

# Ordained Servant

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Greenfield Covenant Church, Greenfield, New Hampshire / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

A Journal  
for  
Church  
Officers

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# Ordained Servant

A Journal for Church Officers

VOLUME 21, 2012

# *Ordained Servant*

## A Journal for Church Officers

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**Editor:** Gregory Edward Reynolds • 827 Chestnut Street • Manchester, NH 03104

**Telephone:** 603-668-3069 • **Electronic mail:** reynolds.1@opc.org

**Website:** [www.opc.org/os.html](http://www.opc.org/os.html)

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# Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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*Dedicated to John Patton Galbraith*

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# ✦ From the Editor

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

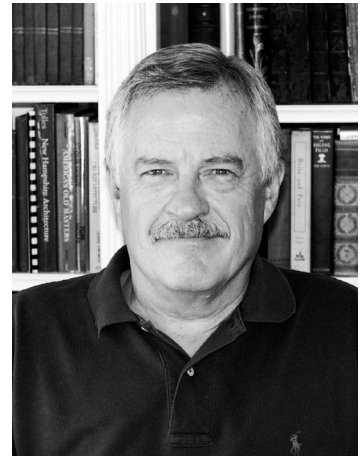
I have dedicated this annual edition to one of my favorite churchmen, and a model of Christian leadership, John Patton Galbraith. His care for doing things decently and in order has helped discipline several generations of ministers to be better Presbyterians. His presence of mind on the floor of general assemblies has kept more than one debate on track. His love for Christ and his church has been exemplified in the many arenas in which he has served.

The cover photo is of Greenfield Covenant Church in Greenfield, New Hampshire. It was founded in 1791 with twenty-eight members as the Church of Christ in Greenfield. New England is famous for having similar churches in each little town. These churches, closely associated with the life of the entire population, were essentially Reformed in theology and connected regionally with something like a Presbyterian polity. Today few of these churches have orthodox beliefs, but there are exceptions, one of which was featured on our cover in 2010 (vol. 19): Limington Congregational Church, which is now Limington Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

It is my prayer that the pages of *Ordained Servant* will be used by our Lord to encourage, instruct, and motivate ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons to serve tirelessly to build the church throughout our world, however slim our resources, by trusting in the grace, power, and wisdom of the Lord of the harvest, who has promised to be with his church to the end of the age.

This year I have continued to print almost 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, Alan Strange, 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

## A Tribute: The Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2012<sup>1</sup>

by William Shishko

Those who are planted in the house of the LORD  
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
They shall still bear fruit in old age;  
They shall be fresh and flourishing,  
To declare that the LORD is upright;  
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in  
Him.  
(Psalm 92:13–15 NKJV)

God willing, on March 10, 2013, the Rev. John Galbraith will celebrate his one hundredth birthday. How fitting that this will be a Sunday. On this day in which the church gathers to worship God and celebrate Christ's conquest of death, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's oldest living minister will once again enter into the activity he loves the best: the praise of the Lord who is building his church!

Of all of my prized associations with men and women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, none is prized more than my association with John Galbraith. To me and to so many others, he is Mr. OPC. I am honored to have been asked to write this tribute to Mr. Galbraith—minister, husband, father (and grandfather and great grandfather!), church statesman, man of God, and (as he would

point out first) sinner saved by grace.

While John Galbraith is a product of America, his covenant lineage is Presbyterian. His four grandparents and both of his parents were of solid Irish Presbyterian stock. Both his father's and his mother's parents settled in Philadelphia, a Presbyterian center, when they moved to the USA from Ireland. His parents-to-be met at Oak Lane United Presbyterian Church, a congregation that gathered a little south of Jenkintown. The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms were important in that congregation (portions of the Larger Catechism as well as the Shorter Catechism were memorized as part of that church's life).

Following their marriage, John's parents settled in suburban Philadelphia, where they attended the United Presbyterian Church in Wyn-cote. John was born in 1913. During his youth he learned of the controversy at Princeton Seminary in nearby New Jersey. The name of J. Gresham Machen was familiar to him in his teenage years. The reorganization of Princeton Seminary and the subsequent founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929 occurred during John's junior year of high school.

After his graduation in 1930, John attended a United Presbyterian school, Muskingum College in New Concord, Ohio. (At that time, John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth, was a nine-year-old boy in New Concord. He, too, would later attend and graduate from Muskingum College.) While his plan was to be a lawyer, that aspiration would be changed very quickly. During a spiritual emphasis week in his freshman year at the college, John sensed a call to the Christian ministry. Majoring in English, minoring in Bible, and switching from advanced classes in Latin to advanced classes in Greek, John pursued his studies avidly through his graduation in 1934. During that time he was a member of a college club out of which many pursued the Christian ministry. He also faithfully attended a local United Presbyterian Church.

Given his family's interest in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and his familiarity with J. Gresham Machen, it was inevitable that John Galbraith would attend Westminster Theological

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=324&issue\\_id=78](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=324&issue_id=78).



Seminary. In the sixth year of the seminary's life, 1934, John entered Westminster. He was not disappointed with his choice, or with the experience of those years. For John, the school's greatest strength was its faculty. Cornelius Van Til (whose outspoken zeal and passion particularly influenced John), R. B. Kuiper (whose preaching skills left a lasting influence), and J. Gresham Machen himself were among his professors. While Robert Dick Wilson had died the year before John entered seminary, he was still privileged to have learned from Oswald T. Allis, Ned Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, Allan MacRae, and the newest faculty member, John Murray, who joined the faculty the same year in which John entered Westminster as a student.

John remembers the controversies that swirled around the seminary in his final year, 1936–37. Premillennialism (the eschatological view held by Professor MacRae), the desire for conservative Presbyterians to be more generally evangelical in their expressions of faith (a view also espoused by Professor MacRae), and the toleration of dispensationalism (a view held by none of the professors at Westminster) were all hot topics of discussion in that turbulent period. Throughout the first three of his four seminary years, John attended Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia—a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. But that would change in June 1936.

On the afternoon of June 11, 1936, seminarian John Galbraith gathered with 139 other deeply concerned Presbyterians in the auditorium of the New Century Club, at 124 South Twelfth Street, Philadelphia. Not only did he witness the beginning of what would become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but he was also among those who stood up, indicating his desire to be part of that faithful “true spiritual succession” of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. (His name, together with two other Galbraiths, is listed among the “laity” on page five of the minutes of the First General Assembly of what was then called the Presbyterian Church of America. John is fond of saying that there were more Galbraiths at that founding assembly than any other family group!) He promptly took up membership in Calvary PCA, German-

town, Pennsylvania—what is now Calvary OPC, Glenside.

On May 25, 1937, following his graduation from Westminster Seminary, John was ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. His first call was to the Gethsemane congregation, a body in southwest Philadelphia that had left the Presbyterian Church in the USA to become part of the then Presbyterian Church of America. He served there until 1940, when he was called to Grace OPC in Westfield, New Jersey, a church founded by Donald Graham, a Westminster classmate of John's, who had been ordained three days after him in the Presbytery of New Jersey. Two years later, he would be called to the OPC in Kirkwood, Pennsylvania, where he served as pastor until 1948. It was in that period that John would become more fully acquainted with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a whole. In 1940 and 1941 he served as stated clerk of the general assembly of the OPC. From 1941 through 1948 he served on the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) of the OPC. From 1944 to 1945 he served on the Committee to Draw Up Standing Rules for the OPC. God was preparing John Galbraith for a long lifetime of service to the church body of which he was a part from the day of its birth.

In October 1948, John Galbraith was called to serve as general secretary of both the OPC Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension and the OPC Committee on Foreign Missions. He would serve as general secretary of both committees until 1961. In that year he became the first full-time general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions. He would serve in that role through 1978. During those thirty years, he was also an active participant on several of the committees that would help form the distinctive character of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church: the Committee on Secret Societies (1946–50); the Committee on Union with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (1946–49); the Committee on Revisions to the Form of Government (1948–77); and the Committee on Christian Education (1957–96), for which he also served as



chairman from 1955–56.

In what could be considered a metaphor for the demanding years of service John Galbraith rendered so selflessly for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, one of his first challenging duties was to visit the family of young OPC missionary Florence Handyside, following her sudden death after a very brief period of service in Korea. John drove to Rochester, New York, in a raging snowstorm, in order to minister comfort to the grieving family. Though he was now in an administrative position, he did not lose the pastor’s heart that still marks his ministerial life.

At the top of John’s recollections of those middle years of the life of the now seventy-six-year-old Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the “commitment to the OPC cause” that marked all of the standing committees of the OPC. “We all agreed on what we would present (to the church), and we would present it!” It was John’s idea to have an annual Thank Offering for the work of the Committees on Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and Christian Education. The OPC was hardly a wealthy church. The Thank Offering to this day is a vehicle by which those committed to the work of the OPC can express their thanks for that work and give to see it continued and expanded.

According to John Galbraith, challenges in the arena of the nations during the middle part of the twentieth century brought challenges, as well, to the OPC. It was during the General Assembly of 1949 that he was on the phone with foreign missionaries Egbert Andrews and Richard Gaffin, as Communists led by Mao Tse-tung began their march to conquer China. The decision was made to relocate our missionary labors to the island of Taiwan. Likewise, though missionary Clarence Duff desired to return to Ethiopia toward the end of World War II, at the invitation and urging of the British government the OPC began its labors in Eritrea. As general secretary of both foreign and home missions, John Galbraith learned many times that “the mind of a man proposes, but the Lord disposes” all things.

A highlight of any Orthodox Presbyterian minister’s life is to be granted the honor of serving

as moderator of the general assembly—a position that, by OPC tradition, is accorded to a man only once. That honor was accorded to John Galbraith at the Fourteenth General Assembly, which met at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin in May 1947. John Galbraith, Floyd Hamilton (who had served as the first-full time general secretary of Christian education since 1943), and Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary were all nominated to be moderator of the assembly. Professor Murray asked that his name be withdrawn. In what would be a harbinger of things to come in that turbulent assembly, John Galbraith was elected over Hamilton—a man viewed by many of the commissioners as desiring an unwelcome “broad church” character for the OPC.

It was during that assembly (after which many of those who favored a broad evangelical course for the OPC left the church), that John Galbraith made his mark as the ecclesiastical statesman he would become. A heated floor debate had ensued between Minister Clifford Smith and Dr. R. B. Kuiper, who was and continues to be revered by John Galbraith. That deep personal respect (and, no doubt, the sympathies he had with Kuiper’s position) did not prevent moderator Galbraith from gaveling down the heated debaters. As moderator, he did his duty and told them both to apologize for their conduct on the floor. They did. And John Galbraith established his reputation as a man governed by principle rather than by personality—something that has made an inestimable impact on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

With his “retirement” as general secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions in 1978 it was as if then sixty-five-year-old John Galbraith began a new chapter in his life as an Orthodox Presbyterian minister. While he no longer had the challenging responsibilities of general secretary, the general assembly of the OPC would not let his experience, gifts, and wisdom lie fallow. Among other duties, he would serve on the OPC Committee on Pensions (a committee position to which he was elected beginning in 1964) until 1996 (a remarkable tenure of thirty-two years!), the Committee on OPC Involvement in the Center for Urban

Theological Training from 1980–81, the Committee on Methods of Worldwide Outreach from 1982–84, and the Committee on Ministerial Training from 1990–2005. He had previously served on that committee from 1969–75, and also, in 1966, on a Special Committee to Study the Oversight of Ministerial Candidates. To this day the training of men for ministry in the OPC remains one of his great concerns and interests.

John Galbraith's decades of experience with international matters in the sphere of foreign missions would also be put to ample use in his years of service to various aspects of the OPC's ecumenical labors. From 1971–2002 he served on the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (for which he served as chairman from 1980–1984); and from 1964 through 1996 (again, another amazing tenure of over thirty years!) he served as the OPC's missions correspondent to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), and he also served as a delegate to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in the years 1963, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984. He was given the honor of serving as second clerk to the RES from 1968–72, first clerk from 1972–76, and moderator of the RES from 1976–80, 1980–84, and 1984–88. During this time he served on the OPC's Committee on RES Matters (1973–88), a committee he chaired from 1973–74, and 1980–88.

Ecumenicity on the national level also occupied his attention as he served on the Committee to Confer with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) from 1967–73, and as chairman of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) from 1976–77 and 1984–85. From Mr. Galbraith dozens of Reformed and Presbyterian church bodies from around the world learned of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It was fitting that John Galbraith authored the article "The Ecumenical Vision of the OPC" for the semi-centennial volume of essays in honor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *Pressing Toward the Mark*, published in 1986.

All of this emphasis on John Galbraith's remarkable years of service to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church should not eclipse his life as a faithful

husband and father. He was married to Ada Mae Kievitt on October 17, 1941, when he was serving as the young pastor of Grace OPC, Westfield, New Jersey. He and Ada would be blessed with fifty-two years of marriage and two daughters, Priscilla and Suzanne. His engagement and married life were windows on the Christian (and very Presbyterian!) character of John Galbraith. The car and the wedding rings had to be paid for before their marriage!

Any hard working married minister battles with fulfilling the many-faceted duties of his particular ministerial call, while, at the same time, fulfilling his role as a husband and (when there are children) a father. Given his duties as general secretary of both the OPC Committees on Home Missions and Foreign Missions, John Galbraith was often away from home. Ada, ever the helper suitable to her husband's needs, not only fulfilled home responsibilities while John was away, but also assisted with office duties connected with her husband's work. Later she would manage her own real estate business—which enabled her to find many homes for Westminster Seminary students. (When he was home, John would often help Ada by putting "For Sale" signs on the properties for which she was responsible!)

Living in Ardsley, Pennsylvania, some two to three miles from both Calvary OPC in Glenside and nearby Westminster Seminary, afforded John and Ada the opportunity to get to know the students at what was, at that time, *the* seminary from which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church got its ministers. Once a semester, John and Ada would open their home on Friday and Saturday nights so that all the Westminster seminarians could come to their home for a "Hoagie Night." John wanted to get to know each of the students, no doubt with a view of scouting out prospective pastors, home missionaries, or foreign missionaries. John and Ada and their daughters were quite surprised on one of these evenings when one of the seminarians ate two huge hoagies. That student was a young man named Harvie Conn. Harvie would later become an OPC missionary to Korea, and, following that, a professor at Westminster Seminary. Combined with this, traveling missionaries would regularly

find lodging at the Galbraith home—a model of Christian hospitality.

John Galbraith's busy life would never be so harried that it prevented him (and his family) from enjoying the lawful pleasures of this life. Ever a baseball fan (the Philadelphia Phillies, of course), he would hurry home to watch baseball games when he was able. When he would take the girls to the games, he made them promise that they would watch the game and also fill in their scorecards—with the correct scorecard shorthand! And, for a month of summer vacation, Owl's Head, Maine, became the family get-away. There John and his family enjoyed the relaxation and change of pace that is so necessary for those engaged in demanding Christian service. No doubt the commitment to get a break from the labors of the ministry contributed much to John's longevity in the work.

As a committed family man, John fulfilled the vows he had taken both to his wife in marriage, and at the time of the baptism of his children. A born teacher, from his children's earliest years, he taught them the things of God. Marian School-land's *Big Book of Bible Stories* among other books were staples of the Galbraith family's Christian nurture. Thankfulness for the blessings of God marked their home. To this day, John is eminently a man full of appreciation for everything that his Father in heaven gives to him. He also beautifully demonstrated the heart of a servant—the primary mark of a minister. On the Saturday nights he was not away, he would get down on his hands and knees to wash the kitchen floor—giving Ada a break while she did other chores necessary to prepare the home for the upcoming Lord's Day.

John's beloved help-meet departed this life on July 5, 1994. It was painful not to see John walking hand-in-hand with Ada, especially during general assemblies—which they often attended together in Ada's later years. One of the most moving personal moments at an OPC general assembly was when John gave thanks for both his wife of fifty-two years, and for the gift of God that she was to him. Tearfully, he also thanked God for the divine comfort granted him following her death, and for how the much felt absence of his wife nevertheless was

working to his sanctification by a specially felt sense of the presence of the Lord with him. John Galbraith, the church statesman, was, and remains to this day, a man who upholds the grace, goodness, love, and faithfulness of our covenant God.

In these latter years of John Galbraith's life, he continues to reside at Rydal Park, in Rydal, Pennsylvania—just a few miles north of 7401 Old York Road, the location of the OPC administrative offices in which John's presence was felt for so many years, and just a few miles south of the current OPC administrative offices. He remains very much interested in everything transpiring in the life of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—and his disciplined, organized mind has lost little of its ability to recall the facts, personalities, and events that have formed the character of the church which he so much loves.

When asked the highlights of his three-quarters of a century as an Orthodox Presbyterian minister, John responded by saying, "They began when I became one!" He has no regrets about that decision. He was glad that he wrote the booklet *Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?* which first appeared in 1940. It was his way of giving a "message for the world" regarding "what we were about." "The course of the OPC was set in the second and third general assemblies," John notes. "Our commitments to the Bible and to Christian liberty" are and remain the hallmarks of the OPC.

And what message does John Galbraith want to communicate to the OPC as he approaches his one hundredth birthday? Ever the preacher, he has three points:

The first is the importance of worship. John notes that the command to honor the Sabbath day (and it *is* a command!) is a critical transition from the first three "God-ward" commandments, and the last six "man-ward" commandments. He is deeply concerned about the growing laxity in attendance at a second worship service on the Lord's Day, or—even worse—the tendency to eliminate that service altogether. "The Sabbath gives us a whole day for fellowship with God and with his people. It's a day for us to grow in our knowledge of the Scriptures. Why would any Christian want

to neglect that?” he asks. Indeed, in our fast and furious day of modern technology it would seem that we must put *more* emphasis on the Sabbath, not *less*.

His second message for the OPC is the need of separation. By that he does not mean, in the first place, separation *from* things, but rather separation *unto* God. “Separation began in the Garden of Eden,” he affirms. Separation unto God in all things brings a distinct type of personal, family, and church life. John fears that we are losing that emphasis that marked the early OPC.

And, finally, his greatest fear for the OPC (as he made clear with memorable eloquence at the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the OPC) is “inclusivism.” The OPC was never intended to be a “broadly evangelical church.” From the beginning, the OPC has been committed to the Reformed faith and to Presbyterianism as the doctrine and polity given in Holy Scripture. “We must test all things by the Scriptures and the standards we have adopted as a church,” he states with passion. In this he sounds very much like the apostle Paul, who wrote: “Test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

Of all of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s many blessings, one of the foremost is to have had (and still have) Rev. John Galbraith as Christ’s gift to us. He is, indeed, Mr. OPC. His service continues to make an impact on the church of which he has been a part from the first day of its existence. In fact, no other OPC minister has influenced the course of the OPC more than John Galbraith. He would be the first to deflect this tribute, giving all glory to God. Nevertheless, this tribute is both fitting and necessary. It is presented in the spirit of that one who was used of God for the foundation of the Christian church itself: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). The entire Orthodox Presbyterian Church praises God for his grace in giving us the life and labors of Rev. John Galbraith, Mr. OPC.

## Additional Resources

### Articles

- “Choose Ye This Day! An Analysis of the Reasons Why Christians Should Separate from the Presbyterian Church in the USA,” [http://www.opc.org/cce/choose\\_ye.html](http://www.opc.org/cce/choose_ye.html).
- “Why the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” <http://www.opc.org/cce/WhyOPC.html>.

### Videos

- The Committee on Christian Education Presentation and Interviews on the OPC’s 75th Anniversary, <http://www.opc.org/GA/media>. ©

**William Shishko**, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the pastor of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Franklin Square, New York.*

# ✦ Servant Thoughts

## Editorials

### A Little Exercise for Young Theologians

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

When I think back on my brashness as a young theologian, I shudder; and whenever that same brashness rears its ugly head today, I shudder still; but age and Christian experience have at least taught me to recognize this monster within.

Very early in my Christian life, while still considering a call to the ministry, I came across a little booklet first published in 1962 by Eerdmans entitled *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*.<sup>2</sup> I recognized the author, Helmut Thielicke (1908–86), from my reading of his *Encounter with Spurgeon*<sup>3</sup> in Bible school in 1972. I have exercised myself with this sage booklet at least once a decade ever since, and never without profit, since the demon of pride is ever in need of being exorcised.

While avoiding the dangerous dichotomy of setting the Christian life over against doctrine, Thielicke doesn't confuse the two by merging doctrine into life. One without the other is a sign

of spiritual illness. Thus, he addresses his seminary students like a wise father:

You can see that the young theologian has by no means grown up to these doctrines in his own spiritual development, even if he understands intellectually rather well the logic of the system.... There is a hiatus between the arena of the young theologian's actual spiritual growth and what he already knows intellectually about this arena.<sup>4</sup>

Thielicke goes on to liken early theological training to puberty, during which it is as unwise to unleash the novice on the church as a preacher, as it would be to let the young singer sing while his voice is changing.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, time spent in the lofty realms of truth makes the novice susceptible to the "psychology of the possessor," in which love is sadly absent. "Truth seduces us very easily into a kind of joy of possession."<sup>6</sup> "But love is the opposite of the will to possess. It is self-giving. It boasteth not itself, but humbleth itself." But when "truth is a means to personal triumph,"<sup>7</sup> the young theologian returns home with a keen sense of membership in an esoteric club, displaying his rarefied tools to the annoyance of all and the hurt of some. Thielicke observes, "Young theologians manifest certain trumped-up intellectual effects which actually amount to nothing."<sup>8</sup>

The only cure for this malady, insists Thielicke, is an active faith that cultivates love, that is, living one's faith out of love for God and those around us. Our theology must be worked out in the life of the church:

We must also take seriously the fact that the "subject" of theology, Jesus Christ, can only be regarded rightly if we are ready to meet Him on the plane where he is active, that is, within

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=291&issue\\_id=72](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=291&issue_id=72).

2 Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, trans. Charles L. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

3 Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963).

4 Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, 10.

5 *Ibid.*, 12.

6 *Ibid.*, 16.

7 *Ibid.*, 17, 19.

8 *Ibid.*, 11–12.

the Christian church.<sup>9</sup>

And it must be worked out in light of eternity:

A well-known theologian once said that dogmatics is a lofty and difficult art. That is so, in the first place, because of its purpose. It reflects upon the last things; it asks wherein lies the truth about our temporal and eternal destiny.<sup>10</sup>

And it must be worked out in spiritual battle:

Thus it is possible to become an eschatological romanticist. . . . Such a person nevertheless has not comprehended a penny's worth of what it means to live on the battlefield of the risen Lord, between the first and second coming, waiting and praying as a Christian.<sup>11</sup>

Thielicke knew the true exercise of a theologian's faith in spiritual battle. In 1935, he was refused a post at Erlangen due to his commitment to the Confessing Church, which opposed National Socialism, and in which Dietrich Bonhoeffer was famously active. In 1936, he became professor of systematic theology at Heidelberg. But he was dismissed in 1940 after repeated interrogations by the Gestapo. He went on to pastor a church in Ravensburg, and in 1942 began teaching in Stuttgart, until the bombing in 1944, when he fled to Korntal. After the war ended, he began teaching at Tübingen, and finally in Hamburg, where he pastored the large congregation of St. Michaelis.

Finally, Thielicke warns the young theologian—older ones need this, too—to beware of reading Scripture only as a matter of exegetical endeavor rather than God's "word to me." He urges a "prayed dogmatics,"<sup>12</sup> in which theological thought breathes "only in the atmosphere of dialogue with God."<sup>13</sup> "A person who pursues theological courses is spiritually sick unless he reads the Bible uncom-

monly often."<sup>14</sup>

While we will not agree with Thielicke's theology at every point, the gist of his message to young theological students is so pointed that there is nothing quite like it in English. Within our own tradition, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield delivered an address at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1911 entitled "The Religious Life of Theological Students."<sup>15</sup> In the strongest possible terms, Warfield pleads for a godly and learned ministry: "But before and above being learned, a minister must be godly. Nothing could be more fatal, however, than to set these two things over against one another."<sup>16</sup> He sums this emphasis up nicely, "Put your heart into your studies."<sup>17</sup>

No exercise in the young theologian's or minister's life is better calculated to keep him humble than regular contact with God himself. Warfield cautions his students:

I am here today to warn you to take seriously your theological study, not merely as a duty, done for God's sake and therefore made divine, but as a religious exercise, itself charged with religious blessing to you; as fitted by its very nature to fill all your mind and heart and soul and life with divine thoughts and feelings and aspirations and achievements. You will never prosper in your religious life in the Theological Seminary until your work in the Theological Seminary becomes itself to you a religious exercise out of which you draw every day enlargement of heart, elevation of spirit, and adoring delight in your Maker and Savior.<sup>18</sup>

We are, after all, called to be warriors; but the kind of spiritual warrior that Scripture calls us to be is not the gladiator seeking personal victory and

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9 Ibid., 23.

