviously left her alive, but by the time he got to Jesus, she could have already been dead. Thus, when Mark records that Jairus told Jesus that his daughter was about to die, Jairus had no way of knowing with any certainty that she was not in fact dead. Matthew may have given us one part of what Jairus said and Mark another. Jairus may have told Jesus that his daughter was about to die and added that she may have already died. We learn from Mark that Jairus pleaded with Jesus earnestly. Mark used the present tense for his plea, which indicates that he said much more to Jesus than has been recorded. There is even the possibility that Jairus in his desperate state said some things in Greek and other things in Aramaic. An excellent example that shows the Evangelists did not always give a full account regards the inscription over the cross. Matthew has, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (27:37); Mark, "the King of the Jews" (15:26); Luke, "This is the King of the Jews" (23:38); and John, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (19:19). The entire inscription undoubtedly read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Mark informs us that Jesus addressed the deceased child in Aramaic (5:41), which suggests Jairus most likely spoke to Jesus in Aramaic, even if not exclusively. This means that the difference between Matthew's account and that of Mark may also involve a matter of translation.

McGowan argues that inerrancy is not a biblical doctrine because it is an implication of a doctrine and not a doctrine itself (114). Should we apply his argument to the doctrines of the Trinity and infant baptism? Our Confession teaches that doctrine "by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture" (WCF 1. 6). Contrary to McGowan, the doctrine of inerrancy is



actually taught in Scripture. Proverbs 30:5 contains this statement, “Every word of God proves true.” The same truth is taught in Psalm 12:6, “The words of the LORD are pure words.” Paul tells us that God cannot lie in Titus 1:2.

McGowan begins on page 115 to argue that inerrancy is rationalistic and therefore not valid. He sets up a dichotomy between what he regards to be a rationalistic approach to Scripture and his preferred approach. Regarding the rationalistic approach he states, “To reduce the Scriptures to a set of ‘facts’ for the theologian, who must then ‘arrange and exhibit’ them, is to change the Scriptures from their true nature as the Word of God into something cold and clinical” (116). According to him, “This rationalistic approach, however well intended, actually undermines the authority of Scripture” (116). How does recognizing that the Bible contains propositional truths undermine its authority? Regarding his preferred approach, he states that “we must insist that the Scriptures are the Word of the living God who uses them to address us, save us, challenge us, teach us, encourage us, feed us, and much more” (116). I agree that we must insist on this, but I also affirm that the Scriptures contain facts. McGowan has fabricated a false dichotomy.

He claims that inerrancy “underestimates God and undermines the human authors” (118). His basic argument regarding how he sees inerrancy underestimating God is that it “assumes that God can only act in a way that conforms to our expectations, based on our human assessment of his character.” No, we base our assessment of God on his own revelation of his character. It is actually McGowan who is guilty of expectations of God based on his human assessment of God’s character. He is basing his expectations on the notion that God breathed out errors. On the same page, he sets forth his position regarding inspiration and human authors. He believes that when God breathed out the Scriptures using human authors, He “did not overrule their humanity” and that this explains the errors in Scripture. According to him, “this is not a problem because God, by his Holy Spirit, has ensured that the Scriptures in

their final canonical form are as he intended them to be and hence is able to use them to achieve his purpose.” He argues that since God uses preachers who are not inerrant nor kept by God from making mistakes, his position is valid. Preaching today, however, is not inspired. Consider these words, “The Scriptures are human documents, written by human beings, with all this entails. At the same time, however, these documents were ‘breathed out’ by God. We must hold these truths in tandem, not emphasizing one over against the other” (121). Paul did not teach this. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 he wrote, “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

McGowan’s fifth chapter is a defense of infallibility as an evangelical alternative to inerrancy. He uses James Orr and Herman Bavinck as representatives of his position. James Orr does represent McGowan’s position, but Herman Bavinck does not. McGowan claims that

aspects of Scripture that the inerrantists “explain away” pose no problem for Bavinck. He goes so far as to say “the guidance of the Holy Spirit promised to the church does not exclude the possibility of human error.” (158)

This quotation is from Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*<sup>2</sup> and is the only quotation from Bavinck that McGowan claims to show he was not an inerrantist. Bavinck is not referring to the doctrine of inspiration at all, but to the theology of the church! McGowan clearly regards Bavinck as his champion, even though Bavinck does not actually agree with him. In his summary of chapter 5, he presents five positive assessments of Bavinck’s doctrine of Scripture. The first of these begins with Bavinck’s stress on the infallibility rather than inerrancy of Scripture, which enables us to affirm a strong view of Scripture, without making any particular claims concerning hypothetical *autographa* that we do

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2 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 32.

not possess and have not seen (162).