10 Ibid., 27.

11 Ibid., 29–30.

12 Ibid., 33.

13 Ibid., 34.

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14 Ibid., 40.

15 Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 1:411–25.

16 Ibid., 412.

17 Ibid., 416.

18 Ibid., 417.



glory, but rather the soldier of the cross who seeks to magnify the person of his Savior and Lord. J. Gresham Machen captured this spirit well in his sermon “Constraining Love.” Christian militancy should never be confused with sectarian belligerence, hubris, or meanness of spirit. But pride can also move us to shrink in cowardice from defending the truth of the gospel. Machen made this clear in his sermon to the second general assembly of our, then, new church. How many movements, he asked,

have begun bravely like this one, and then have been deceived by Satan ... into belittling controversy, condoning sin and error, seeking favor from the world or from a worldly church, substituting a worldly urbanity for Christian love. May Christ’s love indeed constrain us that we may not thus fall!<sup>19</sup>

If Christianity teaches us nothing else it must teach us the value of the cross—the chief expression of God’s constraining love for sinners. If we learn nothing else from the cross we must learn humility—a humility that clings to the Savior who died to save us. As we minister, whether young or old, we must always remember that “we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7).  
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**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

## Education, Natural Law, and the Two Kingdoms

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Several readers of *OSO* have expressed strong disagreement with David Noe’s article in the April issue, “Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?” While it is never my intention to stir up controversy, I do like to stimulate discussion on important issues. Natural law and the two kingdom doctrine are, to my mind, just such issues. Why is it that these ideas raise red flags? I think it is at least partly because these ideas are being reintroduced into Reformed circles, but are new to many of us, at least here in America. In fact, for over a century Neo-Calvinism and more recently various forms of worldview transformationalism have ruled the day.

As Benjamin Miller, in his exchange with David Noe, points out, the ideas reflected in Noe’s original article are outside the mainstream of OPC thinking on the subject of Christ and culture generally and education in particular. This does not, of course, mean that these doctrines are necessarily unorthodox, just not the received wisdom on these topics within our circles over the past century or so. Because of this, I can understand how Noe’s article could be both upsetting and misunderstood. This is why Noe’s clarification in response to Miller’s critique is important.

As the editor of *OSO*, my intention in publishing David Noe’s article was to provide a case in point based on David VanDrunen’s general, more programmatic article on natural law and his latest book, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean I necessarily agree with every point in either

19 J. Gresham Machen, “Constraining Love,” in *God Transcendent and Other Sermons*, ed. Ned Bernard Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 141.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=310&issue\\_id=76](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=310&issue_id=76).

2 David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 166–72.

the article or the book. It does mean that I believe that this is an area where we need to rethink some conventional wisdom. Personally, I have found natural law and the two kingdoms, in its essential formulations in the post-Reformation and VanDrunen's restatement, liberating in a number of ways. First, it has helped me to appreciate God's common grace gifts to unbelievers. Second, it has therefore motivated me to engage more modestly with them in arenas of common concern, interest, and enjoyment. Third, and consequently, it has given me more opportunity for evangelism. Fourth, it has enabled me to more fully explore and appreciate God's common grace cultural gifts. This has in no way dulled my sense of the antithesis or my zeal to spread the gospel.

Perhaps past abuses, among the American Reformed, of the idea that "all truth is God's truth," make some of us gun-shy about exploring and assessing a Reformed articulation of natural law and the two kingdoms. This is not to say that there is a uniform position on these doctrines in Reformed historical theology, nor that VanDrunen's articulation of these doctrines is entirely without some innovations. The latter would have to be the case, since we live in a very different context from past generations of theological reflection on these doctrines. The range of Reformed thinking on Christ and culture issues in general and education in particular should alert us to the fact that lengthy comprehensive discussion and even principled disagreement is warranted.

While in general I believe there is a Christian perspective on everything, in particular I believe that each area of activity or discipline in human life, outside of special revelation and the church, has its own natural God-given laws perceived through general revelation, which are no less under God's sovereign control, just not so through special revelation and the church. Not only so, but as David VanDrunen shows in his section on education in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*,

Each field of learning explores some aspect of the created order, and thus the very first thing taught in Scripture, that God has created

all things, pertains generally to all academic inquiry. God's upholding the natural order (Genesis 8:21–22) underlies mathematics and the natural sciences, his upholding the social order (Genesis 9:1–7) underlies the social sciences, and the twin facts of human sinfulness and image-bearing (Genesis 1:26–27; 3:16–19; 9:6) underlie the humanities.

These considerations suggest the conclusion 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). (I recognize that this can only be a general rule and that it will not always be clear where to draw the line between the big picture and the technical details.) Scripture teaches that God upholds the order of nature, but it does not explain trigonometry or how to play the oboe. Only examination and experimentation with the natural order itself can yield such knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

So, everything is under God's sovereign control and the Christian views everything through the lens of Scripture, recognizing God's common grace, based on the Noahic covenant, and the ways in which sinful human beings exercise their God-given talents for good or ill.

Belief in common grace, natural law, and the common kingdom does not, as I asserted above, in any way dull the antithesis, which Cornelius Van Til so robustly articulated. The antithesis is always in force for the Christian by virtue of his being in covenant with God. We are called to be loyal to King Jesus as his ambassadors in this world, which is his world, and will one day be reclaimed in its fullness in the new heaven and the new earth. Meanwhile we are pilgrim witnesses of the gospel. "We desire to make the common kingdom better when we can, but we should not try to 'transform' it into something other than the common kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

3 Ibid., 175.

4 Ibid., 170.

With that in mind, we must beware of failing to engage fully in the study of a given discipline in terms of its own God-given, common grace, integrity. I must understand Kant before I can critique him. As a believer I am called to be faithful in every area of life. The two kingdom and natural law doctrines, as far as I understand them, do not compromise this. Nor do they compromise my commitment to the antithesis as it informs the difference between the interpretive worldviews of believers and unbelievers.

As I have alluded to above, there is a danger in Christian worldview thinking that we not appreciate the contributions that unbelievers make to common culture. We can easily fall into a kind of worldview separatism, which along with impoverishing us culturally, closes doors for evangelism. As VanDrunen asserts, “Understanding how to interact with and learn from unbelievers is an important part of living in this world.”<sup>5</sup>

Calvin had some sagacious things to say on the topic of our need to appreciate the gifts of unbelievers in common culture:

Hence, with good reason we are compelled to confess that its beginning is inborn in human nature. Therefore this evidence clearly testifies to a universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in men. Yet so universal is this good that every man ought to recognize for himself in it the peculiar grace of God. The Creator of nature himself abundantly arouses this gratitude in us when he creates imbeciles. Through them he shows the endowments that the human soul would enjoy unpervaded by his light, a light so natural to all that it is certainly a free gift of his beneficence to each! Now the discovery or systematic transmission of the arts, or the inner and more excellent knowledge of them, which is characteristic of few, is not a sufficient proof of common discernment. Yet because it is bestowed indiscriminately upon pious and impious, it is rightly counted among natural

gifts.

Whenever we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we condemn and reproach the Spirit himself. What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God? Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude, into which not even the pagan poets fell, for they confessed that the gods had invented philosophy, laws, and all useful arts. Those men whom Scripture [1 Cor. 2:14] calls “natural men” were, indeed, sharp and penetrating in their investigation of inferior things. Let us, accordingly, learn by their example how many gifts the Lord left to human nature even after it was despoiled of its true good.<sup>6</sup>

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6 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:272–74 (2.2.14–15).

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5 *Ibid.*, 186.

When it comes to our use of “Christian” as a modifier of nouns, I believe that Christian education in its narrowest definition is precisely what the visible church is called to do: teach the whole counsel of God. But I also believe that there is value in Christian primary, secondary, and higher education, although the fact that it is provided by Christians guarantees neither its academic excellence nor its faithfulness to Scripture. But I do not believe that disciplines, apart from theology, are specifically “Christian” in any meaningful way that differentiates them from those disciplines taught in secular schools. As VanDrunen observes regarding claims of the uniqueness of “Christian scholarship,” “Most of their [Christian college professors Tim Morris and Don Petcher, authors of *Science and Grace: God’s Reign in the Natural Sciences*] applications are neither uniquely Christian nor even unique to the natural sciences.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, VanDrunen observes that George Marsden’s four illustrations of “how faith bears on scholarship focus on big picture issues or motivation, and none on the actual technical practice of the disciplines themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

A further danger in using “Christian” to modify every area of life is the tendency of assuming that our view of what makes a given area Christian is the only way for Christians to properly understand it. So in education, other than in special revelation, it is easy to disregard the many means of educating, as well as the many ways of understanding a particular discipline, that Christians may hold.

This is not to say that there is no value in a Christian teacher bringing the truth of special revelation to bear on the particulars of a discipline. This will, of course, vary from subject to subject. The Bible does not address mathematics in the detail that it addresses what constitutes a human being. Thus, studying Plato will offer more opportunities for discussing biblical anthropology. This in turn, however, does not obviate the necessity of

thoroughly understanding Plato.

As I said two months ago in my introduction to the articles by David VanDrunen, “Natural Law in Reformed Theology: Historical Reflections and Biblical Suggestions,” and David Noe, “Is There Such a Thing as Christian Education?” I believe Noe is simply applying what VanDrunen has been teaching about natural law and the two kingdoms.

While it is always important in our ecclesiastical debates to be concerned about the unity and peace of the church as well as its doctrinal and ethical purity, debates are an important aspect of the church militant’s life and witness here on earth. Recent topics of intense discussion, such as justification, union with Christ, the nature of the covenants, and natural law and the two kingdoms, have forced us to open our Bibles, confessional standards, and theologies as we seek understanding and consensus within our confessional boundaries. Debate also forces us to consult the ancient church fathers and the Reformers. But most illuminating to me in recent years has been our renewed interest in post-Reformation theologians. The continuity between the magisterial Reformers and these post-Reformation theologians has, until recently, been vastly underestimated. This, in turn, has led to the rediscovery of a number of important doctrines, especially natural law and the two kingdoms.

It is important that we each take the time to prayerfully and humbly read what those we think we differ with have written. May our great God bless our conversation on these important topics. ©

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

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7 VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 182.

8 Ibid.

# The Value of Daydreaming

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

“There never used to be so much noise here on the island,” observed longtime Little Diamond Island resident Hal Hackett back in the nineties. “People seem to always be fixing something instead of relaxing and enjoying this place.” His lovely craftsman summer cottage looked down upon the harbor in Portland, Maine. He had invited us to stop for a glass of lemonade as we passed by on the path to our cottage. He reminisced about changing attitudes on the island since his childhood. The sense of community was strained; people were more concerned to define their property lines. Peace and quiet were becoming rare. The frenetic energies of modern life were intruding on this place which was designed for daydreaming. This was two decades ago, before the Internet was a household presence.

This year my family vacationed at a lake in Vermont. Each morning as I wandered into the kitchen to get my coffee, I observed my grown children each sitting at the dining table with their coffee, laptops, and their work—each connected to their offices. In the era of the soccer mom, I have frequently worried about children bearing the weight of heavy schedules. When do they get to daydream? Then, of course, there’s immersion in all those screens, beguiling them to think virtual reality is preferable to real life, and in some way displacing the imagination, which feeds our daydreams.

But I, as a pastor, have a problem, too. I’m finding that two out of three scheduled pastoral visits get cancelled and rescheduled. Sometimes this leads to an unexpected night off. But I feel

compelled to work—yes, I know, there’s probably a twelve-step program out there somewhere for me. I can only imagine the tortured confessions of fellow workaholics, to which I do not intend to subject myself. That in itself helps me resist the temptation to inquire about such groups. Besides, it would just be another thing to schedule.

Some wit recently suggested that we will soon be abandoning our searches for “hot spots” in public spaces, in favor of “cool spots”—places free of electronic intrusion—locations designed to concentrate the mind, like a positive version of Samuel Johnson’s famous appointment with the gallows. But best of all, even laying the book or journal aside, is daydreaming, which, by the way, can also be done at night. I find after hours the best for disconnecting.

Is it any wonder that the only piece of bad news in outgoing NEA chair Dana Gioia’s 2009 final report on reading, “Reading on the Rise,”<sup>2</sup> is that the reading of poetry has continued to decline? Even a favorite editorial writer recently lumped poets in with the dilettante, second-generation, trust fund rich. Poetry is the literature *par excellence* of daydreamers. Walter Mitty’s early twentieth-century daydreaming<sup>3</sup> was thought to be a disease we moderns should consider vaccinating out of existence. But, unlike polio, it is *not*, I would argue, a disease, but a cure for our modern dis-ease.

My concern is for fellow Christians and church officers who claim a single book to be the main course of their soul’s nourishment. King David, a few years before the advent of electronic communication, was no less a very busy man. But he made it his business to step out of the fray frequently, perhaps a habit formed in his shepherding days, to daydream. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but

2 Dana Gioia, “Reading on the Rise,” <http://www.nea.gov/research/readingonrise.pdf>.

3 James Thurber, “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” *The New Yorker*, March 18, 1939, 19–20. This was made into a movie in 1947.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=317&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=317&issue_id=77).

his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2).

Some might aver that daydreaming is not the same as meditation. But I would counter by asserting that, while the two activities are not synonymous, daydreaming is an essential ingredient in true meditation. It is true that the dictionary definition of daydreaming is: “a series of pleasant thoughts that distract one’s attention from the present.”<sup>4</sup> But “meditation” in Psalm 1 is a kind of musing, and musing requires undistracted consideration of God’s communication to us. Since these are ultimately life-giving pleasant thoughts, perhaps we can alter the definition of daydreaming to something like this: “a series of pleasant thoughts, cultivated by removing oneself from distractions, in order to focus one’s attention on our relationship with the Lord.” Even the dictionary definition can be understood eschatologically by the Christian. And while not all meditation on God’s Word is pleasant—for example, its revealing of our sin—it leads to ultimate pleasantness in communion with our God and our neighbor.

Of course, there is another dimension to daydreaming that I have not yet accounted for. That is serendipity. Again the dictionary is helpful:

the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way: a fortunate stroke of serendipity | a series of small serendipities ... coined by Horace Walpole, suggested by *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the title of a fairy tale in which the heroes “were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.”<sup>5</sup>

When the soil is good, a surprise flower will often appear, unplanted, blown in by the wind. Among thesaurus synonyms for *serendipity* are *good fortune* and *providence*. I believe that God created our minds for meditation with the serendipitous ability to connect ideas in a mysterious

way that defies formulation. One example is found in our application of the Word we are meditating upon to our daily lives and relationships.

In the absence of times and places conducive to daydreaming, I fear the famine of good and great thoughts. We chase the muses away, amusing ourselves to death. Without such thoughts, ministers of the Word will necessarily be superficial, perfectly suited to feed the superficial minds our culture is cultivating. Without cultivating deep relationships with God, ourselves, and others, we succumb to the perpetual connectivity of modern life that immerses us in mediated social realities that snuff our mental solitude and spiritual development. A deficit in mind renewal exposes the Christian to the default position of world conformity (Rom. 12:1–2), the pressures of which are increasing apace.

And it should not escape the reader’s notice that David wrote Psalm 1 and many other poems, called psalms. More than a third of the Bible is written in poetic form. So every minister, elder, and deacon loves poetry whether he appreciates it or not. Plato worried that writing would rob the mind of its furnishings, since the mnemonic orientation of oral tradition would be undermined. Print, hard drives, and the Cloud only exacerbate this tendency. The Bible is structured to encourage remembering God’s Word. In the oral culture in which it was written, believers had no choice. We, on the other hand, must choose to furnish our minds with material upon which to meditate. Daydreaming without something worth dreaming about will only cultivate empty souls, “like the chaff that the wind drives away.”

A well-lived life can only grow out of a well-cultivated interior. Emerson recognized this when he observed, “The saint and poet seek privacy to ends most public and universal.”<sup>6</sup> David put it this way: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf

4 *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

5 *Ibid.*

6 William Deresiewicz, “The End of Solitude,” in Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2011), 316.



does not wither” (Ps. 1:3). So, unscheduled—daydreaming—time may represent the most important spaces on our calendars. The serendipity of solitude is imperative.

### Recommended Readings

William Deresiewicz, “The End of Solitude,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 30, 2009. Reprinted in Mark Bauerlein, ed., *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2011), 307–17.

Alexander Pope, “Ode on Solitude.” ©

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of *Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire*, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

## Face-to-Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Efficiency rules. Advocates of electronic centralization can point to vast benefits such as the availability of medical records to physicians. For members of our own church it is a great benefit to disseminate

prayer requests and other important information to the whole church through electronic means. But the downside of electronic centralization is usually framed in terms of concerns about privacy. As legitimate as this concern is, I would like to address what to my mind is even more important—the diminishment of local face-to-face relationships in our churches.

J. Gresham Machen was concerned in the early twentieth century with the tendency toward a vast expansion of federal power through bureaucratic centralization and its concomitant, the tyranny of experts. In the conclusion of his essay “Mountains and Why We Love Them,” Machen wrote:

What will be the end of European civilization, of which I had a survey from my mountain vantage ground—of that European civilization and its daughter America? What does the future hold in store? Will Luther prove to have lived in vain? Will all the dreams of liberty issue into some vast industrial machine? Will even nature be reduced to standard, as in our country the sweetness of the woods and hills is being destroyed, as I have seen them destroyed in Maine, by the uniformities and artificialities and officialdom of our national parks? . . . Will some dreadful second law of thermodynamics apply in the spiritual as well as in the material realm? Will all things in church and state be reduced to one dead level, coming at last to an equilibrium in which all liberty and all high aspirations will be gone? Will that be the end of all humanity’s hopes? I can see no escape from that conclusion in the signs of the times; too inexorable seems to me to be the march of events. No, I can see only one alternative. The alternative is that there is a God—a God who in His own good time will bring forward great men again to do His will, great men to resist the tyranny of experts and lead humanity out again into the realms of light and freedom, great men, who above all, will be the messengers of His grace. There is, far above any mountain peak of vision, a God high and

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=340&issue\\_id=80](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=340&issue_id=80).

lifted up who, though He is infinitely exalted, yet cares for His children among men.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Machen warned of the tendency in our technological civilization for centralized tyranny to diminish the human spirit by undermining liberty, so ought we to be concerned with the increased power of our technologies to centralize and thus diminish human liberty and local face-to-face relationships in a similar fashion, especially in the church.

The apostle John had a similar concern about the rudimentary communication technology of his day when he wrote: “Though I have much to communicate to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12). “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 John 14).

## Introduction

On May 24, 1844, the first electric communication was transmitted by telegraph thirty-seven miles between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Samuel Finley Breese Morse (1791–1872) sent the famous message “What Hath God Wrought!” His daughter had chosen the quote from Numbers 23:23 in the KJV, “God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.... ‘What has God wrought!’ Behold, a people!” Morse used the statement as an exclamation, not a question. He was proclaiming this revolutionary form of communication to be a wonder of God’s providence. What we now take for granted had the appearance of a miracle to mid-nineteenth-century perceptions.

In our day, the magic continues apace. Our electronic connectedness has grown exponentially. Facebook users are a prime example, growing from over twelve million in late 2006 to over one billion today. Fifty percent of Americans use Facebook. Immersion in electronic technology appears inevitable. So it seems that we should all join or

we’ll be relegated to irrelevance. But while it is second nature to recite the benefits of this pervasive technological environment, we are hesitant—and many are even very resistant—to recognize its liabilities. I believe this is a dangerous position for church leaders, especially since the rising generation has never known any other world. I believe church officers have a grave responsibility in this area if we are to harness the tremendous potential of these technologies as good stewards of God’s world. This requires constructive criticism of the electronic environment.

## Our Pedagogical Responsibility

A wonderful example of the power of constructive criticism is the story of what the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Dana Gioia, did by raising worrisome concerns about the state of literary reading in America. Building on an alarming trend signaled by reports in the 1990s, Gioia sounded the alarm in dramatic fashion in 2004 and 2007 with reports, “Reading at Risk” and “To Read or Not to Read.” He was often criticized as a doomsayer. But, because parents and educators, including the NEA, did not simply accept this as a necessary and irreversible trend, the 20 percent decline in the youngest age group surveyed (ages 18–24) in 2002 was reversed to a dramatic 21 percent increase in 2008, as presented by Gioia in a subsequent NEA Report, “Reading on the Rise.”

So instead of throwing up our hands and saying, “This is the way it is. We have to accept it,” we have a tremendous pedagogical opportunity to help this and the next generation of Christians to navigate the electronic environment as wise stewards of God’s providential gifts. Of course we can’t escape the modern world—nor should we wish to. But we must live well-formed lives, conformed to God’s self-revelation, in this world (Rom. 12:1–2). We must not miss this teaching moment.

When it comes to the electronic media, it is almost as if the church has taken the advice of Oscar Wilde seriously. When asked what he recommended in the face of temptation, he quipped, “Give in to it.”

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2 J. Gresham Machen, *Selected Shorter Writings: J. Gresham Machen* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 436.

But before we do, we must ask, Does the electronic environment diminish or threaten our face-to-face relationships? I believe it does. I believe we can and must do something about it. As leaders in Christ's church we need to turn Morse's enthusiastic declaration, "What has God wrought!" into a question. As with all of man's inventions we need to understand them, how they work, their effect on our perceptions and relationships, and then their benefits and liabilities, and rid ourselves of the dangerous notion that they are just tools!

It is our pedagogical responsibility to teach the church to be discerning in its understanding of and participation in the rapidly changing media environment.

### **Electronic Media Rearrange Our Total Relational Environment**

Electronic media tend to dis-incarnate and distance people from their embodied lives. While excellent at disseminating information, electronic media tend to isolate us from face-to-face interaction. Social media, in particular, cannot replace, and often even undermine, the fabric of personal relationships which strengthen fellowship with God and each other. Church officers need to encourage church members to ask themselves how their use of media fosters healthy relationships with God, his church, my family, my friends, my world.

Many secular researchers are sounding an alarm in this area. Professor Sherry Turkle, who was once very positive about the effects of technology on human beings and their relationships, has recently written *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*.<sup>3</sup> She is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, the founder and director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, and a licensed clinic psychologist. She reports a change in her early assessments:

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3 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

I reported on this work [focus groups on boundaries between real and virtual worlds] in my 1995 *Life on the Screen*, which offered, on balance, a positive view of new opportunities for exploring identity online. But by then, my optimism of 1984 [*The Second Self*] had been challenged. I was meeting people, many people, who found online life more satisfying than what some derisively called "RL," that is, real life.<sup>4</sup>

Church leaders and parents are becoming aware of some of the dangers associated with online life. Mediated relationships open people up to deception about who they really are. This is a special temptation for teenagers, who are forming their identities, and learning habits of human interaction. Things are expressed online that would never be expressed, or at least in the same manner, in face-to-face situations. In some cases social skills are so stunted that young people actually fear face-to-face interaction. The church has a definite advantage in this area, because we believe in the vital importance of meeting together for worship, learning, and fellowship.

But as I have written elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> the Internet has a tendency to rearrange and undermine authority structures. The Presbyterian church is not exempt. Members and officers make theological and personal decisions, sometimes gossiping and even slandering others, outside, or beneath the radar of legitimate church authority. In some cases people even leave the church or never connect with the church, mistakenly believing that social media are sufficient.

Hence disembodied life online can promote the tendency to avoid the messy business of life in a fallen world—of sinners, saved by grace, but with many remaining imperfections, learning to live

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4 Turkle, *Alone Together*, xi.