Bavinck not only did not stress infallibility rather than inerrancy, he actually affirmed inerrancy when he wrote, “Scripture is true in everything.”<sup>3</sup>

McGowan has three more chapters in his book. Since these chapters have no significant part in his argumentation for infallibility, I will not deal with them.

Dr. McGowan’s argumentation is seriously flawed, and he has offered an unacceptable alternative to the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He argues that the Scriptures are God-breathed, but he believes God breathed out errors. His view impugns the character of our triune God and undermines the authority of Scripture. ❶

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 447.

## Between the Times

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by Donald J. Duff

*Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990*, by D. G. Hart. Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011, xi + 340 pages, \$10.

The early history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been fairly well covered by personal memoirs or by historians. Anyone interested in the question “Why the Orthodox Presbyterian

Church?” can find much in the way of an answer. After seventy-five years of existence the question is “What has the Orthodox Presbyterian Church become?” *Between the Times* seeks to give a partial answer to this question. It is a partial answer as it is the story of the church between 1945 and 1990. As the book says:

It attempts to examine in greater detail than any existing account the representative events, decisions, and efforts of the OPC from the rise of neoevangelicalism during the 1940s down to the debates over and fallout from Joining and Receiving with the Presbyterian Church in America during the 1980s. The book is also a partial answer in that it “looks primarily at the OPC through the lens of its main institutions (both formal and informal)—the General Assembly’s deliberations and activities, Westminster Seminary, and the *Presbyterian Guardian*. (8)

Of course, there are another twenty-one years of history of the church that are not covered. The period of the church’s history that is covered, however, is an important one.

*Between the Times* covers three periods in the life of the OPC from 1945 to 1990.<sup>2</sup> This first period covers up to around 1967 as the first generation continued the battle against liberalism, while at the same time engaged in establishing the new church. While this generation kept the best of Old Princeton and that branch of American Presbyterianism, it sought to combine this tradition with insights of Reformed traditions outside America, thus forming a unique church (30). This was a period during which the early faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary had a great influence in determining the nature of the new church. While Westminster was an independent institution, everyone recognized it was closely associated with the OPC. In fact, as Hart says, “To say the Orthodox Presbyterian Church could not exist without Westminster Seminary is an overstatement but not by

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=278&issue\\_id=69](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=278&issue_id=69).

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<sup>2</sup> Hart does not specifically designate these periods, but I think they are there in the book.

much” (121). Its professors were among the founders and subsequent OPC churchmen who served on all the important committees of the general assembly. They “constituted the first generation brain trust” (131). These men led the new church through many struggles in shaping a church “too Reformed for evangelicals, and too non-American for evangelical Presbyterians” (30). They did so early on by taking a stand against the fundamentalism of Carl McIntire and J. Oliver Buswell. They also led the charge against attempts by men such as Robert Strong in the Gordon Clark case and Edwin H. Rian with the Committee of Nine to broaden the message and methods of the church to meet the American church scene. The new church refused to join the American Council of Christian Churches or the National Association of Evangelicals but looked beyond American Protestantism to forming ecumenical ties with Reformed and Presbyterian churches outside the United States.

All the while the church was defining itself as it wrote a new hymnal and wrestled with the questions of Masonry and even Boy Scouts. During this time, the church kept up a militant attack on the modernism and neo-orthodoxy of the mainline Presbyterian Church. This came to a head when the UPCUSA was considering the Confession of 1967. A great deal of effort and money was spent in pointing out the direction the UPCUSA was heading and hoping that some would see the light and leave for the OPC. When the Confession of 1967 was adopted by the PCUSA, Hart says:

For three decades the OPC had defined itself over against the liberal church as part of a struggle for the legacy of American Presbyterianism; but now that the adversary against which it had struggled was no longer so, what would become of the OPC? (97)

Now the UPCUSA no longer pretended to be following the Westminster Standards and was a new kind of American Presbyterian Church. “Now the old frame of reference was gone—conservative verses liberal successors to American Presbyterianism” (97). From this point on the Orthodox Presby-

terian Church would not be spending much of its time on what was happening in the old church but was free to look to its own future.