5 Gregory E. Reynolds, "The Wired Church," *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 26–34; "On Being Connected," *Ordained Servant* 15 (2006): 13–15; "Princess Adelaide and Presbyterianism: The Death of Context and the Life of the Church," *Ordained Servant* 15 (2006): 16–18.

together in truth, forgiveness, and love. This is why we have been careful as a denomination to not unwittingly draw people away from local face-to-face existence by centralizing church interaction, especially through the use of social media. The Committee on Christian Education's Subcommittee on Internet Ministries, on which I serve, often receives questions that should be addressed to local sessions or directly to individuals. We direct them back to those local face-to-face relationships with a gentle biblical admonition when appropriate. The Bible has a lot to say about the face and about face-to-face life in God's world.

The tendency toward centralized power is a clear and present danger to the church. One of the great liabilities of mediated life is its tendency to erode the local life of face-to-face relationships.

### **A Brief Survey of the Importance of Personal Presence in the Bible**

"Face" is used 382 times in the *English Standard Version*. In the Bible the face is most often referred to as a synecdoche representing the most intimate level of personal presence. The face is a revelation of the person, a window to the human soul. "Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed" (Eccl. 8:1).

1. Sin causes God's face to turn away and our faces to hide from him in shame. Sin alienates. Electronic media may exacerbate this tendency. We may become electronic fugitives.

But for Cain and his offering he [God] had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?... Cain said to the LORD ... Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." (Gen. 4:5-6, 13-14)

And he [Moses] said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Ex. 3:6)

I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. (Lev. 26:17)

And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. (Ezek. 20:35)

In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God." (Ps. 10:4)

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (Ps. 51:9)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (1 Pet. 3:12)

2. Serious confrontation in the Bible is done face-to-face.

I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. (Acts 25:16)

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (Gal. 2:11)

3. Face-to-face communication avoids the limits of mediated communication. Paul understood that distance increases the possibility for misunderstanding:

I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!— ... I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do

when present. (2 Cor. 10:1, 9–11)

John appreciated the importance of personal presence that could never be replaced by the first-century medium of written correspondence.

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.... I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. (2 John 12; 3 John 14)

4. The absence of face-to-face presence may cause grief similar to death. This is evident in the departure of Paul from the Ephesian elders, “being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship” (Acts 20:38).

5. Jesus is present with his people through the means of grace and the officers of his church. The living and true God has orchestrated the ultimate in personal presence with the incarnation of his Son. The Word took on a complete and perfect human nature in order to create a new humanity. Church officers represent his presence as his undershepherds until he returns (1 Pet. 5:1–5). The personal presence of God’s people in worship, focusing as it does on Word and sacrament, is essential to the meaning of our redeemed creaturehood.

Throughout the history of redemption, God has favored his people by his grace. Now he smiles upon us through Christ. This was prefigured in the ministry of Moses and Aaron as mediators of the old covenant and consummated in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. (Num. 6:25)

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

“But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.... Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” (Ex. 33:11, 20, 23)

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. (Deut. 34:10)

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6)

The good shepherd feeds his sheep on his Word through his chosen undershepherds. As the great and good shepherd of Scripture he is always present with his sheep. This was prophesied by Isaiah, “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isa. 40:11). “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). His words are the words of the entire Scripture (1 Pet. 1:10–11). Thus, the whole counsel of God is the necessary food of God’s people.

The one who has visited his people in history continues to visit them through his Word and Spirit in the person of the preacher. Nothing can replace that personal presence and that living voice. Pastor, elders, and deacons are called to follow Paul’s apostolic example, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Officers must know the sheep personally by name, even as their shepherd knows them (John 10:3).

Face-to-face encounter is central to the incarnation. The face reveals the person. So the best means of communication for John was to see his spiritual children “face to face” (2 John 12; 3 John 14). This reminds us that the word “communicate” comes from the Latin *communicare*, to commune, or to live in intimate fellowship with others. For John, pen and ink could only supplement personal presence.



Paul also recognized that distance can only be overcome by personal presence, “Without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you” (Rom. 1:9–10). He knew his ministry to the church was incomplete without such presence, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face” (Col. 2:1). The most beautiful expression of this is found in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians:

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.... But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.... as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? (1 Thess. 2:7–8, 17; 3:10)

6. Public worship is all about faces: God’s face and his people’s faces. We see this in the old covenant, “Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him ...” (Gen. 17:3). “David sought the face of the LORD” (2 Sam. 21:1). It has always been the desire of his people to have the closest personal contact with the Lord: “There are many who say, ‘Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!’” (Ps. 4:6). “You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, LORD, do I seek’” (Ps. 27:8).

While the location of worship is now no longer limited to a geographical location (John 4), this does not mean that location is unimportant. In the new covenant the temple is the church, wherever it meets. “What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’” (2 Cor. 6:16).

The writer of Hebrews sounds like the wise real estate agent—location, location, location—when he exhorts, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:25). The location of worship matters, because the personal presence of God’s people matters.

While the modern world has never been better “connected” electronically, it seems to be starving nearly to death for lack of personal and local connectedness. Local church provides this reality in a way that no other institution can. At the center of this communal reality is God’s speech in the preaching and presence of his appointed vicars (the English word for substitute or representative, as in vicarious). “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Few could afford personal Bibles in the first-century church. But even our private reading of Scripture is always also a communal reading, because Scripture is the covenant document uniting God’s people in all ages. Preaching accents and cultivates this communion. The worst tendencies of mass culture are overcome by the promotion of live pastoral preaching as the center of the church’s life.

7. The goal of redemptive history involves Christ’s and our personal presence. The consummate reality for the Christian will be seeing the face of Jesus Christ in resurrection glory. The transfiguration foreshadowed the coming glory reflected in the face of Jesus, “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Matt. 17:2). Paul looks forward to the final glory, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). John reflects the same hope, “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). There is no better antidote to the electronic dispersion of our day than the counter-environment of the church created by the Word of the good and great shepherd.



## Implications for Our Ministry in the Church

1. Officers, consider your personal presence with those to whom you minister in the church essential to effective ministry. Paul's presence in Timothy's life was essential to his mentoring: "Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it" (2 Tim. 3:14).

2. Teach God's people media wisdom (media ecology). To be good stewards of the media we must understand not only the content communicated but the nature of each medium itself—its benefits and liabilities. Electronic media are best for information, and as a supplement, not a replacement, to face-to-face, personal communication. When we know people well face-to-face, then texting, email, and phone calls can be effective supplements—in that order from least to most personal. But nothing replaces personal face-to-face presence.

3. Teach technological etiquette. Manners in general are in a state of decay. By enumerating some of the dangers of poor manners in electronic communication officers can head off some of the worst tendencies in the electronic environment. So many words are sent into cyberspace that would never be said face-to-face.

4. Encourage people to read good literature deeply, especially the Bible. This requires undistracted concentration, which is becoming a rare commodity today. We need to find "cool spots" to eliminate the ubiquitous, distracting buzz.

5. It is especially important that church officers warn people of the dangers of coming to doctrinal and ethical convictions, gossiping, and making decisions about the church on social and other media. The Subcommittee on Internet Ministries regularly sends people with local questions to seek out their church officers.

6. Church officers should encourage people to spend time with their families, developing the art of conversation. This requires some self-criticism regarding the time we spend alone on our devices.

7. We need to emphasize Sabbath keeping and family and personal devotions. This is the day

the Lord has set aside for us to enjoy the Lord's presence in the presence of his people. This is what forms the Christian life. Worship should be a time apart, unique in the atmosphere of reverence and awe. This is the day for absorbing and being formed by God's Word. "Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it" (Jer. 6:19).

Were the apostle John alive today, I imagine him writing 2 John 12 in this way, "Though I have much to communicate to you, I would rather not use email or my smart phone. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face-to-face, so that our joy may be complete." ©

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of *Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC)* in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

# Servant Worship

## Giving Thanks—The Neglected Prayer

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by Jeffrey B. Wilson

On the popular television show *Antiques Roadshow*, collectors and the otherwise curious are able to present articles bearing some sign of age for appraisals. Inevitably, there are pieces found by someone in a retail shop, or at a garage sale, valued to be worth thousands of dollars. Equally fascinating is the item kept by a family for generations and brought to the show just because the owner thought it might be worth something. Often the story is told about how the piece came into the family and then was put on a shelf or set in a corner for many years without much thought. Carefully, the appraiser inspects the object and then announces its value at auction. Every now and then someone has something that has been sitting around the house worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Likewise, in the church there are also many beautiful gifts passed on to us by those who have carefully listened to God's Word. One of these gifts is a prayer called the Prayer of Thanksgiving, or Eucharistic Prayer, often overlooked, yet of inestimable value.

I do not know when I first discovered the Eucharistic Prayer. It was not used in the Presbyterian churches I attended in my youth. There were other prayers, especially related to the sermon,

and some prayers that generally gave thanks to God, but no specific Prayer of Thanksgiving. After college I attended seminary, where it might be expected that various prayers of worship would be part of the required curriculum in preparation for the ministry. However, the one or two classes on worship were electives. I believe my discovery of the Eucharistic Prayer began in a theology class taught by Professor John H. Leith. He did not specifically mention this prayer, but what he did was require us to create a notebook with different kinds of prayers in it, including prayers of invocation, prayers of confession, prayers for illumination, and general prayers of thanksgiving. The result for me was a realization that there are different prayers used in worship. The ensuing years of being a pastor, continuing study, and leading congregations in worship have led to my growing appreciation of the Eucharistic Prayer and its indispensable place in worship.

In considering the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the place to begin is the Lord's Supper, because in Scripture this prayer is attached to the meal instituted by Jesus for the church. Each of the Synoptic Gospels includes Jesus's words at the Supper, and they each mention Jesus's prayer of thanksgiving when he gave the bread and the cup to his disciples. The gospels of Matthew and Mark indicate two prayers, one before the bread and the other before the cup. Mark tells us:

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them. (Mark 14:22–25)

In Matthew's gospel, the parallelism between Jesus's blessing and thanksgiving is stressed: Jesus took the bread, blessed, and gave. He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave (Matt. 26:26–27).

Some have argued that the blessing is for the bread, but a stronger argument can be made that the blessing is to God.<sup>2</sup> What we find in Luke

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=331&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=331&issue_id=79).

2 Davies and Allison make this comment on the text in the Gospel of Matthew, "It is natural to think of blessing, that is,

22:17 is the word εὐχαριστήσας (*eucharistēsas*, “when he had given thanks”) used when Jesus took the cup before he took the bread, so that it reads, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said . . .” Jesus also in the gospel of Luke gave thanks when he took the bread (22:19). Paul’s tradition of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, which he delivered to the church, has the words “and when he [Jesus] had given thanks” before the distribution of the bread and the cup (1 Cor. 11:23–26). Clearly, according to Scripture, our Lord himself offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

In time the church began to give specific form to the Prayer of Thanksgiving, filled in with the teaching and words of Scripture. All prayers have a form, even spontaneous, extemporaneous prayers, because it is impossible to have a prayer without structure and shape. Prayers have a certain form of address to God, a conclusion, order of the parts, style, and cadence, as we can see with the Lord’s Prayer Jesus taught to his disciples. In the twentieth century, when there was a renaissance of interest in the rich history of Christian worship, the ancient prayer of Hippolytus was used by many as a model form of the Eucharistic Prayer.<sup>3</sup> In response to controversies in the church, Hippolytus drafted a carefully ordered Eucharistic Prayer to serve as a model for churches. It is one of the earliest prayers extant. However, this does not mean it was the first Eucharistic Prayer.<sup>4</sup> Prayers of Thanksgiving were

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thanking God, in part because of the use of εὐχαριστήσας in the parallel v. 27 and I Cor. 11:24.” See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 470. The same point is made by France: “Blessed refers of course, to blessing God, not blessing the bread.” See R. T. France, *Matthew*, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 368.

<sup>3</sup> Hippolytus was a theologian in the church at Rome who lived in the third century. See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 13.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the *Didache*, a Christian manual of the second century that includes instruction about Eucharistic prayer, was written earlier than Hippolytus. For a translation of the *Didache* see Cyril C. Richardson, trans. and ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Bradshaw cautions against the

common in the Eastern and Western regions of the early church. Also, there are too many layers of revision over the centuries and uncertainty about dates to assert one Eucharistic Prayer as the model form. What this means is that we have a variety of examples of Eucharistic Prayers at our disposal. The following is the Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus:

We render thanks to you, O God, through your beloved child Jesus Christ, whom in the last times you sent to us as a savior and redeemer and angel of your will; who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all things, and in whom you were well pleased. You sent him from heaven into a virgin’s womb; and conceived in the womb, he was made flesh and was manifested as your Son, being born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands when he should suffer, that he might release from suffering those who have believed in you.

And when he was betrayed to voluntary suffering that he might destroy death, and break the bonds of the devil, and tread down hell, and shine upon the righteous, and fix a term, and manifest the resurrection, he took bread and gave thanks to you, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body, which shall be broken for you.” Likewise also the cup, saying, “This is my blood, which is shed for you; when you do this, you make my remembrance.” Remembering therefore his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, giving you thanks because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister to you.

And we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit upon the offering of your holy Church; that, gathering her into one, you would grant to all who receive the holy things (to receive) for the fullness of the Holy Spirit

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tendency to make one form of the Eucharistic Prayer a prototype of all the others. See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 131–60.

for the strengthening of faith in truth; that we may praise and glorify you through your child Jesus Christ; through whom be glory and honor to you, to the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and to the ages of ages. Amen.<sup>5</sup>

A brief consideration of the main parts of the prayer will emphasize the distinctiveness of Eucharistic prayer. At its center is thanksgiving to God for our redemption through Jesus Christ. Hippolytus's prayer thanks God for sending to us "a savior and redeemer," as Scripture designates him. The Prayer of Thanksgiving specifically focuses on the gift of Jesus Christ as our redeemer. Two things may be observed here: creation and redemption are held together by Christ, and God's redemption in Christ has a larger scope than just the saving of individuals. This is how Scripture teaches us to think about God's redemption, such as in Colossians, "For by him all things were created in heaven and earth . . . and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross" (Col. 1:16, 20).

Beginning with reference to God's creation of us and his general goodness to us, the prayer quickly moves to remembering what Jesus Christ did: his life, death, and resurrection. This part of the prayer is called the *Anamnesis* (remembrance). Remembrance here means much more than mental recall. It is remembrance in the biblical sense, such as in the celebration of the Passover meal. Israel was instructed to remember the mighty acts of God's deliverance from Egypt as participants in the same act of deliverance (see Ex. 12:21–27). Jesus's institution of the Lord's Supper requires this kind of remembering in the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper; he says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). As Hughes Oliphant Old has noted, "That God acts in history is fundamental to our theology; that we rejoice in these mighty acts

is fundamental to our worship."<sup>6</sup> Actively remembering in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, we take our place alongside the people God has blessed in Christ.

After the *Anamnesis* many of the classic Eucharistic prayers include the *Sanctus*, which begins with the words, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God almighty; heaven and earth are full of your glory," although it is absent from Hippolytus's prayer.<sup>7</sup> It is fitting to include it after remembering God's mighty act of redemption in Jesus Christ because that event rightly evokes the biblical response of awe and praise to God. Also, with the *Sanctus* the church joins its thanksgiving with the heavenly worship of God for his redemption. Thanksgiving for Christ is given to God by the universal church in heaven and on earth. The *Sanctus* has been sung or spoken in the Eucharistic prayers, but either way is a most appropriate biblical acclamation to God.

Hippolytus's prayer moves from the *Anamnesis* to Jesus's words of institution and then, towards the end of the prayer, is the *Epiclesis* (call upon). The prayer of Hippolytus says, "And we ask that you send the Holy Spirit upon . . ." With the *Epiclesis* there is the understanding that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes the sacrament of communion effective. Without the Holy Spirit it becomes an empty sign, but with the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us, we are united together in Christ, and we are fed and nourished by him. This is in accordance with the apostle Paul, who teaches, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Calvin makes just this point about the Holy Spirit and the Lord's Supper: "The sacraments profit not a whit without the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>8</sup> The

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5 R. C. D. Jasper and Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 35.

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6 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 237.

7 The *Sanctus* is based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.16.9.

*Epiclesis* recognizes that God continues to bless us with the benefits of Christ's salvation. So, the main elements of the Eucharistic Prayer, the *Anamnesis*, *Sanctus*, institution narrative, and the *Epiclesis* focus on the act of God's redemption in Christ.

One final observation needs to be made concerning the language in Hippolytus's prayer about the church's offering of the bread and the cup to God. Reformed theology rightly teaches that the Lord's Supper is not about our offering the gifts of bread and wine to God, but about what God has given to us. So, for Reformed churches the *Epiclesis* in Hippolytus's prayer may be amended using the words from another Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer of St. Basil, to say, "Send your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts that we have set forth before you, your own from your own gifts."<sup>9</sup> This amendment clarifies the divine source of the gift.

The form of the Eucharistic Prayer contributes to the specific theme of the prayer, which is giving thanks to God for our redemption in Christ. God has certainly lavished his benevolence upon us. Calvin referred to God as the fountain of every good. He is the creator and sustainer of his creation, and "no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause."<sup>10</sup> For Calvin, God is the source of all good.<sup>11</sup> All the good things we generally receive, like food, employment, music, and friendships, come from God. As Psalm 36:8–9 says:

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
The children of mankind take refuge in the  
shadow of your wings. They feast on the

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9 Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers*, 71. Another possible form is, "And we most humbly beseech Thee, O merciful Father, to bless and sanctify with Thy Holy Spirit both us and these Thy gifts of bread and wine." Or this phrase could be used, "these elements of bread and wine, to be set apart from all common uses to this holy use." See *The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1946), 160–62.

10 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.2.1.

11 B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 26.

abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

The bounty of God's goodness to us and to all people is beyond measure. However, there is one gift God has given to us that stands out from all the rest—the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. John's Gospel (3:16) uses the language of gift when it says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son." And the apostle Paul, in Romans 5:15, calls Jesus Christ the "free gift." God's gift of Jesus Christ for our salvation outshines all the other gifts we receive from his hand, because Jesus joins us in our human condition and gives himself to rescue us and cleanse us from our sin in order to reconcile us to God. Nor does God's gift of his Son stop there, but Christ continues to give himself to us by the Holy Spirit for the constant preservation and nourishment of our new life in him. Truly he is the greatest gift we could ever receive from our heavenly Father.

Given God's benevolence to us and the extraordinary gift of his Son, it is right to thank him. Historically speaking, the church has considered giving thanks to God a fundamental part of worship. The church assembled together in worship was inconceivable without giving thanks for Christ. In point of fact, every other element of the church's worship depends on Christ's sacrificial offering of himself for us. Invoking God's presence, confessing our sin, praying for the Spirit to illumine the reading and preaching of Scripture, petition to God for what we and others need—all of these depend on Christ's gracious giving of himself (not to mention the other parts of worship such as singing praise to God). And so, thanksgiving is central to Christian worship. Among the reasons Calvin gives for the necessity of prayer is this, "that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand."<sup>12</sup> How much more ought we to receive the

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12 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.3.

benefits of Christ's sacrifice, like the Lord's Supper, with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving to God for the gift of Christ should not be assumed in worship but intentionally expressed. Yet I have been in some worship services in which thanksgiving was not once expressed to God. The question always is worth asking, what is Christian worship all about? When we begin to learn the answer, we discover the ineluctable place of the Eucharistic Prayer in worship. Used historically in the church, including Reformed worship, this prayer is full of gratitude. There is more to it than just expressing thanksgiving to God, but its hallmark is thanksgiving for the gift of Christ.

For all these reasons I have come to the conviction that some form of Eucharistic Prayer belongs in worship. Since thanksgiving for Jesus Christ is an essential part of worship, the Eucharistic Prayer should be prayed every time the church meets for worship. Of course, other expressions of thanksgiving exist in Christian worship, particularly psalms, hymns, and general prayers that give thanks to God. But these are used occasionally, without a fixed place in the worship service. Is it possible that our reliance on hymns and general prayers alone to give thanks to God gives the impression that thanksgiving is incidental to our worship? Historically, the church has made the Prayer of Thanksgiving a fundamental part of worship attached to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Churches that celebrate the Supper each week can easily give thanks to God with the Eucharistic Prayer and make this prayer a set part of their worship. However, this prayer can still have a place even in churches where the Lord's Supper is not celebrated every week. A modified form of the Eucharistic Prayer could be a set feature of worship in churches without the Lord's Supper in their service. Some parts of the prayer would have to be omitted, or radically reworded, like the *Epiclesis*, because they only make sense with the sacrament. Allowing for these modifications, a Prayer of Thanksgiving focused on the gift of Jesus Christ can be used. It may take some work to craft the prayer, but it would secure the church's thanksgiving to God in worship rather than make it

occasional. ©

**Jeffrey B. Wilson** is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as pastor of Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Southfield, Michigan.



# ✦ Servant Truth

## Natural Law in Reformed Theology: Historical Reflections and Biblical Suggestions

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by David VanDrunen

I am grateful for the invitation to give this lecture,<sup>2</sup> both for the opportunity to serve the presbytery and to learn from you as I continue my own work on the subject of natural law. I know that this can be a controversial topic. Before I begin, I should offer a brief definition of natural law: it is a law given by God, defining human beings' basic moral obligations and the consequences of obedience and disobedience, revealed objectively in the natural world and known subjectively by rational human beings who are constantly confronted by the natural world, though sinfully prone to twist its meaning.

In the first section, I offer historical reflections. I conclude that natural law simply *is* a part of the historic Reformed system of doctrine and intimately woven into the Westminster Standards. Thus, I believe the question before us as Reformed Christians is not *whether* we have a theology of

natural law, but *what kind*. In the second section, therefore, I present an outline of how a good Reformed biblical theology of natural law might be constructively developed.

### Historical Reflections

A number of concerns make many contemporary Reformed Christians anxious or even agitated when they hear a fellow Reformed believer saying a positive word about natural law. The concerns often run along the following lines: the idea of natural law entails too high a view of the powers of human reason (and, hence, too weak a view of human sin); it detracts from the supreme authority of Scripture (and, hence, compromises the doctrine of *sola scriptura*); and it promotes a vision of ethics based on human autonomy (and, hence, without the immediate need to take God into account).

These concerns about natural law are valid. They are valid *if* we understand natural law in the way proponents of the Enlightenment increasingly understood it. After a long period of religious wars and social unrest following the Reformation, many European intellectuals wished to find a way to unite people across traditional confessional divides, through the common and universal powers of human reason, unencumbered by detailed theological convictions. They adapted the idea of natural law to serve this end. Natural law became a tool for constructing a universal human ethic, unhooked from the deep theological doctrines that Christians had traditionally used to talk about natural law. This Enlightenment perspective did indeed have too great a confidence in reason, too low a view of Scripture, and promoted an autonomous human ethic.

The concerns that many contemporary Reformed Christians have about natural law, however, are *not* valid with respect to historic Reformed views of this subject. In many respects they are not even valid with respect to medieval views of it. It is fascinating, furthermore, that many contemporary natural law theorists—from various points on the Christian theological spectrum—are saying that we need to get away from these En-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=301&issue\\_id=74](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=301&issue_id=74).

2 This essay is a shortened and edited version of a lecture given at the pre-presbytery theology conference of the Presbytery of the Midwest (OPC), in Grayslake, Illinois, March 2011.

lightenment ideas about natural law and recover older approaches to the subject that reconnect it to biblical teaching and rich theological doctrines. In light of this, I now reflect briefly on natural law from the Middle Ages through the Reformation era, concluding with the place of natural law in the Westminster Standards.

In the Middle Ages, theologians, philosophers, and jurists all wrote about and utilized natural law. Though they had some internal disputes about certain aspects of natural law, there was widespread consensus on many important points. They agreed that the natural law exists. They believed that God himself had created the natural order and the human conscience that perceives it and responds to it, and thus they believed that the natural law placed people under obligation to God. These medieval thinkers also taught that sin has damaged the human person's ability to understand and to follow the natural law. On the practical side, they commonly spoke about natural law as foundational for civil law (though in a flexible way, requiring prudential application to particular circumstances). Finally, they believed that natural law and biblical moral teaching should be mutually illuminating, neither of them to be explored completely independently of the other. I do not mean to suggest that medieval natural law was perfect. It was not. But medieval thinkers did think about natural law in biblical and theological terms.

As far as I can tell, the Reformers looked at natural law as a part of catholic Christianity that stood in no great need of reform. The Reformers obviously thought that many aspects of Christian doctrine needed serious reform—issues such as justification, the sacraments, and the relationship of biblical and ecclesiastical authority among the most familiar to us. But they did not view many other aspects of their doctrinal inheritance in this way—the doctrine of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, for example. Natural law, it seems, fell into the latter category.

This is not to deny, however, that there were some shifts in perspective on natural law among the Reformers and their heirs, even if they did not take up natural law as a point of focus for their

reforms. Compared to their medieval forbears they had an enhanced sense of the dreadful effects of sin and its noetic effects, and, hence, also an enhanced sense of the necessity of Scripture to clarify and correct their interpretation of what the natural law reveals. The Reformers also developed an understanding of the conscience in some new directions, which in turn shaped certain aspects of their doctrine of natural law. In connection with the doctrine of the two kingdoms, furthermore, we find Reformers making clearer distinctions between the role of natural law with respect to “earthly things” and its role with respect to “heavenly things” (to borrow John Calvin’s language), such that natural law could play a rather positive function for the former while for the latter, it served only the negative function of convicting people of their sins and driving them to a Savior. In other words, God gave natural law a positive role in helping to promote a measure of social order and cultural achievement in this world, but it could not constructively advance a person one step toward a right relationship with God or eternal life.

I believe there is more work to do in developing a Reformed theology of natural law that is biblically penetrating and consistent with our broader doctrinal commitments. But, before I turn to that subject, it is worth reflecting on how natural law became thoroughly integrated into the Reformed system of doctrine and confessional standards.

As far as I can tell, older Reformed theologians never made much effort to build a distinctively Reformed theology of natural law, but they all affirmed the existence of natural law, and they incorporated it into their theology. The Westminster Standards illustrate this. I have counted at least thirteen direct references to natural law in the standards (which uses various terms, such as “light of nature,” the “law of God written in their hearts,” and “law of nature”), and there are also indirect references. But perhaps more significant than the sheer number of references is the range of Reformed doctrines that the standards connect to natural law. This means that one cannot extract natural law from the system of doctrine taught in the standards without fundamentally damaging the

system itself. Natural law is integral to the historic Reformed system of doctrine.

What doctrines do the standards associate with natural law in one way or another? One is the existence of God: “The very light of nature in man ... declare[s] plainly that there is a God” (Westminster Larger Catechism 2). (This refers to natural revelation more broadly, and not simply to natural law.) Another is the nature of human beings as created under the covenant of works. Westminster Confession of Faith 4.2 and WLC 17 describe the first humans as “having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it.” The standards also appeal to natural law to describe the most basic moral commitment that continues to bind all people after the fall into sin: “The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might” (WCF 21.1). The Sabbath is another important moral issue the standards associate with natural law: “It is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God” (WCF 21.7). Of course, the standards also hold that all people rebel against this natural moral revelation. This means that there is no salvation for anyone apart from the word of Scripture, be they “never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature” (WCF 10.4; WLC 60). WLC 151 also speaks of the “light of nature” when explaining the heinousness of sin. And natural law ensures the accountability of all people before God at the final judgment: “The light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable” (WCF 1.1).

Natural law, furthermore, plays positive roles for believers and the church, according to the Westminster Standards. It helps us to understand the bounds of our Christian liberty, for example, for Christian liberty does not permit us to publish opinions or maintain practices that are “contrary to the light of nature” (WCF 20.4). Natural law is also necessary for the proper ordering of worship

and ecclesiastical government. In the very section explaining the sufficiency of Scripture, the WCF states: “There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature” (1.6). WCF 1.6 provides a helpful reminder: in classic Reformed theology, the doctrine of *sola scriptura* means that we do not need other forms of *special* revelation, not that we do not need natural revelation. Scripture itself presumes the existence, and continuing importance, of natural revelation.

In light of all this, I believe that we who are confessional Presbyterians do not have an option about whether to affirm a robust doctrine of natural law as part of our system of doctrine. Our challenge is to develop a theology of natural law from Scripture that best illuminates and further refines this confessional material.

### **Biblical Suggestions**

This second section describes how I think a biblical theology of natural law might be constructively developed, in ways consistent with and supportive of the Reformed system of doctrine. First I reflect on a covenantal theology of nature and then turn to the importance of natural law with respect to unbelievers and believers.

First, I suggest that a Reformed theology of natural law should be grounded in a theology of nature, which in turn should be grounded in our covenant theology. When thinking about a theology of nature, it makes sense first to consider Genesis 1 and the original covenant of works. Genesis 1 makes immediately clear that God’s creating activity instills the entire natural world with order and purpose. His creation is objectively meaningful. Another thing Genesis 1 explicitly teaches is that God made human beings in his image, and this image entailed knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Human beings were, thus, subjectively capable of comprehending and acting upon the truth communicated in nature. To say that the natural order is objectively meaningful and that human beings are subjective-

ly capable of apprehending its meaning may seem like obvious assertions to many Christians, but they are a crucial foundation to a theology of natural law, and they emerge already from Genesis 1. We also observe in Genesis 1 that God made man in his image for the purpose of exercising dominion in the world. God had exercised supreme dominion in creating the world, and man, made in his likeness, was to rule the world under him. If man was to rule the world in God's likeness, he had to rule it not aimlessly but toward a goal, for God himself worked, then passed through his own judgment (Gen. 1:31), and finally rested. As taught in our doctrine of the covenant of works, God made man to work, then to pass through his judgment, and finally to join him in his eschatological rest. Genesis 1, I believe, does not allow us to separate our doctrine of the image of God from the covenant of works, as if the latter were simply added on at some point after man's creation. God made human beings *by nature* to work in this world and then to attain eschatological life. Thus, the original order of nature communicated not only man's basic moral obligations toward God but also the fact that God would judge him for his response and reward or punish him accordingly.

In light of the fall, however, we cannot simply view natural law now through the lens of the original creation. Accordingly, I suggest that it is helpful to view natural law in the present world through the lens of the covenant with Noah in Genesis 8:20–9:17, for this is the means by which God now preserves and governs both the cosmic and social realms. This covenant makes clear that God still orders the cosmos and makes it objectively meaningful, though its purposes have been obscured, and that he still deals with all human beings as his image-bearers, though they are fallen. God gives human beings responsibilities adapted for a fallen world, but these responsibilities resemble those under the original creation order. We are to be fruitful and multiply, to rule the animals responsibly, and to pursue justice (Gen. 9:1–7). God did not impose these obligations arbitrarily; they correspond to the nature with which he created us. The very commission to do justice is grounded in

human nature: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, *for God made man in his own image*” (9:6).

God's original work of creation and his providential governance of the fallen world under the Noahic covenant, therefore, provide crucial foundation for developing a theology of natural law. But how does the rest of Scripture speak about natural law and its purposes? In what follows, I identify aspects of biblical teaching that show the importance of natural law with respect to unbelievers and then with respect to believers.

There are at least three important functions of natural law with respect to unbelievers. First, natural law is a tool of common grace for the preservation of human society. This corresponds to what is often termed the *second use* of the law. The story of Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 20 provides a good illustration. Sojourning in Gerar, Abraham deceived king Abimelech by calling Sarah his sister, and Abimelech promptly took her into his home. Informed of the real situation by God in a dream, Abimelech confronted Abraham the next morning. Though they came from different places, cultures, and religions, Abimelech accused him: “You have done to me things that ought not to be done” (20:9). This pagan recognized a universal standard of morality, cutting across cultural and ethnic divides, that one person should be able to expect any other person to acknowledge. Abraham's response—“I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife” (20:11)—displays that he had misjudged Gerar. There was indeed a certain (non-redemptive) fear of God in this place that restrained the outbreak of sin. The natural law is an instrument of common grace.

Second, natural law is a means for bringing all people under God's universal judgment. Romans 1 provides a clear example. In 1:18–21 Paul teaches that all people are without excuse before God and stand under his wrath because of what can be known about him “in the things that have been made.” Through creation itself they *know* God, though they constantly distort this knowledge. Among their sins, they give up “natural relations

for those that are contrary to nature” (1:26). Paul also states that through this natural revelation they “know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die” (1:32). The picture is not absolutely negative, for Paul later adds that Gentiles also “by nature do what the law requires” (2:14). But this internal knowledge of God’s law involves judgments of the conscience that serve as a foretaste of the final judgment: “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them, on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (2:15–16).

Third, natural law is important for unbelievers because it lays necessary foundation for proclaiming the gospel. This corresponds to the so-called *first use* of the law. The previously quoted verses from Romans 1–2, of course, are part of Paul’s own foundational teaching in preparation for his explanation of justification and other saving benefits, beginning in Romans 3:21. In short, without the law there is no gospel. Without conviction of sin there can be no faith and repentance. Calling attention to the testimony of natural law, therefore, promotes the effective preaching of salvation in Christ.

Finally, I turn to the importance of natural law for believers. Here again I mention three basic considerations. First, natural law rebukes us when we stray. The function of natural law described in Romans 2:14–15 does not entirely cease in people who come to faith, for it continues to prick our consciences concerning sin. The Old Testament prophets frequently appealed to Israel’s knowledge of the natural world and the way it works in order to help the people understand the utter ridiculousness of their rebellion against God (e.g., Isa. 1:2–3; Jer. 8:7). Understandably, there are fewer examples of this in the New Testament, but consider Paul’s statement: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife” (1 Cor. 5:1). His comment only makes sense if pagans are aware of a universal moral truth. Paul awakens believers’ consciences by shaming them through the natural law.

Second, natural law shows believers how we are to live well in a dangerous world. Scripture makes clear that the moral life is not just about memorizing rules, but also about observing the world, learning how things work, and drawing appropriate moral conclusions. The *wisdom* commended in Proverbs is inconceivable without natural law. The structure of the universe is suffused with God’s wisdom, by which he made it (Prov. 8:22–31), and by perceiving and following this wisdom human beings find success and blessing in the world (8:15–21, 32–36). Observation of the world should lead believers to conclusions about how it regularly operates, and this in turn should compel certain moral conclusions. For example, observing the ant (6:6–8) and the sluggard’s vineyard (24:30–34) warn against laziness.

Third, natural law explains and reinforces for us, as New Testament saints, why we continue to honor and participate in the natural institutions of this world (such as family and state), though we are already citizens of a heavenly kingdom that does not have such institutions. Christ did not *establish* any institution except the church, and he did not *create* any brand new obligations toward the family or state. With regard to such institutions, the New Testament echoes and reinforces obligations that are already there under the natural law (though we are now to pursue them “in Christ”). Commands about marital fidelity, raising children, pursuing justice, and honoring magistrates are not arbitrary, but are appropriate for the kind of people God made us by nature. Romans 13:1–7, for instance, reflects the natural order preserved under the Noahic covenant, in which God ordained the use of the sword by his image-bearers to enforce justice against evildoers (Gen. 9:6). And both Jesus and Paul appealed to the creation order to explain their exhortations about marriage and sexual morality (Matt. 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; 1 Cor. 11:2–16). It is true—and I believe very important to remember—that Christians are also called to witness by their conduct that they ultimately belong to the new creation, where the natural order in the form we now know it will no longer exist. Our non-tributative, reconciliation-seeking church discipline,

which looks so different from the way the state is to deal with wrongdoing, is a good example. But as long as we live in this present age, the reality of the natural law explains our continuing obligation to honor natural institutions.

## Conclusion

Having offered these historical reflections and biblical suggestions, I conclude with three basic reasons why we should recover a Reformed theology of natural law. We should do so, first, in order to be faithful to our Presbyterian confessional tradition (as well as to show that we are true heirs of catholic Christianity). We should recover a Reformed theology of natural law, secondly, in order to be better able to teach the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures. Finally, this endeavor will help us to understand better the ways by which God upholds human society through his common grace and, thus, to understand better how to make our way as sojourners in this world and to proclaim the gospel faithfully within it. ©

**David VanDrunen**, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is the Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California.

# “Thou Art the Christ”: Reflections on the Name of the Lord

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by **Bryan D. Holstrom**

Not long ago I received a flyer from a bookseller that specializes in distributing titles from Reformed publishers. As I flipped through its pages, I couldn't help but be struck by an interesting dichotomy in the arrangement of the works offered for sale. In the first few pages, I ran across books with titles or subtitles that included the following: *Singing the Songs of Jesus*; *The Reality of Encountering Jesus*; *Jesus Rose from the Dead*; *The House that Jesus Built*; and *40 Days with Jesus*. But when I got towards the back of the flyer, these titles appeared: *The Priesthood of Christ*; *The Glory of Christ*; *The Intercession of Christ*; and *Christ Crucified*.

Of course, the seller hadn't purposely arranged the books in any kind of order based upon the characteristics of the titles. Rather, if you haven't already figured out what the distinction is between these two groups of books, the former is made up of more recent releases while the latter titles are found in the section containing “classic” works from earlier centuries.

While I've no doubt that each of the books in the recent release category is a valuable resource for Christian readers, the flyer did highlight a disturbing trend that has been making its way through the church for some time now. Increasingly, it seems as if Christians are hesitant to refer to their Lord and Savior by anything other than his given birth name of Jesus. This trend is particularly evident in churches that cater to young evangelicals, but, as the above example demonstrates, even the

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=338&issue\\_id=80](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=338&issue_id=80).



authors and publishers of Reformed books appear to be succumbing to the fashion of the day.

Actually, the seeds of this development date back at least to the fundamentalist-modernist debates of the early twentieth century. The mainline churches had already been greatly influenced by the so-called “Quest for the Historical Jesus” and were rapidly moving to strip him of his divine and messianic titles. As early as 1926, Geerhardus Vos observed that Jesus’s messianic identity had replaced the cross as the great rock of offense to the modern Christian mind.<sup>2</sup> Simply stated, the liberal tendency to refer to the Savior solely by his given birth name is motivated by a desire to replace the divine Christ of Scripture with a purely human substitute, albeit one who was a great moral and ethical teacher.

But while this trend may be nothing new within the confines of the broader visible church, what is of more recent development is the depth to which it seems to have taken hold in those churches of a more evangelical persuasion. I refer here not merely to the titling of books, but to the more fundamental way in which our whole manner of discourse has been influenced by it. More and more Christians who supposedly don’t share the theological presuppositions of which Vos wrote have nevertheless adopted the practice of speaking of Jesus, and of praying in his name, without appending the reference to his official title.

Is this controversy (if I may even be allowed to call it such) merely a tempest in a teapot? I don’t think so. It may not yet rank high on the alarm scale for many of us, but I’m convinced that the significance of this trend far outweighs our awareness of it, for it tends to compromise our gospel message in the most subtle of ways—by obscuring the identity of the one whom we are called to proclaim. I also believe that those of us in Reformed circles have been more influenced by this trend than we probably realize.

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2 Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness*, ed. Johannes G. Vos, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1953), preface.

In the remainder of this essay I will seek to answer two questions: 1) How does the modern practice compare to the pattern of Scripture? 2) What, if anything, can we do to reverse the trend?

### The Biblical Pattern

Peter’s declaration that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16) represents a turning point in the gospel narratives. Even if subsequent events would call into question the depth of Peter’s reliance upon the truth he had just expressed, it nevertheless demonstrates that he had moved beyond the more limited conception of Jesus’s identity that was held by the general populace. Most importantly, it was a truth to which Peter could attain only through the working of the Holy Spirit, and one for which he would eventually give his life. Only a few short weeks after his stumble at Jesus’s trial, he would stare down a hostile crowd in Jerusalem and proclaim that same Jesus as the one whom God had made “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

The rest of the New Testament demonstrates the importance that Peter and the apostolic band thereafter attached to identifying Jesus with his divine and messianic titles. Aside from a few examples in the speeches found in Acts, where the Savior’s given name is used primarily for the purpose of historical identification or to emphasize the nature of his humiliation, the name “Jesus” is almost never uttered without the titles of “Lord” or “Christ” being appended, either before (as “Lord Jesus” and “Christ Jesus”) or after (as “Jesus Christ”).

Paul’s practice is particularly instructive. In his thirteen epistles he uses the name “Jesus” a total of 216 times (not counting his reference to the Jesus also known as Justus in Colossians 4:11).<sup>3</sup> The messianic title is appended to all but thirty-one of those references, eighteen of which are rendered as “Lord Jesus.” That leaves only thirteen references

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3 The word counts given here are from the text of the New King James Version.

without either title directly attached to the Savior's given name. But in every one of those thirteen references the name is contained within a sentence or thought unit that otherwise also identifies him as Christ or Lord.<sup>4</sup> A good example is 1 Corinthians 12:3, which contains two of those thirteen references, the second of which directly states that "Jesus is Lord."

Without a doubt, however, Paul's preferred designation for the Savior is "Christ." He uses it some 402 times, either appended to "Jesus" or as a stand-alone reference. Indeed, it is surprising how many of the most commonly memorized Scripture passages contain the latter type of reference (see, e.g., Rom. 1:16; 5:8; 8:34; 1 Cor. 1:23–24; 10:4; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; 12:9; Gal. 1:6; 2:20, 3:16; Eph. 4:32; 5:25; Phil. 1:21; 4:13; Col. 3:3–4, 11, 16; 1 Thess. 4:16).

A vivid example of Paul's commitment to proclaiming Jesus as Christ and Lord may be seen in the opening words of his first epistle to the Corinthians. In the span of only ten short verses, he refers to the Savior once as "Christ," once as "Jesus Christ," twice as "Christ Jesus," once as "the Lord Jesus Christ," twice as "Jesus Christ our Lord," and three times as "our Lord Jesus Christ."

Nor is the picture any different when we examine the non-Pauline epistles. In the letters of James, Peter, and Jude there is only a single exception to the rule of appending "Christ" to the name "Jesus," and that is Peter's reference to "Jesus our Lord" in 2 Peter 1:2. John's first epistle contains three references to Jesus that do not have "Christ" appended, but each involves one of his diagnostic statements identifying Jesus as "the Christ" (2:22) and "the Son of God" (4:15; 5:5). Thus, those references serve the purpose of historical identification. The Son of God is none other than the man Jesus whom John and the other apostles had "seen and heard" (1:3) with their own eyes and ears.

Interestingly, the only real exceptions to the rule are found in the books of Hebrews and

Revelation. But even in those works the number of such references is dwarfed by the combined number of references to "Jesus Christ," or to "Christ" as a stand-alone designation.

## Stemming the Tide

Is there anything that we can (and should) be doing to encourage those under our care to speak of the Lord in a manner that is more in keeping with the biblical pattern? I believe there are at least two things that we can and should do.

First, we can make sure that the doctrine of Christ's deity is getting adequate attention in our preaching and teaching ministries. To be sure, this isn't an area in which Reformed churches have tended to be deficient. We have neither retreated from the truth of this doctrine nor been timid in our proclamation of it. But in an age when this truth is under constant attack from the unbelieving world, and more of those coming into the church lack the prior catechetical instruction that characterized earlier eras, it's quite possible that we're in need of stepping up our efforts in this area.

Unfortunately, we can no longer assume that those in our care have a proper appreciation for the dual nature of Christ's person or for the doctrinal significance which flows from that reality. In light of this, we probably need to be more diligent to expound upon the great truths attending his divine identity, rather than taking it on faith that our members are already well versed in such matters. We would benefit from evaluating our preaching and teaching ministries in the light of the following questions: Are we doing enough to demonstrate the intimate connection between Christ's divine identity and the nature of his redemptive work? Are we giving sufficient attention to the manner in which his exercise of the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king confirms that identity? Are we making use of the great creedal statements of the past respecting his person, wherein he is spoken of as "true God from true God" (Nicene Creed) or "very and eternal God" (WCF 8:2)? Moreover, are we following the example of our own confessional standards, which speak of the

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<sup>4</sup> Those references are Rom. 3:26; 4:24; 8:11; 1 Cor. 12:3 (twice); 2 Cor. 4:11, 14; 11:4; Eph. 4:21; Phil. 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:10, 4:14 (twice).

mediator almost exclusively as “Christ” with barely a mention of his given birth name?<sup>5</sup>

In commenting upon the increasingly common use of “Jesus” as the Savior’s exclusive designation, Vos wrote that the trend was “a symptom of the generally shifting attitude in the religious appraisal of our Lord from the official to the merely human.” He then noted that, in contrast to this attitude, “Paul and the whole early Church, in making and favoring the combination ‘Jesus Christ,’ expressed a strong feeling of appreciation for the legitimate standing of Jesus in his office of the Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Vos’s comment highlights the second thing that we can be doing to stem this tide. Following the lead of Paul and the other biblical writers, we can be more intentional to speak of our Lord in both prayer and general discourse with the exalted terms that they use, and eschew the more casual form so commonly employed today. If Vos is correct in his diagnosis, then it seems incontrovertible that we should refer to our Lord simply as “Jesus” only sparingly, if at all.

Another theologian from the same time period, A. W. Pink, speaks even more forthrightly on the matter. After examining the way in which the biblical writers speak of Christ, and noting in particular the example of Paul, Pink concludes, “To address the Lord of glory in prayer simply as ‘Jesus,’ or to speak of Him to others thus, breathes an unholy familiarity, a vulgar cheapness, an irreverence which is highly reprehensible.”<sup>7</sup>

Now if Pink meant to say that every use of the name “Jesus” without an accompanying title is *per se* sinful, then we would surely part company with him. But I don’t believe that’s what he meant to affirm. Rather, it is the trajectory and general thrust of his comments here which are helpful and on point. We may not say that it is outright sin to speak of the Savior in such terms, but we may say that it doesn’t represent the best that we have

to offer. To paraphrase Paul’s distinction between what is legal and what is profitable, we may say that whatsoever is permissible in this area is not necessarily advisable.

Such an affirmation in no way obscures the fact that the name “Jesus” itself has profound theological significance (Matt. 1:21). But the same divine/human person who was given that name at birth came into the world already possessing the title of “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10). Nor do we foolishly assert that appending one of those divine titles to the human name works as a magic incantation, turning an otherwise fruitless prayer into an effectual one. Nothing will substitute for a right heart in prayer, or worship, or any other endeavor. But the Christian who desires to conform his or her practice to the biblical pattern will be hard pressed to maintain that the casual form of addressing the Savior is to be preferred over the more exalted forms used by the writers of Scripture.

The truth that Peter confessed in Matthew 16, and which he afterwards proclaimed to the crowd in Jerusalem, was Spirit-wrought, life-changing truth. It is the same truth that we proclaim to a dying world; a world that will gladly make room for a human Jesus but not a divine Christ. Like Peter, we have only so many opportunities in a week to proclaim this Jesus as Lord and Christ. We do well not to waste them. ☉

**Bryan D. Holstrom** is a ruling elder at Covenant of Grace OPC in Batavia, Illinois.

5 See especially WLC questions 36–60.

6 Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 109.

7 Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 103.

# ✦ Servant Training

## How Much Catechesis? The Case for a Maximalist Approach to Membership Classes

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by Ken Golden

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church requires prospective members to make credible profession of faith by taking solemn vows in corporate worship. Often this marks the end of an extensive process of studying the essential Christian teachings that are summarized in the vows. Many of these classes also include summaries of Reformed distinctives, such as TULIP and worship. This raises several questions. How many class sessions should be required? How many topics should be covered? How much information should be imparted in order that vows can be taken in good conscience? A philosophy of curriculum is helpful in order to answer these questions. The purpose of this essay is to examine our philosophy of membership curriculum (hereafter *catechesis*) in light of biblical, historical, and practical issues. In this essay, I argue that catechesis should take on a *maximalist* or comprehensive character, not only for public profession of faith, but also for long-term assimilation into the OPC. I support this thesis with biblical and historical data, interact with practical concerns, and offer a sample curriculum.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=287&issue\\_id=71](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=287&issue_id=71).