The second period in the church’s history, which goes to around 1986, is the one in which the second generation of church leadership saw the battle with liberalism as essentially over and were willing to “consider innovative practices in church planting as well as formerly suspect ecumenical relationships as a way to grow numerically” (10). This is a period in which, to some extent, the OPC lost its way, even to the point of considering ceasing to exist by being swallowed up in another church.

In 1960, Robert S. Marsden, executive secretary of Westminster Theological Seminary, died at the age of fifty-five, and in 1962 “Ned B. Stonehouse, only sixty years old, died suddenly and ended a lifetime as a significant New Testament scholar and arguably the Orthodox Presbyterian Church statesman with the greatest stature in ecumenical circles” (139).<sup>3</sup> In 1968, E. J. Young died, also only sixty years old. John Murray retired in 1967 and Cornelius Van Til in 1972. “Within roughly a decade Westminster and the OPC had lost the wisdom, conviction, and scholarship of men who had defined both institutions. Obviously neither would be the same without them nor would the relationship between the seminary and the church” (139). In 1968, Edmund P. Clowney became the first president of the seminary. Under his leadership of the seminary, the changes that occurred in the 1960s at Westminster accelerated, with the seminary having less and less influence upon the church. The *Presbyterian Guardian*, which had been so important in the controversies and convictions that had brought the OPC into existence, and had been especially devoted to the seminary and the OPC, changed and ultimately ceased publication in 1979 (259). The church began to speak on social and political issues, such as abortion and race relations. The early influence

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<sup>3</sup> I was a student at Westminster and I remember the death of Dr. Stonehouse as a real blow to the seminary as he was one of the original faculty members.

of the Christian Reformed Church on the OPC waned, but, with the beginning of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973, there was a new, and for many, a very attractive player in the picture. The Christian Education Committee found a partner in the PCA in forming Great Commission Publications in 1975. That was also the year that the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) held its first meeting, as well as the year that the OPC and the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (RPCES) voted on a Plan of Union. Cooperation with other churches and merger talks were the big things as the OPC looked to others for help, increased size, and importance. In 1975, the OPC voted for the Plan of Union with the RPCES (95 to 42), but it was rejected by the RPCES. In 1981, the PCA, OPC, and RPCES voted on a joining and receiving invitation (J&R) from the PCA. The OPC (90 to 48) and RPCES accepted the invitation, but the PCA voted against receiving the OPC. Another J&R invitation was extended to the OPC in 1986, and this time the OPC voted against it (78 to 68).

The third period in the history of the OPC up to 1990 is one that overlaps the second period. This third period is one in which, as the OPC considered aligning with other conservative Presbyterian communions, the OPC became more interested in its past and what the church had stood for. Thus, “an effort to recover the OPC past was also responsible—not solely but substantially—for a shift within the church from a stance of flexibility and openness to one of greater caution and resolve. The study of the OPC’s past prompted this change because historical study revealed an Orthodox Presbyterianism that was more than simply conservative in opposition to liberalism. The OPC also represented a historically Reformed witness that took seriously Presbyterianism’s theology, polity, and worship” (30).

As early as 1966, the possibility of union with the RPCES had been suggested, and for twenty years there were efforts at mergers, first with the RPCES and then with the PCA. As Hart points out, “conversations between the OPC and the RPCES did have the unintended effect of promoting

greater awareness within the OPC of the Church’s history” (298). This interest was greatly accelerated when Charles G. Dennison became the historian of the OPC in 1981. His

efforts as the OPC was turning fifty did raise an interest, neglected perhaps for the better part of two decades, in the church’s founding and historical development. Over the lectures, essays, and books produced for the semicentennial was this important question: what did the founding of the OPC mean for the church fifty years later? Were the battles that contributed to the early stance of the OPC simply part of a particular time and place or did they create a tradition of belief and practice that contemporary Orthodox Presbyterians need to perpetuate to be faithful to their forebears? (305)

By 1986, the church which had twice voted to dissolve had regained a sense of who it was and was ready to answer this question by voting to continue as a church distinct from other American Presbyterian expressions. Not everyone agreed with the decision. Thirty-eight commissioners signed a protest against the decision concerning J&R in 1986. In the four years after 1986, there was a voluntary realignment as congregations left the OPC for the PCA.

Hart’s contention is that by 1990

the OPC had become exactly what its founders had hoped—a disciplined Presbyterian communion that carried out its mission of proclaiming the good news through the biblically prescribed means of Presbyterian polity and discipline. (320)

The commitment of the OPC to biblical Presbyterianism was a source of frustration to the Bible Presbyterians in the 1930s, to the neoevangelicals in the 1940s, and, for some, in the late 1980s, who felt compelled to leave for better, friendlier, or less restrictive expressions of American Presbyterianism (218). It was a church which, having gone through a series of merger talks with other Presbyterian bodies, came to recognize itself as a unique Presby-

terian church in America with a specific reason for its continued existence as a separate church among the varieties of American Presbyterianism.

The church that almost voted itself out of existence at its fiftieth anniversary has now celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. In looking over the developments in American Presbyterianism of the past twenty-five years, there is reason for thankfulness for the vote in 1986 and the continued existence of the OPC. To a large degree the church has built on its heritage and continued to remain faithful to its founding principles. Today, in the American Presbyterian church scene, there is even more reason to be thankful for the existence of a church such as the OPC.

This does not mean that the OPC can boast in anything other than the fact that the Lord has raised up this church and made it what it is. At one point in its history, the church seemed to have somewhat lost its way. It will only be by his grace that it will remember its history and the lessons it has learned and will not be tempted by the many forces which would pull it away from its calling. The OPC must always walk on a tight edge. It must be narrow in matters of Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian polity but it must also be broad minded in those things which make for true Christian liberty. It must not relax its Reformed stand to broaden its appeal, but it must also not become so ideological as to unnecessarily give offense to others.

Perhaps one of the strengths of the OPC is that its ministers have continued to come from all kinds of backgrounds, thus bringing in new blood. At the same time this will be a great weakness unless these ministers read books like *Between the Times* and other books put out by the Committee for the Historian so that they are acquainted with the history of the church and what has shaped the nature of the church.<sup>4</sup> As Hart says at the end of the book:

The history and identity of the OPC are bound up with each other; they cannot be sep-

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4 I say other books as, for instance, Hart does not mention the Peniel controversy in this book.

arated. The OPC's history looks different from that of other Presbyterian churches because of its understanding of Reformed Christianity. At the same time Orthodox Presbyterianism arose from specific struggles and traditions within Presbyterianism in the United States. When the OPC has been most aware of its history she has been most keen to preserve her Reformed heritage, and when she has been most zealous for what Machen called the grandeur of the Reformed faith she has been most attentive to her history. If the OPC is going to maintain her strength as a Reformed communion, or if her officers and members decide to refashion or modify her identity, they will need first to consider the church's past. Without that history Orthodox Presbyterianism makes no sense. (328) ☺

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## Fractured Light 日本画

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**by Gregory E. Reynolds**

*River Grace*, by Makoto Fujimura. New York: Poiema Press: International Arts Movement, 2007, 22 pages, \$27.00.

*Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture*, by Makoto Fujimura. Colorado Springs, CO: Nav-Press, 2009, 175 pages, \$24.95, paper.

I still remember the thrill as a very young Christian, converted out of the counterculture in 1971,

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=281&issue\\_id=69](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=281&issue_id=69).



having been raised around creativity in the form of drawing, painting, poetry, and architecture, of discovering that there were serious Christians involved in the arts. My mother collected all things Japanese and Chinese, brush paintings, cinnabar boxes, and jade jewelry. She loved the profound simplicity and spare beauty of Haiku poetry, Japanese tea rooms, and brush painting. Later in life she would study Japanese brush painting and obtain her own Chinese chop, or block print signature, a lovely orange red ideogram. So it made perfect sense that Frank Lloyd Wright should be the architect to emulate in our house. She designed and built houses to prove it. Several years after my mother became a Christian, Edith Schaeffer's *Hidden Art* helped rescue her from the cultural suffocation of her fundamentalist church, dear as the members were in so many other ways.

Francis Schaeffer's *Art in the Bible* was of similar help to me, because he took art seriously (even though I have come to doubt aspects of Schaeffer's worldview approach). For Schaeffer the legitimacy of artistic endeavor had to come from the Bible, rather than from common culture, as the Bible itself teaches was the case for Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain (Gen. 4:20–22). Examples of artistry in the Bible, such as the tabernacle and temple, or literary structures, like the poetry, are all shared with the common culture. The Holy Spirit simply put these to sacred use. These common temporal blessings of God are no less the work of the Spirit than the eternal redemptive blessings he pours out on God's people.