### Biblical Support

The New Testament approach to indoctrination falls under the category of catechesis. This means more than the familiar question-and-answer format we find in the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Catechesis (*katēchēsis* κατήχησις) is derived from the verb κατηχέω (*katēcheō*), which means “to report/inform” or “to teach/instruct.”<sup>2</sup> At least one of Luke’s reasons for writing his gospel was for a certain Theophilus to have “certainty” (*katēchēthēs* κατηχήθης) about the doctrines of the faith (Luke 1:4). Additionally, the Alexandrian Jewish convert Apollos was described as being “competent in the Scriptures” and “speaking accurately the things of the Lord,” because he was instructed (*katēchēmenos* κατηχημένος) in “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:24–25). The way of the Lord is the religion of God that finds fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Judg. 2:22; Isa. 40:3; Jer. 5:4–5).<sup>3</sup> Based on its New Testament usage, catechesis can be described as the transmission of Christian doctrine from the mature to the untrained.

Catechesis also has deep roots in the Old Testament. God chose Abraham and his progeny in order to “command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD” (Gen. 18:19). The purpose of Abraham’s election was to create a “God-fearing community” through the instruction of covenant children—an obligation that was reiterated in the Mosaic Law.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the Exodus, God commanded Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell [*tesaper*

2 “κατηχέω,” Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, eds., *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 534.

3 Cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 2:887. “In Acts, Christianity is described as the Way, ἡ ὁδός, at 9.2; (16.7); 18.25, 26; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22.” *Ibid.*

4 Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Bible Commentary (WBC) (Dallas: Word, 1994), 50.

הַסֵּפֶר] in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know [vidayetem וַיִּדְעֶתֶם] that I am the LORD” (Ex. 10:1–2). The verb סָפַר (*safar*) in the Piel frequently describes a transmission of information.<sup>5</sup> The verb יָדַע (*yada*), however, expresses “a multitude of shades of knowledge gained by the senses” including “God’s knowledge of man (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 34:10) and his ways (Isa. 48:8; Pss. 1:6; 37:18), which . . . begins even before birth (Jer. 1:5).”<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is intimate and enfolding. In Deuteronomy 4:9–11, the command to make known (*vehodayetam וְהוֹדַעְתֶּם*—Hiphil of יָדַע) is accompanied by the exhortation to teach (*yelamedun וְיִלְמְדוּן*) the entire history of the law to the next generation.<sup>7</sup> Here, the Piel form of the verb לָמַד (*lamad*) suggests the idea of training as well as educating.<sup>8</sup>

The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. According to Paul, Abraham received the gospel in advance. The gracious covenant that bears his name was not annulled by the law (Gal. 3:8, 17) but fulfilled when God the Son assumed its responsibility on the cross of Calvary. As spiritual heirs of this everlasting covenant by faith in Jesus Christ, Christian parents must diligently transmit the faith to their children.<sup>9</sup> Paul specifically had this in mind when he

wrote, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up (*ektrepheete* ἐκτρέφετε) in the discipline (*paideia* παιδεία) and instruction (*nouthesia* νοουθεσία) of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). The verb ἐκτρέφω (*ektrepheete*) occurs only in the book of Ephesians, denoting “to nourish” (5:29) and “to rear, bring up” (6:4).<sup>10</sup> Παιδεία (*paideia*) entails “the act of providing guidance for responsible living” (Eph. 6:4; Heb. 12:5, 8, 11) or describes “the state of being brought up properly” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).<sup>11</sup> Finally, νοουθεσία (*nouthesia*) expresses an “avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct” (1 Cor. 10:11; Eph. 6:4; Titus 3:10).<sup>12</sup> In describing these various forms of instruction as being “in the Lord,” Paul connected the Old Testament mandate of catechesis with New Testament families who were the spiritual inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 2:39). With the unfolding of redemptive history, fathers must now pass on their doctrinal heritage in light of its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> Timothy was such a covenant child who from his earliest years was “acquainted with the sacred writings” (2 Tim. 3:15).<sup>14</sup>

All this language suggests a comprehensive approach to the transmission of covenantal knowledge from one generation to the next. While the covenantal context involved transmission from parent to child (Deut. 6:7; Ps. 78:2–8; Eph. 6:4), the maximalist principle can be broadened from nuclear to ecclesiastical families. It can inform the catechesis of converts, lapsed persons, and even Christians seeking a deeper understanding of the faith.

## Historical Support

Catechesis was an indispensable tool for the early church. Catechumens, the students of catechesis, included adult converts preparing for bap-

5 “סָפַר,” Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (KB), rev. Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, Benedikt Hartmann, Ze’ev Ben-Hayyim, Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, Philippe Raymond; trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson; 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:766.

6 R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago, Moody, 1980), 1:366; cf. “יָדַע,” KB, 1:392.

7 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard, 2nd American ed. (Columbus, OH, 1852; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, n.d.), 12.

8 “לָמַד,” KB, 1:531; cf. Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 1:480: “The training aspect can be seen in the derived term for ‘oxgoat,’ *malmēd*. In Hos 10:11 Ephraim is taught like a heifer by a yoke and goad.”

9 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 1:481.

10 “ἐκτρέφω,” BDAG, 311.

11 “παιδεία,” BDAG, 748–49.

12 “νοουθεσία,” BDAG, 679.

13 Cf. Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 408.

14 Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 12.



tism and the children of baptized parents. Instead of the question and answer format that typifies later catechesis, teaching often involved the study of creedal or doctrinal statements of faith.<sup>15</sup> Although catechetical philosophies varied, there is evidence for curricula that was lengthier in duration and fuller in scope. The renowned catechetical school of Alexandria usually involved a two- to three-year curriculum.<sup>16</sup> Some, like Augustine of Hippo, took on a narrative approach. He wrote: “The narrative is complete when the beginner is first instructed from the text, ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth,’ down to the present period of Church history.”<sup>17</sup> Augustine was not implying that catechumens receive the minutiae of biblical information; rather he suggested “a general and comprehensive summary.”<sup>18</sup>

Others were more topical in their approach. Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catecheses* were lectures intended for students approaching baptism. Beginning with repentance and baptism, they moved on to a systematic discussion of faith, the Trinity, Christ in his humiliation and exaltation, and the holy catholic church. In his *Procatechesis*, Cyril explained the reason for his systematic program:

Let me compare the catechizing to a building. Unless we methodically bind and joint the whole structure together, we shall have leaks and dry rot, and all our previous exertions will be wasted. No: stone must be laid upon stone in regular sequence, and corner follow corner, jutting edges must be planed away: and so the perfect structure rises.<sup>19</sup>

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15 John Murray, “Catechizing—A Forgotten Practice,” *Banner of Truth* 27 (October 1962): 15.

16 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 2:257.

17 Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, trans. Joseph Patrick Christopher (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1926), 3.5.

18 Augustine, *Catechizandis*, 3.5. Note: chapters 17–24 provide an example of his narrative program.

19 Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 11 in *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, trans. Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1969), 1:79.

Here, Cyril underscored the importance of systematic study. While the order of topics differed considerably from later dogmatic presentations, his principle of theological connections not only appeals to the academic mind, but strengthens the rank-and-file catechumen in pursuit of discipleship.

As the church became more and more identified with the world and ecclesiastical pomp and ritual developed, evangelical teaching began to decline. Nevertheless, remnants of the evangelical church remained faithful to catechesis. As John Murray noted, “It stands out clearly in the history of the dark Middle Ages that where this kind of instruction was adhered to most closely [e.g. Waldenses and Lollards], Christian life remained purest.”<sup>20</sup> During the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, catechesis experienced a renaissance. By this time, the question-and-answer format became commonplace, with larger confessions and “institutes” providing deeper reflection.

Not everyone has shared this vision. In recent centuries, catechesis has been met with resistance, especially in the modern Sunday school movement that favors Bible memorization. While one would be hard-pressed to criticize this activity, an overemphasis at the expense of systematic teaching warrants some concern. Accordingly, Murray’s insightful critique is worth repeating:

A misguided reverence for the Bible has prevented some from forming a systematic outline for the main doctrines of the Word, and consequently when confronted with a systematic challenge to their faith, which also alleges Scripture for its authority, they are ill equipped to defend their position. As we are so painfully discovering today, such people are the easy prey of Romanism and false cults.<sup>21</sup>

Today, many cults are repackaged versions of ancient Christian heresies. Their command of proof texts can be overwhelming to Christians

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20 Murray, “Catechizing,” 16.

21 Murray, “Catechizing,” 23.



who have not gained a systematic understanding. Furthermore, Christians are confronted negatively by skeptics seeking to undermine the Bible and positively by seekers desiring to deepen their understanding of the Scriptures. A maximalist approach to catechesis enables Christians to meet these challenges.

### Practical Concerns

So far, we have seen how catechesis has served as an integral component of transmitting biblical truth from the mature to the untrained, whether adults or children. Since this essay concerns training for public profession of faith, both groups are in view. Different people have different needs. Some people come from other Reformed churches and have already been catechized. Others come well versed in Reformed doctrines even though they attended less consistent churches. Still others come with an extensive but fragmented knowledge of the Bible. Finally, there are those who come with no biblical knowledge at all. Does this mean that churches need to design separate curricula to accommodate every situation? Few would find this practical. Instead, one curriculum that could be tailored to various needs would serve the purpose.

Here, it is helpful to compare the maximalist approach to other strategies. Some principally subscribe to the minimalist maxim of “less is more.” While brevity can be a virtue in many things, the transmission of the Christian faith requires more understanding. The seriousness of taking membership vows—including the fifth vow requiring fidelity to the church—requires counting the cost beforehand. Those with insufficient knowledge may find themselves at odds with the church concerning such issues as predestination, paedobaptism, the regulative principle of worship, or fencing the table. This can prevent assimilation and commitment. Studying these issues ahead of time can help avoid problems down the road.

Others take these issues seriously but feel that a maximalist approach may be impractical for teachers or a stumbling block for inquirers. Lengthier catechesis involves time commitments

for pastors who are already juggling busy schedules. Moreover, the busy lifestyles of inquirers may cause some to expedite the process. Wisdom needs to be employed in these matters, but pragmatic concerns should not trump pedagogical needs. While pastors should be seen as the primary catechists, they could be supplemented by session-approved teachers. Catechists can also be flexible with inquirer schedules. Classes do not have to take place at one specific time in a classroom. In fact, conducting classes in the homes of inquirers according to their schedules can lead to ministry opportunities. This can build trust between teacher and student.

### A Sample Curriculum

Having evaluated the strategies and their perceived motives, the question still remains, how much catechesis is needed? One specific solution is now being proposed. My own search for a maximalist approach to catechesis led me to write a curriculum titled “The OPC Class.” This rather ordinary title provides the structural divisions of the book: (I) Orthodox—*Christian Essentials*, (II) Presbyterian—*Reformed Distinctives*, and (III) Church—*Means of Grace*. The purpose of this division is to differentiate what one must believe in order to make profession of faith from other important doctrines that will be taught in an OPC congregation. Consequently, inquirers can approach membership with the freedom to disagree about certain teachings and the opportunity to grow in their understanding of the Reformed faith.

The Orthodox section is subdivided into familiar categories with accessible titles. Chapter 1 begins with the Bible as God’s Word to man. This includes discussions on general and special revelation, attributes of Scripture, biblical authority, and the canon. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce inquirers to the triune God and the image-bearer with whom he entered into covenant. Chapters 4 through 6 alternate between what man has done in sin and what God has done in salvation through Christ and is doing through the Holy Spirit. The latter chapter includes a summary of the law for further

reflection.

The Presbyterian section introduces the familiar Reformed distinctives of TULIP, church government, and worship. The Church section focuses on the means of grace: Word, sacrament, and prayer. Rather than being short summaries with proof texts, these chapters provide full biblical and theological treatments of the subjects covered. Questions for further discussion are found at the end of every chapter.

The book also offers two appendices. The first one concerns the five membership vows, breaking them down into a number of questions about each vow. This gives inquirers a chance to review what they learned and better understand the vows they will be taking. The second appendix is a sample liturgy offered in table format with biblical proof texts for each element and their dialogical progression from beginning to end.

In keeping with the maximalist approach to catechesis, The OPC Class contains some chapters that are longer due to the complexity of the subject matter. While most chapters can be taught in one sixty-to-ninety-minute session, the longer ones would require multiple teaching sessions.

## Conclusion

In seeking to prepare inquirers for public profession of faith, OPC sessions need to consider the consequences of their philosophy of curriculum. As argued in this essay, a strong biblical, historical, and practical case can be made for a maximalist approach to catechesis. Such an approach will not only provide adequate preparation for entrance into our congregations but undergird the need for long-term assimilation into the OPC. ©

**Ken Golden** is the pastor of *Sovereign Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Moline, Illinois (Quad Cities)*.

# Why a Candidates and Credentials Conference?

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by **James S. Gidley**

Welcome to the inaugural Candidates and Credentials Conference!<sup>2</sup> In such company, I am conscious that much, if not all, of what I have to say will not be new to you, but I hope that it will be a helpful reminder.

So, why are we here? The most direct way to answer this question is to say that the General Assembly, in effect, wanted us to be here. In 2004, the Seventy-first General Assembly adopted a recommendation of the Committee on the Views of Creation in the following form:

That the General Assembly encourage the Committee on Christian Education and its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training to seek ways of working more closely with the candidates and credentials committees of presbyteries in order to bring ministerial candidates to a fuller understanding of the confessional standards, the *Book of Church Order*, the *Minutes* of the General Assembly and the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>3</sup>

The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training proposed this conference as a means of responding to the Assembly's request, and the Committee on Christian Education has endorsed it. The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training had already been considering how we might work with candidates and credentials committees, and I view this conference as a continuation and extension of a variety of efforts undertaken by the SMT and

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=292&issue\\_id=72](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=292&issue_id=72).

2 Held at the offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania on August 8–9, 2005.

3 *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 29.

the CCE over the last decade to strengthen the preparation of candidates for the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

It is significant that the Seventy-first General Assembly's action came originally as a recommendation from the Committee on the Views of Creation. You are well aware of how the issue of the days of creation has troubled our presbyteries and influenced the process of examining candidates for the ministry, and I hope that Alan Strange will address this issue more directly later in the conference. For my purposes, I draw your attention to a more general problem, of which the views of creation are a particular instance: increasing diversity in the church and among candidates for the ministry presents a challenge to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in maintaining our identity and, more importantly, the faithfulness of our witness. A crucial part of the challenge is encountered in the process of preparing and examining candidates for ministry, and therefore a particular responsibility for meeting this challenge falls upon your shoulders.

All of this leads me to consider more fundamental reasons for our presence here today than the deliberations of a committee or even the action of a general assembly, however important these things may be. We are gathered here today to consider how we may increase our faithfulness in the exercise of the binding and loosing authority of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. On that memorable day in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

As Presbyterians, we believe that this promise was not made to Peter as an individual, nor even exclusively as an apostle—much less as the first Pope—but that this promise descends to the true church in all ages and places of the world. The promised authority is concentrated in the ordained officers of that true church. In particular, the promised authority descends to us as elders and ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Perhaps the most far-reaching exercise of that

authority is the admission of men into the sacred office of minister of the gospel. We do well to consider carefully Paul's exhortation to Timothy on this score: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure" (1 Tim. 5:19). Is it not significant that when Paul urges this sobriety and caution in ordaining men to office he immediately adds that Timothy is not to take part in the sins of others? If we commit the sacred office to unqualified men, we take part in their sinful motives for seeking the office, whether they are consciously seeking the ministry for base and selfish reasons or honestly yet foolishly overestimating their qualifications. In an indirect way, we then also take part in the sins of omission and commission that such unqualified men become guilty of in the conduct of a ministry to which God has not called them. As I consider this, I would not wish to be among such Presbyterian elders and ministers as those who ordained a Charles Grandison Finney to the ministerial office!

Yet I believe that the warnings of the Lord contain a promise of blessing as well. If it is true that we in some way participate in the sins of those whom we ordain, is it not also true that when we entrust the ministerial office to able and faithful men, we also participate in their faithfulness and fruitfulness? The Puritan John Flavel approvingly cites the Jesuit theologian Suarez, who "argues for a general judgment, after men have passed at death their particular judgment; because (saith he) long after that, abundance of good and evil will be done in this world by the dead, in the persons of others that over-live them."<sup>4</sup> Consider then what fruit may be borne even after we are dead and gone from our placing men in the sacred office of the ministry! Whether good or ill, we will be called to account for it in the last great day, at least as far as it lay in our power to foresee what that fruit would be.

It is well for us to consider the times and circumstances in which we bear the responsibility of the keys. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we

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<sup>4</sup> John Flavel, *Pneumatologia: A Treatise on the Soul of Man* (London: W. Jones, 1824), 116.

are undoubtedly living in a period of change. One way of characterizing this change is to observe that the diversity of the OPC is increasing. Probably a good bit of this is simply the result of the growth with which God has blessed us.

The membership of the OPC is changing. Luke Brown, the Statistician of the OPC, noted in his report to the Seventy-first General Assembly:

The church as a whole grew from 19,198 members (including ministers) at the end of 1993 to 28,019 at the end of 2003. This 8,821-member increase represents a net gain of 45.9 percent. During the same period, losses due to deaths and erasures totaled 8,638 persons, at least some of whom were replaced (statistically) by new members being added to the rolls. Thus one may estimate that well over one-third (perhaps even one-half) of our church members are new to the OPC since 1993. This is truly remarkable.<sup>5</sup>

I would add: remarkable only for the relative speed of the turnover. As surely as all flesh is grass, 100 percent of the membership of the church of Jesus Christ will be new 150 years from now. Certainly none of us will be here! Having said that, however, it does seem that Mr. Brown has put his finger on an important aspect of the life of the OPC as we begin the twenty-first century: we are in a time of significant change. Corresponding to the turnover in membership, there seems also to be a turnover among elders and ministers: at this year's general assembly, over 40 percent of the commissioners had been ordained within the last fifteen years.<sup>6</sup>

We observe another aspect of change in our church-planting efforts. The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension reported to the Seventy-first General Assembly: "For almost a decade OP church planting has been in a response mode. A group of Reformed people find each

other, come to us for help, and we adopt them as a core group."<sup>7</sup> In addition to this, you are all aware of whole congregations entering the OPC from other denominations or from independency. One of the implications of this is that we have groups of people, including whole congregations, coming into the OPC having been converted, disciplined, and catechized (or *not* catechized) in other traditions, some Reformed, some not. Please understand that I am not questioning the sincerity or convictions of these precious brothers and sisters in Christ; I am only pointing out that their history suggests that they present the OPC with a special challenge and responsibility in the arena of Christian education.

The diversity has become ethnic and linguistic as well. For example, what a blessing and encouragement it has been to hear at this year's assembly and to read in the most recent *New Horizons*<sup>8</sup> of the increasing presence of Hispanic brothers and sisters in the OPC! I recall sitting in a CCE meeting almost fifteen years ago and ticking off in my head the names of the men sitting around the table—names like Williamson, Tyson, Elder, Poundstone, Johnson, Winslow, Wilson ... white Anglo-Saxons all! It is a blessing that this will typically no longer be so. Already we have had names like Shishko, Deliyannides, Olinger, and VanDrunen, and there is nothing to prevent our having a Perez, an Alvira, or a Kim on the CCE. Yet again, ethnic and linguistic diversity poses new challenges for Christian education.

As there is increasing diversity in the membership of the OPC, so also there is increasing diversity among the ministers of the OPC. The days when we could assume that most ministers in the OPC had been to Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia are long gone! Whatever we may think of that change, it is undeniable that our ministers no longer have a unifying seminary experience to

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<sup>5</sup> *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> David K. Thompson and Danny E. Olinger, "The Seventy-second General Assembly," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 8 (August-September 2005): 4.

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<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Ross Graham, "Spanish Spoken Here," and Richard Gerber, "Gospel Fruit in Vineland," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 8 (August-September 2005): 18–19.

introduce them to the OPC and to each other. At the 2003 General Assembly, Danny Olinger sat quietly at the Historian's table and conducted a poll of the ministers. He found that collectively they had attended over twenty different seminaries. In your duties for candidates and credentials committees, you have no doubt dealt with ministers coming to the Reformed faith in the midst of their ministry and seeking entrance into the OPC. They may have attended a non-Reformed seminary or no seminary at all. Again, praise God for these dear brothers in Christ. But again, they pose a challenge to our Christian education efforts.

Recent general assemblies have also seen an increasing number of candidates for ministry who do not meet the standard educational requirements for ministers in the *Form of Government*. This may simply be an anomaly, or merely a result of the growth of the church, but it seems to be a real increase. Our *Form of Government* provides for exceptions to the educational requirements for the ministry because we do not believe that ministers are made by formal education. Nevertheless, education equips men to minister. Again we have a challenge to our Christian education efforts.

One reaction to increasing diversity is to insist on a rigid uniformity. While my premise is that the ministers in the OPC are exhibiting an increasing diversity, it could be argued that we are seeing a narrowing of views and an increasing uniformity among our ministers. I do not believe that these competing diagnoses of the situation are necessarily mutually exclusive. Our response to diversity in denominational background, culture, ethnicity, etc., may be to compensate by developing a greater ideological uniformity. I use the word "ideological" deliberately. Ideological uniformity may or may not be true biblical uniformity.

Presbyterian history illustrates the dangers of a misguided insistence on uniformity. According to the sober church historian Williston Walker,

in 1637, in a fatuous desire for uniformity, Charles [I, King of England and Scotland], inspired by Laud [William Laud, then archbishop of Canterbury], ordered the imposi-

tion of a liturgy which was essentially that of the Church of England. Its use, on July 23, in Edinburgh, led to riot. Scotland flared in opposition.<sup>9</sup>

A chain of subsequent events gave us the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms a little over a decade later. That riot in Edinburgh, featuring the tossing of a stool at the mitred head of a bishop by one Jenny Geddes, has passed into legendary status in Presbyterian history and stands as a symbol of Presbyterian protest against a top-down, hierarchical ecclesiology. The lapse of over three and a half centuries has not been sufficient to remove our constitutional aversion to "a fatuous desire for uniformity."

Coming down to the present, we observe that the principal locus of responsibility for preparing and examining candidates for the ministry resides in the Presbytery. Hart and Muether have observed historical reasons for this:

Because Presbyteries were established first, not synods or general assemblies, American Presbyterianism is characterized by the power of presbytery. The American church, unlike its Scottish analogue, has delegated greater power to presbyteries than to higher courts. This is particularly evident in ordination, where presbyteries still enjoy remarkable autonomy in calling men to the ministry. This feature of American Presbyterianism may reflect sound polity and good theology, but it is also an accident of history. One of the reasons for forming a presbytery in Philadelphia in 1706 was to license and ordain men for the gospel ministry. Ever since then, presbyteries in America have been jealous to guard that prerogative.<sup>10</sup>

In the OPC the general assembly becomes

9 Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 412.

10 D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, "Turning Points in American Presbyterian History, Part 2: Origins and Identity, 1706–1729," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 26, no. 2 (February 2005): 23–24.

involved in the ordination process only in exceptional cases.

The Committee on Christian Education and its Subcommittee on Ministerial Training have no desire to steer the church in the direction of a more top-down, hierarchical ecclesiology. Our role in putting on this conference is to assist and to facilitate. Because each of the members of the CCE and SMT is also an elder or minister, and because some of us also serve on candidates and credentials committees of presbyteries, we also join with you in the collegial task before us. To put it simply and comprehensively, I see our task not as the establishment of uniformity, but as the promotion of unity and consistency in the process of preparing, licensing, and ordaining men to the gospel ministry. This bears repeating: our goal should not be *uniformity*, but *unity* and *consistency*.

Let me illustrate what I mean by unity and consistency in the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. We face a basic problem of unity and consistency when a candidate can be ordained in one presbytery but not in another. Ordinarily there is no reason to be distressed by this. There will always be variations in how candidates are prepared for the ministry, variations in how the presbyteries apply the common criteria, and variations in how candidates and credentials committees conduct examinations. Devotees of uniformity may be distressed by this natural outcome of the various distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit, but adherents of unity and consistency need not fear it. The manifold workings of God's grace and providence do not work injustice upon candidates who are affected by this sort of non-uniformity.

However, there are two situations in which diversity among presbyteries is problematic. The first situation is where it is publicly known that one presbytery is substantially more—or less—rigorous than others in the conduct of the trials for licensure and ordination. Candidates are then tempted to gravitate to the “easy” presbyteries, which run the risk of becoming something like the “diploma mills” that cheapen higher education. Other candidates may be tempted to feed spiritual pride by gravitating to the difficult presbyteries in

an attempt to prove themselves against a higher standard.