The weakness in Schaeffer's view of art resides in his failure to appreciate the common grace gifts of the Spirit in common culture. A lack of faith is not the only ingredient in the creativity of unbelievers, although unbelief sometimes expresses itself in ugly and even reprehensible ways. True beauty may be created by the non-Christian artist or poet made in God's image. General revelation is no less God's revelation.

Like Schaeffer, Fujimura self-consciously reflects on art through the lens of his Christianity—as well he should. However, Fujimura also recognizes (*Refractions*, 23, Rin subsequent notes;

*River Grace*, 8, RG in subsequent notes) the brilliant insight of the artistry of his unbelieving Nihonga master Matazo Kayama-sensei (1927–2004) (R, 21), as well as many other modern western artists, like Mark Rothko (RG, 3).

*River Grace* is an elegant, concise, reflective memoir of Makoto Fujimura's development as an artist. He was born in Boston in 1960 and raised in Japan. After graduating with an undergraduate degree from Bucknell University in 1983, he received an MFA from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1989. As a bicultural person he was the first outsider to be invited to study in the prestigious traditional Japanese Painting Doctorate program, in which he was trained for six and a half years in the highly disciplined tradition of Nihonga (literally “Japan-painting” 日本画 14th century), which is described in detail in this volume (RG, 2–3, 18). Nihonga is a thousand year old Japanese tradition in which pigments are handmade from minerals and precious metals and a sumi ink is made from pine tar (RG, 2–3). These pigments and ink are applied to silk or handmade paper (RG, 18). “Nihonga materials create a cacophony of sensuality and extravagance. They are an ideal medium for capturing the expansive vision of the world centered by God” (RG, 4).

In *River Grace*, Fujimura reflects on his own idolatrous view of art before his conversion. This is helpful spiritually, but perhaps not in terms of the quality of his art, in which common grace is the formative influence under God's providence. He was already enormously talented; and it was this gift that enabled him to be considered for advanced training in Nihonga. Certainly his conversion altered the subject matter and motivation for his work. This made all the difference for him as a man, surrendering his artistic gifts to the lordship of Christ.

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*Refractions* includes twenty-three essays in an ongoing series of essays reflecting on Fujimura's journey of faith, art, and culture. The continuation of the written pilgrimage can be viewed at his personal website [www.makotofujimura.com](http://www.makotofujimura.com).



My copy of *Refractions* came slightly bent at the spine—as if it were fractured, a fitting image of Fujimura’s philosophy of art. But, as I turned the pages, slowly the dent in the gutter disappeared, a little more with each turned page. Refractions—yes, splintered light ushers in healing. This is a major theme of Christian artist-author Makoto Fujimura.

Reflecting on the empty areas of space on the canvas, known as “yohaku,” Fujimura explains:

I am interested in creating ambivalent visual space between the two (ambiguity and depth)... Grace, it should be grace that exists between the immanent reality of earth and the transcendent reality of heaven. (RG, 3)

The spare beauty of Japanese Nihonga painting and the essays of Fujimura may also serve as a model for preachers. Spare verbal beauty is a perfect medium for the gospel. Psalms read aloud from the KJV or ESV will impress preachers with verbal economy and rhythm, using silence like the empty space in Nihonga paintings.

Fujimura has worked tirelessly to integrate his art with his faith, but also with other artists around him and throughout the world. While the International Arts Movement he founded in 1990 may be far too optimistic in its quest to change the world through art, Fujimura is to be commended for reaching out to a wide range of Christians and non-Christians. His TriBeca Temporary project after 9/11, discussed in chapter V, “The Disintegration Loops: The September 11th Issue” (R, 37–40), sought to bring healing to his neighborhood near Ground Zero. Chapter VIII, “L.I.B.E.S.K.I.N.D.,” movingly amplifies this neighborhood involvement (R, 65–72). His involvement in the world of art is a wonderful example of how Christians ought to bear witness to the gospel by sharing in common endeavors with unbelievers, and making a genuine contribution to those endeavors.

Fujimura is also an expert and articulate interpreter of art. His understanding of historic Christianity lends a unique depth to his insights. I was especially surprised and enlightened by his chapter “A Visual River of Gold” (R, 91–102) on Christo

and Jean-Claude’s *Gates* installation at Central Park in 2005. He helped me appreciate two artists whom I had never really understood. The most impressive interpretive essay is Chapter XXII, “Come and See: Leonardo da Vinci’s Philip in *The Last Supper*” (R, 147–56)—a tour de force apologia for the value of viewing original artwork.

As a painter Fujimura’s integration of eastern and western painting traditions is a work of true genius. Anyone who labors under the illusion that abstract painting is a sham or simply the fruit of the chaotic worldview of unbelievers (such as in Jackson Pollock) will be disabused of such a notion if he takes Fujimura seriously. It is also important to remember that appreciation of anything fine requires reflection, experience, and training. The cry for accessibility is often a feeble excuse for laziness, inured by our saturation in the instant gratification of our image-ridden world. Advertising thrives on instant recognition, rather than subtlety, depth, and ambiguity. Fujimura explains his medium in this way:

In watercolor, the light is reflected from the paper underneath. In oil and acrylic, light is basically reflected from the surface of the paint. But the Nihonga materials allow both, as they are semi-opaque and uniquely suited for ambiguity and depth. (RG, 3)

Both books are, as one would expect, works of art. Binding, graphics, typography—all conjoin to please the eye. Anyone with an ounce of artistic instinct, visual, spoken, or written, will find these slim volumes endlessly stimulating. Officers aware of artistic talents and aspirations in their congregations could not do better than to recommend these books.<sup>2</sup> 📖

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2 Fujimura exhibits at the Dillon Gallery in New York City ([www.dillongallery.com](http://www.dillongallery.com)).

# McLuhan 100: A McLuhanesque Biography

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!* by Douglas Coupland. New York: Atlas, 2010, 216 pages, \$24.00.

Written in the style of a McLuhanesque collage or mosaic, while at the same time in biographically chronological order, Douglas Coupland's tribute, I think, would have been appreciated by Marshall McLuhan. It captures a great deal of the man, his life, and his thought. Coupland is the author of a dozen novels and a visual artist, thus sharing many of the sensibilities that colored McLuhan's unusual and brilliant career. He mimics the 1967 hit *The Medium Is the Massage*<sup>2</sup> and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*,<sup>3</sup> a 279-page continuous text with only three clever interval markers, based on keyboard commands ...return / ...command ...shift / ...escape ...control. So, predictably, there is no index.

McLuhan was truly anomalous, considered a media devotee in the sixties, while despising electronic media. He did not own a TV or a car, attended mass daily, and yet in the sixties was on the cutting edge of cultural change. How can we explain such a man? Woody Allen famously includes McLuhan in a cameo appearance in his 1977 film *Annie Hall*. In it, McLuhan tells a Columbia professor who teaches a course in "TV, Media, and Culture": "You know nothing of my work. You mean my whole fallacy is wrong. How you got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing." Hence, the subtitle of Coupland's

biography. Remarkably, I was able to find this on YouTube almost instantly. And, McLuhan foresaw this almost half a century before it happened. Did you catch the irony of McLuhan's retort, "you mean my whole fallacy is wrong"? Herein lies his genius, the brilliance of his probes and puns. The photographic montage, *The Medium Is the Massage*, ends tellingly with an Alan Dunn cartoon from *The New Yorker Magazine* (1966), in a library. That is where McLuhan's media criticism began.

## Marshaling the Tools

McLuhan's mother, Elsie, was a cosmopolitan with a dramatic flair and an "emotional yo-yo," while his father was easy going and erudite (24–25); both were autodidacts (30). While Marshall struggled with his early education, he was a "born debating machine, able to demolish pretty much anyone in his orbit" (29, 36). He loved serious subjects, especially "English literature, history, and theology," and went on to graduate with a BA in liberal arts from the University of Manitoba (31).