The second problematic instance of diversity occurs when it is common knowledge that a man will be denied ordination in some presbyteries because of a particular theological conviction that is unacceptable in those presbyteries but not in others. Then candidates are tempted to shop for a presbytery that is congenial to their particular views. In the heat of debate over particular theological issues in the church, the ordination process runs the risk of becoming something like a political football. We are tempted to examine men not so much for their comprehensive fitness for the gospel ministry as for their adherence to the theological party that is dominant in our presbytery. The Seventy-first General Assembly tried to address this problem by adopting two recommendations of the Committee on Views of Creation, one of which dealt specifically with the doctrine of creation,<sup>11</sup> which I will here pass by, and the other of which addressed the general problem:

That the General Assembly urge members of presbyteries and sessions to uphold the peace of the church by addressing theological issues within the church primarily through educational, administrative, judicial, or other constitutional means, and not merely by voting for or against candidates for office.<sup>12</sup>

It is well to remember that Presbyterians have not historically demanded a precise, all-encompassing *doctrinal* uniformity any more than they have wished to impose a precise uniformity in the forms of worship or church government. Our confessional documents ought not to be viewed as a pinpoint of doctrinal precision but as a circle within which acceptable variations of theological conviction are to be found.

Another way of describing healthy diversity among presbyteries would be to say that it should be exhibited in dealing with candidates for the

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11 *Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly*, 28–29.

12 *Ibid.*, 29.



ministry whose qualifications are at the margin of acceptability, candidates about whom all would agree going in to the process that there is significant doubt or even reservation about their qualifications. Unhealthy diversity, however, is exhibited in dealing with candidates who are far from the margins of acceptability. On the one hand, men who are eminently qualified for faithful and fruitful ministry may be denied ordination because of excessive rigor in the process or because of party spirit. On the other hand, men whose qualifications for ministry are evidently substandard may be ordained because the examination process is culpably lax or because they are able to mouth the particular Shibboleths that are congenial to a presbytery.

If these situations persist, it is only a matter of time before some ministers ordained in one presbytery will not be received or recognized by others. Whenever this occurs, the unity of the church is threatened. When it becomes something other than an extremely rare event, we are no longer one church.

On the other hand, *unity* prevails when presbyteries uniformly respect each others' actions, particularly with respect to ordinations. *Consistency* prevails when candidates for the ministry cannot predict where they would most easily be ordained or where they could not be.

Perhaps it would be appropriate here to back up and approach the problem from yet another point of view, that of the call to the ministry. The Presbyterian approach to the call to the ministry is complex, involving the call of God and the call of the church, or as they might be alternatively designated, the internal and the external call. Yet these two sides of the call are not independent factors. The call of God is sovereign and determinative; in principle, the call of the church is the working out and confirmation of the call of God. If we identify the call of God exclusively with the term "internal call," we run the risk of supposing that the call of God is purely a personal affair between a man and God. The external call of the church is in reality no less the call of God than the internal call operating in a man's heart and conscience.

Having said this, however, we must always reckon with the fallenness of this world and the imperfection within it of even divinely ordained means and institutions. It is all too possible that the visible church may call to the ministry men whom the Lord has not called. Such are the plants that our heavenly Father has not planted, whose destiny is to be rooted up (Matt. 15:13). May we be spared from participating in the sins of such men!

On the other hand, it is also possible that the visible church may refuse to ordain men whom the Lord really is calling into the gospel ministry. In this world, such failures are inevitable, but it is still our duty to do all in our power to avoid them.

We ought to be equally concerned about failures on either side. Therefore, the way to discharge our duty wisely and faithfully is *not* that we should all become more and more rigorous in the licensure and ordination process until only men of apostolic giftedness and devotion can be ordained. Neither, of course, should we make the process so lenient that no qualified man, by any stretch of the term qualified, would ever encounter any difficulty.

We must strive to admit to the ministry those whom God is calling and to exclude from it those whom he is not calling. I am sure that you will agree that we must not seek to know whom God is calling by way of special revelation or mystical insight. Rather, we must do the hard work of designing and administering trials for licensure and ordination in such a way as is most fit, by the grace of God and under his providential guidance, to achieve a result consonant with the call of God.

Where do we go from here?

Our history and our convictions forbid a (worldly) top-down approach. In fact, according to Presbyterian conviction, there exists no ecclesiastical "top" from which pronouncements and directives can come down except the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, in so far as we have the law of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have all the top-down direction that we need or that we ought to allow. But in the visible church on earth, there is no ecclesiastical "top."

We are left with the process of mutual encour-

agement and exhortation among the ordained officers of the church, a process that is so distressing to control freaks of every stripe. I hope that our gathering together for this short conference will enhance that process and prove to be fruitful in mutual edification and for the peace and purity of the church.

To be specific, let me suggest two ways in which I believe that this conference may bear fruit. This will by no means be an exhaustive list.

First, by facilitating open discussion between members of candidates and credentials committees of various presbyteries, each presbytery may be better able to move towards the adoption of “best practices” in preparing men for the ministry and in the conduct of the trials for licensure and ordination. Undoubtedly, each presbytery exhibits different strengths and weaknesses. Let us share our strengths and correct our weaknesses! In doing so, I hope that we may also move towards a more perfect unity and consistency among the presbyteries.

My second suggestion flows from the fact that the preparation of men for the ministry is the concern of the whole church. I have already spoken about the power of presbyteries, but there remains a legitimate role for the whole church, acting through the general assembly, in preparing men for the ministry. That is why the OPC has a Subcommittee on Ministerial Training within its Committee on Christian Education and has charged it to do the following:

- (1) Assist the churches in seeking out men with apparent gifts for the gospel ministry and in pressing upon them its urgent claims.
- (2) Consider means of strengthening the preparation of men for the gospel ministry.
- (3) Consult with representatives of seminaries or other educational institutions regarding the training of men for the ministry.
- (4) Recommend to presbyteries ways in which gifts of men under care may be developed and proved, and work with presbyteries in establishing suitable programs to this end.

(5) Develop means for the continuing education and development of ministers.<sup>13</sup>

In my fifteen years of service on the SMT, I have more and more come to see how large a task is outlined here! There are many things that we are not doing, but let me highlight two things that we are doing, which I believe you could help us to do better, which is my second suggestion.

First, the SMT conducts a program of semi-annual visitation. Reports on our visits to seminaries have been appearing in the report of the CCE to the general assembly in recent years, and these are available in the published GA minutes. We hope that these reports have been helpful to you in dealing with candidates coming from the seminaries that we have reported on, and we would be interested in your feedback on how useful the reports have been. How could we make them better? Our manpower is small, and we have enlisted ordained officers from outside the SMT/CCE to assist us in the visitation process. Let me thank those of you who have participated and ask all of you how you might help us to make the visit process more effective and helpful to the church.

Second, the SMT operates the Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. (You will be hearing from some MTIOPC instructors later in the conference.) What is your experience with men who have taken one or more courses in the MTIOPC? Do these courses appear to have been helpful in preparing men for their trials for licensure and ordination? Have you taken courses yourselves? Do you see the MTIOPC as a wise use of denominational resources, both in terms of finances and manpower? If so, how can we make it better? For example, are there additional courses that we should be offering?

If these efforts and others like them are to be fruitful in a Presbyterian way, they need the support and participation of presbyteries. In asking for your help, I am seeking to keep these efforts truly

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13 Standing Rules of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, X.2.c.

Presbyterian.

Again, brothers, welcome! Now let us work together. ☺

**James S. Gidley**, a ruling elder at Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pennsylvania, is a professor at Geneva College, where he is chairman of the Engineering Department. He is also a member of the Christian Education Committee and the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training.

## How to Prepare Spiritually for Ordination Exams

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by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Taking a ministerial licensure or ordination exam must be an act of piety. Laying hold of this thought is the best means of approaching an exam without fearing the men who shall examine you. In many respects, preparing for licensure and ordination can be one of the best means to prepare for the pastorate. If we would be bondservants of Jesus Christ, then we must not seek to please men (Gal. 1:10). Being examined for the ministry is the first act among many in the ministry where a man must wrestle between speaking his conscience as it is

informed by the Word of God, and seeking to tell others what he thinks they desire to hear. How you approach your exams will often indicate how you will approach your ministry. You must prayerfully seek to conduct yourself in your exam in a manner that is worthy of the office that you are seeking to enter. This means that you must be prepared to confess your faith in Christ and your desire to obey him with humility, submission, and sincerity, yet with boldness.

A ministerial examination is, above all, a test of the heart. Your examiners can discern what you present to them outwardly, but you alone can search your heart and pursue your exam as an act of worship to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. In all of your laborious preparations for the ministry, be sure to keep your heart diligently, for from it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). By the blessing of the triune God, the following considerations will help you to approach your examination as an act of piety.

**1. Regard your examination as a public testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the truths of his Word.** Through it, you must confess with your mouth what you believe in your heart (Rom. 10:9). This should make your exam an act of worship. This is true whenever you speak in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you confess him before men, then he will confess you before his Father in heaven, but if you deny him before men, then he will deny you before his Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32–33). If you are confident that Christ is pleased with your answers, then the presbytery should be pleased, too.

**2. Approach your exam in prayer and in faith.** Philippians 4:6–7 asserts, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> There have been times in my ministry where I have prayed

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=294&issue\\_id=72](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=294&issue_id=72).

<sup>2</sup> Scripture citations are taken from the New King James Version.

fervently through this passage daily in order to persevere. This text provides you with the biblical means to deal with anxiety in terms of both a command and a promise. Pray through all of your preparations to ensure that your studies are driven into your heart and life by the work of the Holy Spirit, and do not neglect thanksgiving! When we give thanks to the Lord for and during the circumstances that have tempted us to be anxious, then we both place our trust in him and we confess his sovereign wisdom.

**3. Consider the cause of your fears.** Frequently, we must reason ourselves out of fear. Why else do we dread an examination other than the fact that we may potentially fail, together with the ensuing consequences of failure? This highlights a great danger in the ministry. Once you are ordained and the fear of passing or failing an exam is removed, the temptation to become lax in the charge that you have received from Christ becomes stronger. If you neglect your knowledge of the Word of God and cease to grow in your study of theology, then you may not “fail” an exam, but you must answer to Christ for the weak emaciated sheep who are under your care, who are unable to stand against the assaults of the evil one. Fear prior to an exam may be “natural,” but remember: “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:6; Ps. 118:6). The Lord warned Isaiah that it is audacity against God for one of his messengers to fear men: “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of a son of man who will be made like grass” (Isa. 51:12).

**4. Be honest and keep a clear conscience before God and men.** If you do not know the answer to a question, then be honest and say so. Would you really want to stand before a congregation and say, “thus says the Lord,” when you are not sure whether he has actually said so or not? If so, then why would you desire to do so before ordained men who are examining you for the ministry? Besides this, giving an answer when you are unclear or uncertain will almost always get you

into trouble—especially in an oral exam.

**5. Remember that ministry is bold.** Some candidates for the ministry object that they do not perform as well in oral exams as in written ones. If such is the case, then your oral exam will be even more profitable to help prepare you for the ministry. Most of a minister’s public work in the local church is verbal and not written. If you intend to speak in the name of Christ from the pulpit, then it is good for you to learn to speak without shame before a presbytery or before an examination committee. Though often intimidating, a presbytery (or comparable ordaining body) is a relatively friendly environment, whereas an unbelieving world, and at times a congregation, is not. Let us imitate the apostles by praying for boldness (Acts 4:29; Phil. 1:19–20).

**6. Remember that those who will be examining you for the ministry have been given a sacred trust from the Lord.** They are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). When they admit others into their number through the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14, etc.), they must take care that they do not lay hands on anyone hastily, lest they share in the sins of those who prove to be unfit for the office (1 Tim. 5:22).<sup>3</sup> Be humble and be respectful of the solemn charge that has fallen upon such men and that, if the Lord wills, you shall one day share. Would you truly desire your examiners to ordain you to the ministry carelessly or mistakenly, any more than they should desire to do so?

**7. Look upon a thorough ordination exam as a confirmation of your call to the ministry.** Remember that the triune God uses his church to set men apart for the gospel ministry. When a man has a personal sense of call to church office, and this call is confirmed both by the election of a local congregation and by a group of previously ordained elders, then, and then only, shall that man know with confidence that the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer (Acts 20:28). Your motive for ministry must be love to the God who has first loved you in Christ (1 John 4:19). Your goal in the

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<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix below.

ministry must be to proclaim the love of the Father, as it is manifested through the grace of Jesus Christ, by means of the fellowship and comfort of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18; 2 Cor. 13:14). However, your call to the ministry must never be a bare internal desire or a mere individual decision. We are easily self-deceived. Men may have a virtually invincible “sense of call” to the ministry in their hearts, but unless the church agrees that this is the case, both on the local level and on the presbytery level, the fact remains that such men have not actually been “called” to the ministry. The simple reason for this is that the church has not yet given him a call to labor as one of its ministers! I have known men who believe that they are called to the ministry, and yet virtually no one in the church seems to agree with them. May you never forget: “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26). Your exam is neither a formality nor is it superfluous. There is no example of an ordinary officer in the New Testament who was not elected by the people and ordained by the laying on of the hands of a presbytery. A call to the ministry is always a churchly affair. If Christ is calling you into the ministry, then your exam is part of how he is doing so.

**8. Remember that your examiners are your potential future colleagues in the ministry.** If they have been duly called to their office, then their desire should be for the good of the church. This includes the good of your soul. You must avoid viewing these men as “enemies,” but look upon them as fellow soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of them are experienced veterans from whom you have much to learn. How often have young men scoffed at criticism that they have found later to be “words of wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:2)?

**9. Regard taking an ordination exam as an excellent exercise in self-denial.** Whether you pass or fail, the Lord is at work both in you and in his church through this process. Submit to his providence humbly and, if at all possible, cheerfully. A good test of whether we are denying ourselves is to consider whether we find ourselves complaining about the process. Theological students who com-

plain over a heavy course load become candidates who complain about their exams. Candidates who complain about their exams, in turn, become ministers who complain about their churches and their presbyteries. Faithful and hard-working ministers realize quickly that the most rigorous course of seminary training cannot compare to the difficulties of the pastorate. If you find yourself developing a sinful pattern in this area, then deny yourself, pray that you might be content in whatever state you are in (Phil. 4:11), and read Numbers 11 and following regularly!

**10. Preparing for your exam should provide you with a stronger foundation for biblical knowledge and personal piety.** We must avoid making a sharp distinction between knowledge and piety. We must know what we practice, and we must practice what we know. The truth, as it is revealed in Scripture, is according to godliness (Titus 1:1). Every truth of Scripture including—among many others—the two natures of Christ, the covenant of works, the efficacy of the sacraments, the law of God, and the Trinity, has been derided as theological “hairsplitting.” Yet each of these areas has significant pastoral implications. If we do not see how true theology is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), then the fault invariably lies with us rather than with the Word of the triune God. If nothing else, all theological truth must increase our personal communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In order to pass a bar exam, a future lawyer must know the law *and* how to apply it. The same standards apply to medicine and to other disciplines. Should we expect less diligence and fewer rigors with respect to future ministers of the gospel? Studying for an exam frequently forces men to tie together more comprehensively what they have learned in seminary. Candidates should use this rare opportunity to pray these truths more fully into their hearts and lives. Preparing for your exam forces you to review your knowledge, yet let it serve as an occasion to wed your knowledge to your piety as well. If you pursue your examination for the ministry as an act of piety, then you shall never find the experience barren or unfruitful.



## APPENDIX: JOHN ERSKINE (1721–1803) ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDINATION EXAMS

In 1750, John Erskine preached a sermon entitled, “On the Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity.” Erskine was an influential Scottish minister who helped prepare Jonathan Edwards’s *History of the Work of Redemption* for publication. He concluded this sermon with an exhortation to presbyteries regarding their involvement in ordaining men to the gospel ministry. Erskine’s material reinforces what is written above by viewing ministerial examinations from the standpoint of the examining body. I have broken down the original large paragraphs into smaller parts for easier reading.<sup>4</sup>

How awful is the warning of Paul to Timothy, and in him to all concerned in ordaining others to the pastoral office! *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.* As if he had said, though you have no particular reason to suspect a candidate unfit for the ministry, be not on that account slight and superficial in trying his qualifications for it, but examine, with the utmost care and exactness, his moral character and aptness to teach; for if, through indolence and carelessness, you neglect to make those inquiries, upon which you might have discovered what was amiss; or if, through an excessive tenderness for candidates, through that fear of man which bringeth a snare, or through some other unworthy motive, you so far connive at his known vices or defects, as to grant him ordination; by this conduct, you partake with him, not only in the sins he has already committed, but also in those which he shall afterwards commit, while he either

teaches or lives badly; and therefore, you must answer for all the pernicious consequences of his ordination, in ruining his own soul, and the souls of his flock. Nay, should other ministers be unwarrantably rash in this matter, and urge you to concur with them, be not moved by their entreaties or authority, to act contrary to your own judgment, lest you be condemned as accessory to their guilt.

In the verse preceding this caution, ministers are charged *not to prefer one before another, and to do nothing by partiality*, i.e., not to determine a cause for or against a person till we hear what can be said on both sides; not to prefer one before another, where there appears no sufficient reason for such a preference; and not to be swayed by friendship or prejudice, to be favorable to one and more severe to another, than we ought to be. And, in the end of the chapter, to encourage this diligence, the apostle informs us, that if we proceed with due deliberation we shall not lose our labour, but shall ordinarily be able to form a judgment concerning candidates. *Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before them to judgment; and some men, they, viz. their sins, follow after. Likewise, also, the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they, viz. the good works, that are otherwise, cannot be hid.* The meaning is some men’s sins are so heinous and notorious, that, going as it were before them to judgment, little or no trial is necessary to discover them. And the sins of others follow them to judgment; because, though less open, yet they also might, in most cases, by due inquiry, be brought to light. In like manner, the good works of some, and their fitness for ordination, are easily discerned, even before they undergo a formal trial; and those good works which are not manifest beforehand, but which, through the modesty or obscure situation of the performer, are little observed, may often, by a diligent search, be discovered.

From this remarkable passage ... Grotius

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from John Brown (of Edinburgh), ed., *The Christian Pastor’s Manual: A Selection of Tracts on the Duties, Difficulties, and Encouragements of the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh, 1826; repr., Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1991), 136–40. Sadly, this excellent volume is now out of print. However, it can be downloaded in full from <http://www.puritanboard.com/f29/christian-pastors-manual-john-brown-39577/>.



observes, that we ought not only to enquire, whether a candidate for ordination is innocent of atrocious crimes, but whether he has done much good, seeing the pious actions of the eminently pious can seldom be hid. And, agreeably to this, Paul requires, not only that a bishop be blameless, but that he have a good report with them that are without, lest he fall into reproach; so that freedom from gross scandals, without certain positive evidences of a pious disposition, is no sufficient warrant for us to ordain any. It is criminal to lay hands on a candidate, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will preach usefully; and it is equally criminal to do it, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will be an example to others in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity; for the last of these is as really a part of the minister's duty, and as really a means to be used by him for the saving of souls as the first. The things, says Paul to Timothy, that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. We must have probable evidence of their faithfulness, as well as of their ability to teach. Even deacons are first to be proved, and then to use the office of a deacon. Sure, then, ministers, whose office is much more honourable and important, should not be allowed to exercise it, till their fitness for it is well tried....

If any allege that there would not be found a sufficient number of ministers for all our churches, did we ordain with such caution, I answer, it is better to hazard this inconvenience, than to break an express law of Christ, which, if less strict in ordaining, we certainly do. Let us mind our duty, and leave the event to providence. Strictness in admissions may, indeed, discourage those who bid fairer for starving or poisoning, than for feeding the souls of their flocks. But to discourage such is highly commendable: and a small number of able and faithful pastors, is more to be desired

that a multitude of raw, ignorant, illiterate novices, incapable either to explain or to defend the religion of Jesus; or of polite apostates from the gospel to philosophy, who think their time more usefully and agreeably spent in studying books of science than in studying their Bibles; or of mercenary hirelings, of as mean and sordid a disposition as those we read of in 1 Sam. ii. 36, who crouched to the high-priest for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, saying, 'Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' office, that I may eat a piece of bread.'

May God, in mercy, prevent such low and unhappy men from ever creeping into the sacred function! May a faithful, an able, and a successful ministry, ever be the blessing of our land! May the glorious Head of the Church appoint unto every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and to all her assemblies, pastors according to his own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding! And may he, whose words are works, say to our church in general, and to this corner of it in particular, 'This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with righteousness, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame; but upon himself his crown shall flourish.' ©

**Ryan M. McGraw** is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America in Conway, South Carolina. He is a graduate of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and he is a Ph.D. student at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

# ✦ Servant Living

## Marks of a Faithful Church Member

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by Joel R. Beeke

For an annual fee, you can be a member of your community recreational center, where you have access to its exercise equipment and swimming pool. If you choose never to visit the building, it's no problem. You can sit at home and eat ice cream all day and never get your membership revoked. So long as you pay your dues, you are a member. Similarly, you can be a member of a book club that offers great deals on books. Club mailings say you are under no obligation to buy anything; you can return a book at any time and cancel your membership.

In such a cultural setting, it is not surprising that membership in a local church has also become non-demanding. In many churches only a fraction of their “members” attend worship. The church leadership is partly responsible for this easy membership by not upholding biblical standards and discipline. Responsibility can also be laid at the feet of people's wrong views of the church, such as when people view the church like a museum, or a shopping mall, or a social club, or a community service program.

To correct a faulty view of the church, we must go back to the biblical concept of the church. The Bible tells us the church is the body of Christ.

A Christian, then, is a living part of a larger body of people. That is the essence of Ephesians 4:10–16, which says the church is a living organism. It is a spiritual and relational body; each Christian is a member much as a hand or foot is a body part. Christ is the head of this body. He and all his members are bound together by the Holy Spirit and the bond of true faith.

This truth has profound implications for what it means to be a member of the church of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:10–16 that membership in the church is all about Christ. We will focus our attention on five marks: Christ's Word, his person, his people, his kingdom, and his image. We will examine what it means to be a faithful member of the body of Christ in each of these areas in the (1) personal, (2) public, and (3) practical dimensions of our lives. Thus, the five marks will unfold into fifteen characteristics of a faithful church member.

### Mark One: Receiving Christ's Word

Ephesians 4:11–13 tells us that Christ gives pastors and teachers to the church to the end that “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> The primary tool the exalted king uses to build the house of God is his Word as taught by the pastors and teachers of his church. Therefore, the first mark of a faithful church member is *receiving Christ's Word*—not merely as an individual reading his Bible at home, but also as a worshiper listening to Bible preaching.

**1. Personal hunger for the Word.** In 1 Peter 2:2, the apostle Peter urges all Christians to thirst for the sincere milk of the Word, “that ye may grow thereby.” If you are sick and have no appetite, you only feel nauseous and restless when served a delicious meal. Some people experience the preaching of the Word like that; a sermon makes them uncomfortable. They blame a minister for preaching too long, but the problem is that they have no

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=288&issue\\_id=71](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=288&issue_id=71).

2 Dr. Beeke uses the King James Version throughout.

hunger for the Word. Even a simple meal of meat and potatoes is a feast to someone who is hungry. So it is with a person who has a healthy appetite for the preaching of the Word.

**2. Faithful attendance at corporate worship.** Hunger for the Word in church is expressed publicly by faithful attendance at church worship services. Hebrews 10:25 says we must not forsake assembling ourselves in corporate worship. Biblical worship makes “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) wrote, “There is no worship of God that is better than hearing of a sermon . . . it stirs all the coals of fire in your spirit, and makes them burn with a brighter flame.”<sup>3</sup>

**3. Active listening to the Word.** Jesus describes four kinds of listeners to the Word in the Parable of the Soils, only one of which receives the Word, perseveres in faith, and goes on to bear abundant fruit. In Luke 8:18a, Jesus says, “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” Pray on Saturday for tomorrow’s worship. As you come to church, remind yourself that you are going to the throne of God to hear him speak. John Calvin (1509–1564) wrote, “Whenever the gospel is preached, it is as if God himself came into the midst of us.”<sup>4</sup> What an awesome thought! When you sit before a preacher, stir up your mind to listen actively, alertly, and reverently, as one who hears the living voice of God. Don’t expect to be spoon-fed like a baby. Cut your food and chew it for yourself. Think about what the preacher is saying. Take notes on the sermon, giving special attention to the main points, Scripture references, and personal applications. Listen with humble self-examination. Listen with delight at the words of life.

The first mark of a faithful church member is receiving Christ’s Word from his appointed pastors and teachers.

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3 Robert L. Dickie, *What the Bible Teaches about Worship* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 53.

4 John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 3:129.

## Mark Two: Union with Christ’s Person

Christ gives his Word to call us into union with him (Rom. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:14). In Ephesians 4:15–16a, Paul commands the saints of God to grow into Christ in all things. Christ is the head of his body; all our growth, which lifts us into closer communion with him, comes from him. Therefore, one must be a member of Christ to be a member of the body of Christ. Paul challenges us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” You are not truly in the church until Christ is truly in you. This, too, has personal, public, and practical characteristics.

**4. Personally trusting in Christ.** Colossians 2:6–7 says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” True church members receive Christ personally as prophet, priest, and king (for that is what “Christ” means). We receive Christ by God-given faith (John 1:12–13). This faith is active trust; it rests upon God in Christ for salvation. William Ames (1576–1633) wrote, “Faith is the resting of the heart on God. . . . We believe through Christ in God.”<sup>5</sup> Do not assume you are a believer because of a response you made or something you experienced years ago. Ask yourself, “Am I trusting in Jesus Christ alone to make me right with God, to rule me and to guide me?”

**5. Making diligent use of the sacraments.** I am not suggesting that baptism and the Lord’s Supper have the inherent power to save. Trusting in the sacraments for your salvation is idolatry. In its historic Reformed usage, *sacrament* means a public sign and seal of the covenant between God and man. Sacraments are also called “ordinances,” for Christ ordained their use for the worship of his people. They are a means of grace, the Word

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5 William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 80–81 (L.iii.1, 8).

made visible. They are not empty rituals. They are Christ's command (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 22:19). Membership in Christ's church demands that we publicly receive holy baptism and partake of the Lord's Supper, trusting that, as Christ's ordinances, they are means by which he works in our hearts and lives.

**6. Practical obedience to Christ.** In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." He adds, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them ... loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (v. 21). Obedience is the best expression of love for Christ and the way to experience more of the love of Christ. Thomas Boston (1676–1732) was a champion for the gospel of free grace among the people of Scotland. Yet he reminded us regarding Christ's church, "They have delivered up themselves unto him, to be ruled by him, as well as to be saved by him; to be governed by his laws, and not by their own lusts, as well as to be saved by his grace, and not by their own works."<sup>6</sup> Does your obedience show that you are truly one with Christ?

Receiving Christ's Word is the first mark of a faithful church member. Union with Christ's person is the second mark.

### Mark Three: Connected to Christ's People

The third mark of a faithful church member, according to Ephesians 4:16, is being "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth." *Joint* here refers to a ligament or tendon that holds together the bones and parts of the body with great strength. Romans 12:5 says, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." This is more than outward association, like a shoe tied onto a foot; it is the way a foot is tied to the rest of the body, sharing the same life-blood and nervous system. The membership of a church is more than a voluntary association. Its members are interconnected and

interdependent, as well as accountable to one another. How does this play out in personal, public, and practical characteristics?

**7. We are personally connected by love.** Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." Each member of Christ's body should love his brothers and sisters in the Lord, and each member should grow in love for the church. Perhaps you do many things in church. But do you love the people?

**8. We publicly confess our faith.** It was after Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ that the Lord said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Earl Blackburn writes, "The first responsibility of church membership is loyalty to the church. By loyalty to the church, I mean fidelity to the teachings of the church so far as they are loyal to the Word of God.... It is only right, then, for a church to ask someone who desires to be a member to be loyal to its doctrinal position as defined in its statement or confession of faith." A personal confession of faith is required for church membership.<sup>7</sup>

**9. We practice hospitality.** Personal love and public confession become practical in hospitality. First Peter 4:9 counsels, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." The church aims to be a family, and nothing characterizes a family as much as maintaining fellowship and eating meals together. Extending hospitality to others in the church, however, is far more than sharing food; it is sharing love and life, especially with those who may otherwise be deprived of it. The church in the United States desperately needs to practice such hospitality, for many times visitors will attend a worship service for months without ever being invited into a member's home.

The third mark of a faithful church member is connecting with Christ's people. The stronger the tendons and ligaments which hold together a body

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (Choteau, MT: Old Paths-Gospel Press, n.d.), 197.

<sup>7</sup> Earl M. Blackburn, *Jesus Loves the Church and So Should You* (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010), 108, 121.

are, the stronger the body will be. Likewise, the strength of the church depends upon the strength of our friendships.

### **Mark Four: Serving Others for Christ's Kingdom**

Ephesians 4:16 describes the next mark of a healthy church as the “effectual working in the measure of every part.” Every part of the church must do its job. We all have different gifts, and we all need each other. Some people are gifted in helping the hurting; others are good at teaching. One Christian can give much money to help the poor and spread the gospel. Another is anointed with the spirit of prayer. Each member has a role to play in the advancement of God's kingdom. To be the body of Christ, we must be Christ's hands and feet on earth and cooperate with each other in the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Father's will.

**10. We personally serve with zeal.** Serving Christ must arise from the zeal of our hearts. God's mercies to us propel us to sacrifice ourselves for him (Romans 12:1), and our service to him takes shape according to a believer's particular gifts (vv. 3–8). Every believer should be fervent in serving the Lord. *Fervent* literally means burning hot, like water heated to boiling or metal heated to the point of glowing. Are you burning for the Lord? If you are zealous, you don't need a title or personal invitation to serve at a meeting or ministry. Offer yourself humbly to the elders to happily take on the difficult and mundane jobs for the sake of Jesus Christ's kingdom.

**11. We publicly witness for Christ.** In Ephesians 4:15, Paul says we should speak the truth in love. In this context *truth* is the knowledge of the Son of God (v. 13), or Bible doctrine (v. 14). A faithful church member speaks the truth to his neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family members. Be confident that the gospel *is* the power of God for salvation. Behind its words stand the infinite power of God and the finished work of Christ. When you speak the gospel, you are unleashing a lion! It is God's instrument on earth to advance his kingdom. So seek first his kingdom by being a

public witness for Christ.

**12. We practice good stewardship.** We make our commitment to Christ's cause practical by giving money. Jesus says in Matthew 6:19–21, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Our money is a temporary gift to us, like Monopoly money which is useless when the game is over. Our life is also over quickly. A wise church member gives as much money as he can to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Are you tithing to the church? Are you supporting the kingdom cause?

The fourth mark of a faithful church member is serving others for Christ's kingdom.

### **Mark Five: Growing into Christ's Image**

Christ “maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love,” Ephesians 4:16 says. God wants the body of Christ to grow in him. Ephesians 4:13b says the goal of this growth is “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Our growth will not be complete until we, the church of Jesus Christ, reflect our Lord in his splendid holiness and righteousness. What a glorious destiny we have, to be conformed to the glorious image of God's Son! A faithful church member pursues this growth all his life long in personal, public, and practical ways.

**13. We are personally humble.** In Ephesians 4:1–2a, Paul says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation [or calling] wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness.” The first quality of a worthy walk with Christ is “all lowliness,” that is, humility. We were once spiritually dead in our sins and trespasses, but in his great love, God made us alive with the miraculous power of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Eph. 2:1–5). That truly makes us humble. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) said that by gospel humility we are



FAITHFUL TO CHRIST	<i>Private Dimension</i>	<i>Public Dimension</i>	<i>Practical Dimension</i>
<i>Receiving his Word</i>	1. Hungry for Word?	2. Attending worship?	3. Actively listening?
<i>Joined to his Person</i>	4. Trusting in Christ?	5. Sacraments?	6. Obeying his laws?
<i>Connected to his People</i>	7. Loving the people?	8. Confession?	9. Hospitality?
<i>Serving his Kingdom</i>	10. Zealous to serve?	11. Witnessing?	12. Stewardship?
<i>Growing in his Image</i>	13. Humble?	14. Prayer meeting?	15. Meditation?

“brought sweetly to yield, and freely and with delight to prostrate ourselves at the feet of God.”<sup>8</sup> One test of our humility is how we respond to the leadership and correction of our church’s elders. Do we clothe ourselves with humility and receive the Word meekly?

**14. We faithfully attend prayer meetings.** In addition to private intercessory prayer, we reveal our quest for spiritual growth by participating in prayer meetings of the church. Acts 2:42 says of the first Christ-followers, “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The early church gathered often for prayer (Acts 1:14, 24; 3:1; 4:23–31; 12:5, 12). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) realized that though his church only had a few people when he came, “yet I could never forget how earnestly they prayed,” as if they could see Christ “present with them, and as if they must have a blessing from him.”<sup>9</sup> Christ teaches us to go to the Father seeking his Spirit like hungry children asking their father for bread. A faithful church member seeks spiritual growth for his church by joining in prayer.

**15. We engage in meditation.** In Christian meditation, your mind hovers over a biblical truth like a bee over a flower to draw out its sweetness. Meditation is taking time mentally and emotionally to digest what you learn from listening to and

reading God’s Word. Without proper digestion, you will not benefit from the nutrition you have received. Thomas Manton (1620–1677) said, “Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises.”<sup>10</sup> Meditation is crucial for growing in Christ’s image. Psalm 1:1–3 says that the man who meditates daily on the Scriptures flourishes “like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”

### **Be Faithful to Christ and His Body**

Ephesians 4:10–16 shows us five marks of a faithful member of Christ’s body. A faithful member receives Christ’s Word, unites with Christ’s person, connects with Christ’s people, serves others for Christ’s kingdom, and grows into Christ’s image. In every respect, church membership depends on the church’s living head, Jesus Christ.

These marks unfold into fifteen ways to exercise faithful church membership. Can you circle each one of the fifteen characteristics (on the chart above) as present in your life? If not, how do you need to change? Go to your pastor and tell him you want help growing in those specific areas.

Remember that how we treat the church is how we treat Jesus, for the church is his body. Therefore, the stakes are high. How dreadful were Christ’s words to Saul in Acts 9:4, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” If you abuse Christ’s body, you abuse Christ. If you neglect Christ’s body, you neglect Christ. On the other hand, what unspeak-

8 *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 312 (III.6).

9 Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 270–71.

10 *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1874), 17:270.



able joy the faithful servant will experience when the king of kings comes with his holy angels, sits upon his throne, calls you by name, recounts your acts of service to his people, and says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). Strive therefore to be faithful members of the body of Christ! ☉

**Joel R. Beeke** *is the senior pastor the Netherlands Reformed Church (a Heritage Reformed church) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and serves as president and also as professor of systematic theology, homiletics, and church history at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.*

# Servant History

## Calvin's Kline

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by David W. Inks

### Introduction

I was a Dillard dodger while attending Westminster Theological Seminary in the late 1970s. By the time I migrated to Westminster Seminary California in the fall of 1982 to complete my fourth and final year of seminary, I had avoided the dreaded Old Testament Introduction (OTI) with Professor Raymond Dillard and, thus, all the rest of the OT curriculum. Looking back on it, as I see it, my cowardly tactics were strangely rewarded. The year was laden with OT studies, and my only OT professors shared the same last name—Kline. That was a “glory-cloud” experience and a truly rewarding conclusion to my seminary trek. The covenant-kingdom map from the senior Kline (Meredith G.) is now a dog-eared fixture in my frontal lobe. Son Meredith M. Kline’s locating of Ecclesiastes on that grid, with his own artistic brush, proved to be an aha moment prolonged into several weeks.

Having since had the privilege of leading several small reading groups through Calvin’s *Institutes*, I have come to realize that, despite Dr. Kline’s creativity, he was unoriginal in his understanding of the law-grace antithesis. It has become clear to me, contrary to the Barthian school, that Calvin operated out of that very antithesis, which later became codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It has also become clear that Kline’s

contention that the Mosaic covenant contained a works principle in its covenantal administration was not innovative but true to Calvin’s sentiments. This article will attempt to demonstrate that Calvin operated out of a law-grace antithesis and that he also preceded Kline in locating this antithesis in the Mosaic covenant. Consequently, it’s Calvin’s visage that is genuinely reflected in Kline; his paradigm preceded and shaped Kline’s formulations. So besides being chic, that’s why I have dubbed this little piece, “Calvin’s Kline.”

In the following, I wish to document for the interested reader a twofold interconnected thesis shared by Calvin and Kline. The thesis is that the Mosaic covenant suspended its sanctions upon works, not grace, and therein provided the platform for grasping the meaning and benefits of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection as proclaimed in the gospel.

### Meredith G. Kline

I tend to assume that my thesis is accepted as commonplace regarding Dr. Kline’s outlook and without contestation. But *ad fontes* we must go to alleviate any doubts in the reader. Regarding the works principle in the Mosaic covenant, note the following quotations.

Also contradicting the contention that no divine covenants have ever been governed by the works principle is the irrefutable biblical evidence that the Mosaic economy, while an administration of grace on its fundamental level of concern with the eternal salvation of the individual, was at the same time on its temporary, typological kingdom level informed by the principle of works. Thus, for example, the apostle Paul in Romans 10:4ff. and Galatians 3:10ff. (cf. Rom 9:32) contrasts the old order of the law with the gospel order of grace and faith, identifying the old covenant as one of bondage, condemnation, and death (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 4:24–26). The old covenant was law, the opposite of grace-faith, and in the postlapsarian world that meant it would turn out to be an administration of condemnation as a conse-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=318&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=318&issue_id=77).

quence of sinful Israel's failure to maintain the necessary meritorious obedience.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Paul affirmed that the Mosaic Covenant did not annul the promise arrangement given earlier to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). The explanation for this is that the old covenant order was composed of two strata and the works principle enunciated in Leviticus 18:5 and elsewhere in the law, applied only to one of these, a secondary stratum.<sup>3</sup>

Leviticus 18:5, in stating that the man who performed the covenant stipulations would live in them, declared that individual Israelites must observe the requirements of the law to enjoy the blessings of the typological kingdom community.<sup>4</sup>

That these sanctions played out only in the temporal and earthly level confines them to the typological. As Kline says:

The works principle of the Law was rather the governing principle in the typological sphere of the national election and the possession of the first level kingdom in Canaan. It is this works principle that explains the otherwise inexplicable termination of the typological kingdom of Israel through judgment curse.<sup>5</sup>

Even individuals who were elect in terms of eternal salvation would be cut off from that temporal, typological realm as the penalty for various serious infractions of the law.... What we have found then is that once the typological kingdom was inaugurated under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel's retention of it was governed by a principle of works applied on a national scale.<sup>6</sup>

The old covenant's works principle begs for fulfillment, and in fulfillment, replacement by a covenant that announces that *the law's curse is removed and the righteousness-acquiring life is realized*. Christ is that one who embraces both sanctions, cursing in his death and blessing/resurrection due to his righteousness. The new covenant is "new," partially, in how we achieve the blessing. It is by faith in Christ and his work, not by our works. (Under the old covenant's typological administration, blessing was contingent upon obedience/works, though the *ordo salutis* stratum was by faith.) As Kline argues, "God honors his original covenant of law in its abiding demand for obedience as the condition of life and with the curse of death for the covenant breakers."<sup>7</sup> That is why the coming of Christ and his work is indeed a new day. He will "offer himself up to the curse of the covenant."<sup>8</sup> And with regard to the blessing sanction he says, "Now if it is the obedience of the one that is the ground of the promise-guarantee given to the many, then clearly the principle of law is more fundamental than that of promise even in a promise covenant."<sup>9</sup>

I trust this sufficiently shows that my thesis accurately represents Kline's views. But does Calvin agree with Kline's paradigm? The Torrances, Federal Vision advocates, and others wish to insist that, for Calvin, the old covenant did not operate with a principle of works as contrary to grace in the new covenant. For them, it's all of grace in both old and new covenants, one preceding and the other following the cross. It's my contention that they wrongly read Calvin as supporting this absence of a works covenant before the coming of Christ. I would wish now to document that Kline is not Calvin's ventriloquist but rather his successor in this profound dynamic of discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

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2 Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (S. Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1993), 68.

3 *Ibid.*, 196.

4 *Ibid.*, 197.

5 Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 97.

6 *Kingdom Prologue*, 197.

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7 Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 30.

8 *Ibid.*, 58.

9 *Ibid.*, 31.

## Calvin's Institutes

When it comes to ferreting out Calvin's theology, the first and best place to go is the *Institutes*. He called them "a key to open a way for all children of God into a good and right understanding of Holy Scripture."<sup>10</sup> Though citations will be limited to the *Institutes*, I believe they will, nonetheless, provide us with a clear grasp of Calvin's thought on the topic at hand.

### The Promises of the Law versus the Promises of the Gospel

Calvin uses the word "promise" regarding the law. What does he mean? "We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised."<sup>11</sup> "Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse."<sup>12</sup> "I reply: even if the promises of the law, in so far as they are conditional, depend upon perfect obedience to the law—which can nowhere be found—they have not been given in vain. . . . From it all of us are condemned and accursed (Gal. 3:10). And it holds us far away from the blessedness that it promises to its keepers."<sup>13</sup> "In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder for perfect righteousness, which all of us lack."<sup>14</sup> We tend to be unaccustomed to hearing the word "promise" employed with regard to the law. In reality it is no different than using the word "covenant" insofar that a sanction is promised, depending upon which condition is fulfilled.<sup>15</sup> Obey, and God promises life. Disobey, and God promises death. From this soil it should not surprise us that the covenants of works and grace sprouted in the next century, not in contradiction to Calvin, but in coherence with Calvin. Though rarely noted, Cal-

vin does call this works arrangement a covenant of law.<sup>16</sup> Any attempt to draw out of Calvin a "grace in law, and law in grace" formula on the grounds of his using "promise" with regard to "law" should immediately be identified as a tendentious distortion. Calvin poses gospel promises *in contrast* to law promises. Yet, he is perfectly clear that "what is promised" is the same thing in both cases—eternal life!

From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it. . . . For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law?<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere he says, "The reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised," and "he causes us to receive the benefit of the promises of the law as if we had fulfilled their condition."<sup>18</sup> Thus, the law precedes the gospel in holding out the same goal, but through different means. And yet for Christ, the means are the same, obedience, so that we might attain eternal life through faith because Christ has fulfilled the terms initially set down by the law. This becomes even more obvious below. As for the contrast between law and gospel promises, notice the following citations.

Now, to be sure, the law itself has its own promises. Therefore, in the promises of the gospel there must be something distinct and different unless we would admit that the comparison is inept. But what sort of difference will this be, other than that the gospel promises are free and dependent solely upon God's mercy, while the promises of the law depend upon the condition of works?<sup>19</sup>

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10 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 7.

11 *Ibid.*, 2.7.3, 351.

12 *Ibid.*, 2.7.3, 352.

13 *Ibid.*, 2.7.4, 352.

14 *Ibid.*, 2.7.8, 357.

15 *Ibid.*, 4.14.6, 1280: "The Lord calls his promises 'covenants.'"

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16 *Ibid.*, 3.17.3, 805; 3.17.15, 820.

17 *Ibid.*, 2.17.5, 533.

18 *Ibid.*, 2.7.3, 351; 2.7.4, 352.

19 *Ibid.*, 3.11.17, 747.

“... But the law is not of faith; rather, the man who does these things shall live in them” (Gal. 3:11–12).<sup>20</sup>

Calvin then comments on this Galatian text saying: “The law, he says, is different from faith. Why? Because works are required for law righteousness. Therefore it follows that they are not required for faith righteousness.”<sup>21</sup> The law for Calvin, among other things, made promises of eternal life upon condition of works. And this covenant stood in antithetical relationship to the covenant of grace.<sup>22</sup>

### The Law Is Fulfilled in Christ

How does Calvin understand that Christ has fulfilled the law? The answer is simple. The law set forth two sanctions, blessing/life and cursing/death. Christ achieved the first sanction through his righteousness, meriting eternal life.<sup>23</sup> Christ bore the second on the cross. Thus, the law is fulfilled through the work of Christ and our consequent deliverance from the curse and entrance into life is now offered through faith, not works. Since Christ has fulfilled the law, there is logically nothing left for us to do but to receive it as a gift through the empty hand of faith. When we say that Christ fulfilled the law in this way, we also are necessarily saying that the law as a covenant of works explains to us the meaning of the work of Christ. Apart from this we cannot understand what the work of Christ did. This is the tragedy of denying the law as a covenant of works. This is the tragedy of blindly insisting that for Calvin “grace came before law.” The following are a few of the many passages available to decipher Calvin’s view.

With regard to the Ten Commandments we ought likewise to heed Paul’s warning: “Christ

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20 Ibid., 3.11.18, 747.

21 Ibid., 3.11.18, 747.

22 Ibid., 3.17.15, 820 for the phrase “covenant of grace.”

23 Ibid., 2.17.3, 530–31. “By his obedience, however, Christ truly acquired and merited grace for us ... then he acquired salvation for us by his righteousness, which is tantamount to deserving it.” Such statements should not be attributed to a residual medieval merit scheme but to a coherent law-gospel construct.

is the end of the law unto salvation to every believer” (Rom. 10:4)... He means that righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration. For this reason, Paul justly calls Christ the fulfillment or end of the law.<sup>24</sup>

“Christ ... became a curse for us,” (Gal. 3:13). It was superfluous, even absurd, for Christ to be burdened with a curse, unless it was to acquire righteousness for others by paying what they owed.<sup>25</sup>

For this reason the apostle defines the redemption in Christ’s blood as “the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). If we are justified through the works of the law, then “Christ died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it; or, what is the same thing, that we obtain through Christ’s grace what God promised in the law for our works: “He who will do these things, will live in them” (Lev. 18:5). This is no less clearly confirmed in the sermon delivered at Antioch, which asserts that by believing in Christ “we are justified from everything from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law? What he afterward taught the Galatians has the same purpose: “God sent forth his son ... subject to the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:4–5). What was the purpose of this subjection of Christ to the law but to acquire righteousness for us, undertaking to pay what we could not pay? Hence, that imputation of righteousness without works which Paul discusses (Rom. ch. 4). For the

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24 Ibid., 2.7.2, 351.

25 Ibid., 2.17.4, 532.

righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours.<sup>26</sup>

### Typological Sanctions Conditioned upon Works

Calvin saw the Old Testament sanctions (blessings and curses) in the land as typological of future spiritual realities.

He willed that, for the time during which he gave his covenant to the people of Israel in a veiled form, the grace of future and eternal happiness be signified and figured under earthly benefits, the gravity of spiritual death under physical punishments.<sup>27</sup>

And to urge us in every way, he promises both blessings in the present life and everlasting blessedness to those who obediently keep his commandments. He threatens the transgressors no less with present calamities than with the punishment of eternal death. For that promise “He who does these things shall live in them” (Lev. 18:5) and its corresponding threat “The soul that sins shall itself die” (Ezek. 18:4–20) without doubt have reference to either never-ending future immortality or death. Wherever God’s benevolence or wrath is mentioned, under the former is contained eternal life, under the latter eternal perdition.<sup>28</sup>

The typological sanctions, which also “contain” in them the eternal sanctions, Calvin sees as administered under the law by way of works not grace. Again, Calvin says, “We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised.”<sup>29</sup> Kline, as seen, emphasizes a works principle on the typological level of the Mosaic covenant’s administration. Calvin presses it further to the eternal. Both make a profound connection be-

tween Israel’s situation and the situation of fallen mankind. Israel’s story of law, fall, and judgment is a picture of us all. This story in both arenas is administered by a covenant of works. Calvin does not speak of a “typological covenant of works” *per se*. However, he clearly employs all the content of it and then freely moves from the temporal to the spiritual/eternal operations of the law as a covenant of works.