While disliking the modern world, McLuhan "hungered for a framework to make sense of the modern world" (38). It was at Cambridge University, after a trying and unsatisfying attempt at teaching in Canada, that he came into his own intellectually. He discovered a kind of soul mate in the writings of G. K. Chesterton and learned a new form of literary criticism known as the New Criticism, which focused on the verbal structure, rather than the social and authorial background, of texts (42–45). It is here that McLuhan developed his already keen ability at pattern recognition. Professor F. R. Leavis was the first to encourage McLuhan to apply this skill to the real world (44). After achieving only second class honors at Cambridge for his second BA, he took a position at the University of Wisconsin as a teaching assistant (57). A year later, after his conversion to Catholicism, he took a position as full instructor at Saint Louis University, completing his Cambridge doctoral thesis in 1939 after a year of study in the UK (he received his D.Phil. in 1943). Finally after a brief and unhappy stint at Windsor's Assumption College, McLuhan

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=284&issue\\_id=70](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=284&issue_id=70).

2 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).

3 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

ended up at his final academic institution, St. Michael's, the Catholic college at the University of Toronto (215).

McLuhan's doctoral thesis was on the sixteenth-century English satirist, rhetorician, and critic Thomas Nashe (68). It was through the, what might at first blush seem unlikely, study of the history of rhetoric that McLuhan eventually launched into a career in media criticism (74). His study of the ways in which rhetoric effected civilizations transformed into the study of the ways in which all communication media influence human consciousness and culture.

### Making the Tools Speak

McLuhan sought to shock us into an awareness of our environment. Two of his main ideas have become clichés that have branded McLuhan: “the global village” and “the medium is the message” (12–13). But long before this, his broad cultural criticism began in the area of advertising and the mass culture it promotes. During the 1940s, several influences gave further direction to McLuhan's analytical instincts. The Swiss architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, author of *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (1941), and *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), “gave McLuhan intellectual permission to study not just novels, films, and poems, but *everything*” (95–96).

Then there was Harold Innes, who became McLuhan's colleague in 1946, when McLuhan went to Toronto. Innes's studies of the Canadian fur trade and railroad led him to understand how transportation technologies alter human communities. Before his untimely death in 1952, he concluded that print and radio “reorder human notions of time and space” (102). Coupland also discusses the influences of Wyndham Lewis, Hugh Kenner, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce, to name a few. Especially important is the mark made by James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) on McLuhan's understanding of the effects of electronic media on human consciousness and culture, a “harmful disruption of the balance of senses used

in daily life” (109–10).

He noticed that “the strategies used to promote tyrants were being used to promote laundry soap” (78). This resulted in the ground-breaking analysis of his first book, *The Mechanical Bride*, in 1951 (110–15). The book represents the last time McLuhan would emphasize content. Henceforth, the medium is the message.

In 1953, McLuhan and colleague Ted Carpenter received a generous grant from the Behavioral Science division of the Ford Foundation. The resulting seminars were a huge success due to the American postwar interest in “renegotiating its relationship with technology” (119). The foundations for notoriety were being laid.

McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) catapulted him into celebrity status in the 1960s by demonstrating “how a given medium shapes the environment in which it operates ... how various media shift our brains' focus between visual and acoustic space” (120–21).

Because McLuhan now took the stance of a descriptive observer of media, rather than a critic of its content, the people thought he was a cheerleader for the new media (122). He really thought of himself as “an artist ... on the frontiers of perception” (123), an idea promulgated by Ezra Pound. Like the fishermen in Edgar Allan Poe's “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841), to survive the ocean vortex one must observe the patterns of its forces and act accordingly. Hidden in this uncharted sea of McLuhan's words (and leaving the false impression of uncritical enthusiasm about the electronic environment) are these startling, but almost entirely ignored, words: “Far from belittling the Gutenberg mechanical culture, it seems to me that we must work to retain its achieved values” (140).<sup>4</sup>

At the apex of his popularity, the University of Toronto allowed McLuhan to establish the Centre for Culture and Technology in 1963 (144). Then, just as the counterculture exploded onto the scene, he published *Understanding Media: The Exten-*

4 McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 135.

sions of Man in 1964. In it he explored the sensory manipulation of electronic media in a more clearly organized way (146).<sup>5</sup> Now came the concept of the “global village” made possible by media transcendence over space and time, “retribalizing” modern man (148); and the catch phrase “the medium is the message.” Again, while thinking he approved of the global village, the public missed his real attitude, “When people get close to each other, they get more and more savage, impatient with each other ... the global village is a place of very arduous interfaces and abrasive situations” (163).

He made the cover of *Time* magazine (151). By the time he published *The Medium Is the Massage* in 1967, the cliché had become common cultural lingo, so McLuhan punned off of his own cliché (156). In that same year he was named the Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities at Fordham University (156). But, in the same year, he had brain surgery to remove a tumor (he had a stroke in 1960) that proved a turning point, reducing his mental powers (158–59).

Coupland only briefly covers one of the more helpful concepts in McLuhan’s thought. The electronic environment tends to disincarnate man. McLuhan was vehemently anti-gnostic. Electronic media tends to disconnect people from their bodies and the global village tends toward a loss of identity (176–77). McLuhan’s anthropology is rooted in conservative Thomistic theology, a fact Coupland almost totally ignores. For this reason McLuhan cannot, as he often is, be categorized as a technological determinist. He believed that man as *imago dei* can choose to resist the worst tendencies of the modern world. “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening.”<sup>6</sup> While Coupland understands that McLuhan is not a determinist, he doesn’t know why.

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5 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964).

6 Gregory Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 169.

Call it religion or call it optimism, but hope, for Marshall, lay in the fact that humans are social creatures first, and that our ability to express intelligence and build civilizations stems from our inherent social needs as individuals. (165)

One of my chief quarrels with this otherwise excellent biography is that Coupland does not pay enough attention to the religious dimension of McLuhan’s thought, although he does report that all of the McLuhan family “agreed to some extent on Christianity’s larger strokes” (32), and that he had early influences from Methodist and Baptist churches. In his mid-1930s, he converted to a highbrow brand of Catholicism while at Cambridge University. Coupland comes closest to the truth on this subject when he observes:

To him, Protestant-themed religions meant cheap houses, billboards, spraying dirt ditches with pesticides for thirty cents an hour—plus the absence of most forms of high culture. Catholicism offered Rome! History! Art! Beauty! Ritual! But most of all, it allowed Marshall a spot to park his overpowering need for a viewpoint that could explain, or perhaps heal, the stress and disjointedness he saw in the world. (46)

McLuhan himself claimed that his Christianity was at the center of his media ecology.

That McLuhan’s religious convictions were essential to his Media Ecology is clear from his own correspondence. In a 1973 letter to Allen Maruyama McLuhan observed: “At one time, when I was first becoming interested in the Catholic Church, I studied the entire work of G. K. Chesterton and the entire group from the pre-Raphaelites and Cardinal Newman through to Christopher Dawson and Eric Gill. *All of this really is involved in my media study, but doesn’t appear at all.*” To Joe Keogh he wrote in 1970: “Am enclosing Father Johnstone’s piece. He’s the first to notice that my approach to media is metaphysical rather than

sociological or dialectical.<sup>77</sup>

That “Christ is the medium and the message” is a precept only “visible to babes, but not to sophisticates.”<sup>78</sup> McLuhan declared: “Christianity proclaims its communication theory loud and clear. Every aspect of the Christian thing is communication and change and transformation.”<sup>79</sup>

Coupland also spends a bit too much time speculating about the possibility of a mild autism explaining some of McLuhan’s eccentricities (48–55). The speculation appears as a thread throughout the narrative.

### How Does McLuhan Speak to Us Today?

Coupland sums up Marshall’s thought nicely when he interprets it thus,

Although he never phrased it as such, it was the irreconcilability of the world with the afterworld that generated the contradictions that defined much of Marshall’s career. On the one hand, technology was a bauble played within the mortal coil. It was not worthy of the respect accorded religion. On the other hand, it was a transformative agent for the mind and for society. (47)

Just as McLuhan sought to shock his readers and hearers into an awareness of our environment, preachers must seek to awaken people to the environment, not just of modernity, but of the world as it is since the fall of Adam. The electronic environment tends to weave a subtle, but enslaving web around us, slowly, silently cutting us off from

the possibility of taking flight to another world. “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.... So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (Eph. 5:14; 1 Thess. 5:6). ☺

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7 Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 165, quoting W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding, A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 75, emphasis added, cf. fn. 373.

8 Ibid., quoting Hubert Hoskins, “Electric Consciousness and the Church,” in George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald, eds., *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, Inc., 1989), 162. For an analysis of McLuhan’s thought see Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 108–20; 161–70.

9 Marshall McLuhan, *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, eds. M. Molinaro, C. McLuhan, and W. Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987) 467–68 (letter to Barbara Ward, February 9, 1973).

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1. *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.
2. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
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