Why is it important to see this working in the Old Testament? It is important for two reasons. First, this brings our sins, our despair, and consequent condemnation into sharp focus. We have sinned against God as seen in the *standard* of the law as *given* to Israel. And we are cursed as seen in the *sanctions* of the law as *applied* to Israel. Second, this provides the foundation for looking to a new covenant in redemptive history and for understanding the work of Christ and its application to us in the gospel. In understanding the nature of fulfillment we understand why the gospel is indeed “good news” in contrast to the law and its exposure of sin and administration of the curse. This antithetical point of discontinuity highlights the redemptive story line to consummate in magnifying God’s grace. Because of this, Israel’s history provides a protracted argument for the depth of human disobedience as despised by God’s wrath. The old covenant drama of the sanctions strained with prophetic anticipation of *a redemption* that would “hush the law’s loud thunder” and *a righteousness* that would inherit life. Those who feel compelled to resist Kline’s insistence on this works principle (and Calvin’s), reinterpret out of view the large planks of Old Testament legal roadway which lead us to Christ’s finished/*telos* work in his passive and active obedience. They turn a story line of judgment under the law to falling from grace, since they contend there is no covenant of works operative in Moses.

Christian preaching from the Old Testament story line becomes diverted from “fleeing to Christ our redeemer from the curse and righteousness unto life” to warnings about apostasy from grace which, unbeknownst to them, are about the law. Unwittingly, new covenant saints then are placed

26 Ibid., 2.17.5, 533.

27 Ibid., 2.11.3, 453.

28 Ibid., 2.8.4, 370.

29 Ibid., 2.7.3, 351.



under the strains of the law and the pulpit defaults to “working on our sanctification” coupled with eccentric threats of cursing for disobedience. Using the same OT text in a proper Christocentric fashion will orbit us back to Christ and his finished work in fulfilling the covenant of works as grounds for the new covenant. Such will rivet us to Christ through refreshing faith in him rather than the smothering fray with the tar baby of personal progress under duress.

Contrary efforts to reduce this law-grace antithesis/contrast to a continuum or combination blur: first, the crucial point of discontinuity between the two administrations, then, what Christ has actually achieved for us in fulfilling the law, and consequently, the sight of and rest of faith by those seeking closure with God. A swinging continuum is not how Calvin conceived of the redemptive historical program regarding law and grace. By retaining the antithesis, Calvin magnifies Christ work in dispatching the law as a covenant of works, and clarifies our response as one of faith not of law/works. If you muddle the law, you will muddle the gospel. That is the tragic truth, not only of the past, but of the present assortment of muddling models, whether they come from Barth, Federal Vision, or even a Reformed journal.

## Conclusion

I trust that this handful of Kline and Calvin citations will satisfy the reader of their essential agreement on three points. First, the covenantal and antithetical relationship between law promises and grace promises. Second, the typological nature of the sanctions of the law as administered in a covenant of works environment. Third, that Christ culminates this redemptive historical story line in fulfilling the law’s demands, both in bearing the curse and through his righteous obedience in bringing about eternal life. For generations the law bore down on Israel in conviction and condemnation, begging for its covenant of works structure to be fulfilled. This Christ did, fulfilling it both in its typology and in its eternal demands as it weighed down upon guilty sinners.

I have attempted to set before the reader that Kline is in line with Calvin regarding the works principle operative in the Mosaic economy. As a matter of fact, Calvin is even more multifaceted on the issue in stating that the law held out eternal death and eternal life in its sanctions. Kline, on the other hand, is more reserved, confining himself to the typological when speaking of the law’s sanctions. Kline, despite all his creativity, is unoriginal in seeing lines of discontinuity (antithesis) between the old covenant promises of the law and the new covenant promises of the gospel. His law-grace hermeneutic for redemptive history, the work of Christ, and gospel proclamation agrees with Calvin. He images Calvin on this score even as Calvin images the Bible.

Those tempted to think that Kline is inimical to Reformed theology or at odds with the confession need to consider the gallery of Reformed men who stand with him and Calvin. Men like Thomas Boston<sup>30</sup> and Charles Hodge,<sup>31</sup> to name two worthies, also saw these parallel antithetical principles at work during the Mosaic economy. I doubt that they ever sensed any conflict with their ministerial vows. I am certain, contrary to some of our contemporaries, that Calvin would have embraced Kline as one of his successors. Kline stands downstream from Calvin in the same law-gospel hermeneutic.<sup>32</sup> Thus, he was one of his kin, of the same ilk. I realize that one man’s sense is another man’s nonsense. But as I see it, my esteemed teacher of the glory-cloud was Calvin’s Kline. ☉

**David W. Inks** serves as pastor of Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Washington.

30 Edward Fisher with notes by Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Publishing House, n.d.), 56–58.

31 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 375.

32 Jeong Koo Jeon, *Calvin and the Federal Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). The first two chapters are replete with documentation/exposition in support of the interpretation of Calvin argued for here.

# The Revised Historiography of Reformed Orthodoxy: A Few Practical Implications

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by Carl Trueman

The last forty years have seen a major revolution in the way in which scholars regard the intellectual development of orthodox Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Prior to that time, much of the field was dominated by historiographical models which tended to oversimplify the intellectual landscape.<sup>2</sup> Thus, some scholars isolated one or two figures and made their theological formulations normative and all those who differed with them in either content or style to be to some extent deviant and defective. Such was the infamous “Calvin against the Calvinists” hypothesis which pitted the allegedly pristine and monolithic theology of John Calvin over against that of his successors in later decades. We might also add to the mix the woefully inadequate use of the term “scholasticism” and its cognates as meaning “rationalistic,” “over logical,” or simply “dull and dry.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not my intention to rehearse in detail either the flaws with the older approaches or all of the insights of the approach which more recent scholars have proposed, but it is useful to be aware

of key developments.

The most important figure in the revision of studies of seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy is Richard Muller.<sup>4</sup> Muller did his doctoral work under David C. Steinmetz at Duke Divinity School. Steinmetz himself was the doctoral student of Heiko A. Oberman, arguably the most significant Reformation scholar of the second half of the twentieth century. Oberman’s work was marked by a multidisciplinary approach to the Reformation and, most important, an emphasis on the late medieval intellectual context of Martin Luther.<sup>5</sup> This was not an innovation with Oberman; where Oberman was significant was that he refused to allow modern theological convictions to operate as qualitative criteria for assessing the theologians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Where earlier scholars, such as Joseph Lortz, had understood Luther as emerging from a medieval Catholic theological milieu, they had tended to allow their view of such a milieu (in Lortz’s case, a highly negative one) to shape their evaluation of later developments. Hence, for example, Lortz regarded Luther and his theology as the poisonous progeny of a degenerate late medieval theology.<sup>6</sup> Oberman repudiated such an approach, arguing instead for a “social history of ideas” which took ideas seriously but avoided reducing the objects of study to pawns in some modern theological struggle. He also emphasized the need for studying Reformation thought as part of an ongoing Western tradition rather than allowing the rather stark taxonomy of “Medieval” and “Reformation” to create artificial breaks where none existed.

Steinmetz developed Oberman’s approach by devoting much of his academic life to the examination of exegesis in the late medieval and early mod-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=325&issue\\_id=78](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=325&issue_id=78).

2 Scholars associated with the older historiography include Ernst Bizer, T. F. Torrance, James B. Torrance, Brian Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, and Alan Clifford. For a collection of essays which exemplify the newer approach, see Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

3 A critical survey of the older scholarship can be found in chapters 4 and 5 of Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

4 The single most important text in Muller’s extensive scholarly output is *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

5 See Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1983); *Luther: Man between God and Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

6 Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). This book was originally published in 1949.

ern periods. In many ways this was as revolutionary as the approach of Oberman.<sup>7</sup> Popular Protestant mythology regarded late medieval Catholicism as having little time for exegesis; yet Steinmetz (and his students, such as Susan Schreiner and John Thompson) demonstrated that late medieval theologians were also exegetes; and, further, that their exegesis lay in the background of much Reformation exegesis.

What Muller has done is to draw on both of these approaches, applying them not simply to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but extending the analysis to the development of post-Reformation theology up to the late seventeenth century, when the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and others is beginning to transform the intellectual landscape. While his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* is now the standard in the field, his approach has been adopted and developed by numerous other specialists within the field. The result has been a burgeoning number of scholarly articles and monographs and a transformed understanding of how Protestantism developed in the generations after the early Reformers. Methods developed in other disciplines—most notably the history of political thought—have also been appropriated and applied to the issue of Protestant Orthodoxy.

The literature in this field is growing and is often highly technical. For example, where older scholarship used terms like “Aristotelian” as if this referred univocally to some monolithic philosophical approach, the newer scholarship is aware of the fact that Renaissance “Aristotelianism” was a highly variegated phenomenon which defies such generalization.<sup>8</sup> Further, the newer scholarship takes for granted the distinction between a text and its reception. Thus, there is a distinction between Thomas and later Thomism, to the point where those who reject Thomas, based upon the reading

7 See his *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1980).

8 See Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 34–44. There I draw on the work of Renaissance scholar Charles B. Schmitt: see his *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981).

of him offered by later Thomists (be they Cajetan or Maritain), are rejecting a straw man. Yet, for all of this complexity, it is still helpful to outline a few key insights of the newer scholarship before addressing the question of its usefulness to contemporary Reformed church life.

## 1. Scholasticism is a method, not a set of philosophical principles.

One of the key insights which Muller had early in his career was that scholasticism was a method, primarily that of the medieval *quaestio*, or “question.” At a more elaborate level, it also referred to the elaborate technical vocabulary which medieval theology had developed. Such an insight was not original with Muller: medievalists had understood this for a long time. What Muller did was use this to critique the kind of sloppy Protestant scholarship that used the term as a pejorative and moved simplistically from explicit form to implied content. Thus, in the older scholarship, to label theologians as “scholastics” was at once to indicate that they were rationalists, logic choppers, pedants, and dry as dust. While the new approach to Protestant scholasticism does not deny any relationship between form and content, it does deny any necessary connection between scholastic form and particular understandings of human reason.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Theology is expressed in ways that reflect the conventions of context and purpose.

This leads to the second point: understanding Reformed Orthodoxy requires understanding the linguistic and pedagogical conventions of the time. This point has been made implicitly by Muller throughout his work and has been given more explicit theoretical expression through the appropriation of the methodological writings of Quentin Skinner.<sup>10</sup> To provide a common example, in order

9 See Muller, *After Calvin*, 25–46.

10 See Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57–89. I have made the case for the usefulness of aspects of Skinner’s approach relative to the

to understand the reasons why Calvin's *Institutes* and Turretin's *Institutes* differ radically in form and sometimes in content, one must first understand what the two men were intending to do in the two works; then one must set each within the literary, linguistic, and pedagogical context of his time. Simply saying that "they look different" or "Calvin seems more pastoral" is inadequate as a basis for assessment, being little more than expressions of aesthetic preference.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Reformed theology stands in positive relation to late medieval theology and philosophy at a number of points.

Muller's basic contention, that Reformed theology needs to be understood as an alteration of direction within the wider Western theological tradition stretching back through the Middle Ages to the ancient church, has been confirmed by a variety of specialist monographs.<sup>12</sup> The issue of continuity is philosophically and historically complex; but the basic point, that Reformed theologians build positively upon the metaphysics, doctrine of God, and basic theology of the medieval period is beyond dispute.<sup>13</sup> Within the ranks of those who advocate the new approach, there is some disagreement on the precise nature of this: Antonie Vos and his students in Utrecht have argued strongly that Reformed Orthodoxy is essentially a Protestant form of Scotism, the theological/philosophical ap-

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history of theology: "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 253–75; also *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 179–80.

11 See Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies*, 120–29.

12 E.g., see Willem J. Van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007). For a general discussion of this, see Willem J. Van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011).

13 On the complexity of defining continuity, see Carl R. Trueman, "The Reception of Calvin: Historical Considerations," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011): 19–27.

proach of Duns Scotus and his followers.<sup>14</sup> I have argued instead for a stronger Thomist influence, at least on individual figures such as John Owen.<sup>15</sup> Richard Muller advocates seeing Reformed Orthodoxy as metaphysically eclectic and defying simplistic generalization.<sup>16</sup> For the record, I see my own view and that of Muller as being compatible: in my opinion, most Reformed Orthodox theologians of the seventeenth century advocate forms of Scotistically modified Thomism, though there is a spectrum within that.

### 4. Reformed Orthodoxy retained a strong emphasis on linguistics and exegesis.

The old canard, that the early Reformers were interested in exegesis, not systematic theology, while their successors became increasingly preoccupied with proof texts, logical deduction, and systematic consistency, at the expense of doing justice to the Bible, has been thoroughly debunked. A growing number of studies have demonstrated the increasing sophistication of exegesis, linguistics, and textual studies in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such makes perfect sense: ironically, the old model, where the biblical text was nothing more than a theological quarry, cannot account for the rise of higher criticism towards the end of the seventeenth century. It is, after all, only in the context of vigorous concern for the biblical text that one would become aware of textual difficulties.<sup>17</sup>

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14 E.g., Antonie Vos, "De kern van de klassieke gereformeerde theologie," in *Kerk en Theologie* 47 (1996): 106–25; see the essays by Antonie Vos and Andreas J. Beck in Van Asselt and Dekker. See my critique in *John Owen*, 57–58.

15 I argue this point at length in both *The Claims of Truth* and *John Owen*; also in "The Necessity of the Atonement," in Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversy: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 204–22.

16 This is the overall implication of his four volumes of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. It is also evident in his introductory essay ("Diversity in the Reformed Tradition: A Historical Introduction") to Haykin and Jones.

17 See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 2; Trueman, "Preachers and Medieval and Renaissance Commentary," in Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan,

## The Contemporary Theological and Ecclesiastical Significance of the New Scholarship

In addressing the issue of the contemporary relevance of all of this material, the first—and most important—point to make is that, with the possible exception of Antonie Vos and his followers, most of the contributors to the revised understanding of the development of Reformed Orthodoxy see themselves as making a historical contribution, not a systematic one. This means that the results of such revision do not necessarily in themselves have direct theological implications. The questions asked have been along the lines of “Why does Reformed Orthodoxy develop this way?” not primarily “Is this development biblical?”

For example, in my own work on John Owen, my primary concern was to demonstrate that the thesis of Alan Clifford, that Owen’s view of atonement was the result of the intrusion of Aristotelian categories into theology, was incorrect.<sup>18</sup> In so doing, I demonstrated that Owen was working with Trinitarian and anti-Pelagian categories drawn from Scripture and mediated through the doctrinal debates of the ancient and medieval church. My point was not that Owen was correct; it was simply that the reasons for him holding his view were not those which Clifford had imputed to him. In a similar fashion, though on a larger scale, Muller’s demonstration that the path from Calvin to the seventeenth century is not susceptible to the old radical break/decline and fall models of an earlier generation does not mean that either Calvin or his successors were necessarily correct. In the context of the new approach, the question of dogmatic truth is separable from the question of historical rationale.

Having said this, there are a number of ways in which the new approach can be of help to the church today. First, it makes clear that Re-

formed theology is truly catholic theology in that it connects to, and rises out of, the wider Western theological tradition. It draws positively, not simply on Reformation sources or even on patristic writers, but also on medieval thinkers, particularly in the areas of the doctrine of God and the nature of freedom and determinism, the new approach. This considerably broadens the theological sources on which today’s pastor should feel able to draw with integrity; and it also goes some way to answering that perennial question posed to Protestants, “Where was the church between the patristic era and Martin Luther?”

Second, by eschewing simplistic taxonomies and by taking seriously the sophistication of Reformed Orthodoxy, the new approach has been able to tease out important systematic doctrinal connections which have been neglected in the past. Again, to draw on my own research on Owen, the connection between orthodox Trinitarianism and Augustinian anti-Pelagianism is vital for understanding Reformed views of redemption but has often been neglected. Historical study shows how these two doctrinal loci connect.<sup>19</sup> Another example would be Muller’s work on the doctrine of God. By careful examination of texts in context, he has been able to demonstrate that contemporary objections to divine simplicity, such as those made by Alvin Plantinga, are built upon a misreading of the content and intention of the Reformed Orthodox writers. Again, the point is not primarily one of dogmatic truth. Muller demonstrates rather that the contemporary argument misuses historical texts; that does not necessarily mean the arguments are wrong, but it is nonetheless a significant criticism. Systematic theology should be done in dialogue with theologians throughout the ages, and those who build their systems in dialogue with incorrect historiography need to take account of those who promote more accurate history, in order to see if it has systematic implications.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the new approach can be very helpful

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eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54–71.

18 See Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

19 This is the major historical-theological argument of *The Claims of Truth*.

20 See *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:40–41.



in a practical way relative to issues of subscription. For example, one of the areas which is most often cited by students as a point at which they object to the Westminster standards is WCF 2:1, “without ... passions.” To the layman, this seems to present a God who is some kind of First Cause, deistic and distant. In fact, understanding how the language of passions functions in seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy clarifies this: it is not intended to make God a remote deity; rather it is designed to protect his divinity and his absolute priority over the created realm. The clarification is necessary and important, given the way that language and conceptual connotations have changed over time.<sup>21</sup>

This points to a third area where the new approach is significant for the contemporary church: it highlights how important the consensus nature of confessions was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The process of producing confessions was complex and not uniform. Some were written by individuals and later adopted by churches (for example, the Belgic Confession); others were in origin committee productions always intended as ecclesiastical documents. What the new approach has done is demonstrate that, with the confessional Reformed world, there was always a certain amount of legitimate diversity on many topics. Thus, matters such as the distinction between infra- and supra-lapsarianism are not matters on which the confessions take hard and fast positions; and even where they have distinct preferences, historically these were not issues of ecclesiastical division. The obvious application of this is that arguments which attempt to set criteria for office-bearing within the church based on the thought of individual theologians, or based on interpretations of confessional documents through the narrow lens provided by the theology of a single individual, are historically alien to the intentions of confessional orthodoxy.

Fourth, the new approach has demonstrated that Reformed Orthodoxy was grounded in ex-

egesis but engaged in constant dialogue with the history of theology. This is in part evident in its eclectic nature but also has direct application to some contemporary issues. For example, one common complaint about the Westminster standards is that they are based upon proof texts. The concern seems to be that Reformed theology has thus been built on simplistic, decontextualized reading of isolated texts. Many, of course, will be aware that the divines themselves did not want the proof texts included and that they were overruled in this by Parliament. That, in itself, should give pause for thought about how such texts function. Yet Muller has explored this issue further and demonstrated that the divines were not only competent exegetes themselves and that Reformed Orthodoxy is exegetically grounded but also that proof texts in the seventeenth century were not intended as simple, blunt answers to complex questions. Proof texts operated rather as exegetical markers, directing the reader to the key verse but doing so in the expectation that the reader would check the classical expositions of that verse.<sup>22</sup>

This is also significant for understanding the covenant of works. One criticism is that the only reference to the pre-Fall arrangement with Adam in the garden as a covenant is Hosea 6:7. The Hebrew is ambiguous and could indeed be read as “like a man.” As such, it seems remarkably slender textual ground upon which to build such a crucial doctrine as the covenant of works. In fact, as Muller has shown through his study of the Westminster Annotations, the divines were well aware of this ambiguity. Their use of the language of covenant to refer to Adam in Eden was not built on this text, but upon Romans 5, which they saw as pointing to the conceptual presence of covenant in Eden, even as it was linguistically absent. Such a point would seem significant in assessing John

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22 See Muller, “The ‘Whole Counsel of God’: Scripture, Exegesis, and Doctrine in the *English Annotations* and the Westminster Confession,” in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, eds., *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2007), 3–82.

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21 *Ibid.*, 553–59.



Murray's criticism of the covenant of works.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

The work of revising our understanding of how Reformed Orthodoxy developed in the post-Reformation period continues apace and, as this article has suggested, is an increasingly complex and interdisciplinary exercise. Yet even now there are some obvious practical implications for the theological life of the church in the present, most notably in the need to understand our history correctly, to do theology today in a manner that understands the tradition within which we stand, and also to apprehend the fact that Reformed theology was always intended at its foundations to be a confessional theology which understood that it is the church, and no single individual, which sets the public norms for profession and for office-bearing. ©

**Carl Trueman** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Ambler, Pennsylvania, and as professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

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<sup>23</sup> Muller, "The 'Whole Counsel of God,'" 69–81.

# ✦ Servant Literature

## Why Read Literature?

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by Leland Ryken

At the beginning of every summer, the weekly newsletter that accompanies the morning worship service at my church includes a sidebar listing the books that the pastors and selected elders plan to read during the upcoming summer. I can recall only once or twice when a work of literature appeared on the list. The reading lists are solidly in the category of religious reading, with an occasional excursion into such topics as leadership and current cultural hot topics.

Why do I experience this as such a huge let-down—in fact, as an annual depression? Because of the missed opportunity that it represents. The exact nature of that opportunity is what I will explore in this article.

### A Practical Experiment

Why read literature? Answering that question is what in the academy is called “an apology” for literature. I have been proclaiming such an apology for more than four decades, and I will do so again in this article. But it occurs to me that my readers can forge their own apology for literature if they will simply set aside the time to read a work of literature that they have not read before (or have not read for a very long time) and then analyze what the effects of that reading experience were.

I will take the lead by reconstructing a recent

reading experience of my own. One of the benefits of my having coauthored a book about the portrayal of pastors in literary masterpieces is that I read works that I had never read before and that I probably would not have read without the impetus provided by the publishing venture. I will arbitrarily choose one of those books for purposes of self-scrutiny of the type I am urging upon my readers in this article.

Once the project of writing about pastors in the literary classics commenced, the list of candidates for inclusion kept growing. A colleague in my own department suggested a book entitled *The Hammer of God*, authored by a twentieth-century Swedish churchman named Bo Giertz. Initially I undertook the assignment of reading the book with the intention of adding it to the handbook section of our book (a compendium of five dozen one-page entries on books dealing with ministerial issues). But I was so captivated by what I read that the book quickly catapulted into the section of our book where we give extended coverage to twelve major classics of clerical fiction.

*The Hammer of God* is a collection of three novellas. Each of the three stories follows a young Lutheran pastor over approximately a two-year span at the beginning of his ministerial career, all in the same rural parish in Sweden. Each of the three pastors arrives fresh from theological training and decidedly immature (and in two cases a nominal rather than genuine believer). Each of the three attains maturity of faith through encounters with parishioners, fellow pastors, and various religious movements that were in fact prominent in Sweden during the historical eras covered. There are two plot lines: the “coming of age” spiritual pilgrimages of the three young ministers, and an episodic fictional history of a rural Swedish parish.

So what transpired in my spiritual and imaginative life as I undertook my excursion into a hitherto unknown work of literature? Before I break my answer into the subjects that will indirectly comprise an apology for literature, let me comment on the exhilaration of committing myself to mastering a new realm of the imagination. When I situate myself in front of a television set for a bit of

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=306&issue\\_id=75](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=306&issue_id=75).

relaxation, I do not feel as though I have embarked on something momentous. But when I choose to read a novel or collection of poems, I feel elevated by what I have undertaken.

English poet John Keats wrote a great sonnet on this very subject (“Sonnet on First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” 1815). Using the metaphor of geographic discovery, Keats pictures reading literature as “traveling in the realms of gold.” On the logic of this metaphor, encountering a new work of literature possesses all the thrill of discovering a new country.

As I make the case for the importance of literature, therefore, I want first to extend a challenge to my readers. If you want to know why it is important to read literature, answer the question for yourself by reading a novel or play or browsing in an anthology of poetry in the next two or three weeks. If a chapter per day seems like an insurmountable barrier, resolve to read six pages a day. I predict that the moment you commit to the program, you will feel that you have crossed a threshold and stepped into a liberating space.

### The Power of Transport

As I have already implied, the first gift that a great work of literature imparts is the power of transport. Children know this power when they thrill to the formula “once upon a time.” But this childhood thrill is actually universal. It is an impulse that adults, too, need to cultivate (as Jesus practiced when he told his parables).

The word *escape* is equally accurate as a name for what I am commending. We all need beneficial escapes from burdensome reality. We long for a sense of having *gotten out* of our workaday world with its pressures. We feel equally a sense of exhilaration when we pass through a door of the imagination and discover that we have *gotten into* an alternate world (and even a short poem is such a world). Literature illuminates the life we live in this world, but it does so by first removing us from our world.

I can think of two good reasons to undertake excursions into imaginary realms. One is that the

rush of everyday duties becomes confining to the human spirit if we never get out of the daily routine and its duties. The second is that our culture seeks to encompass us and even suffocate us with the cheap and tawdry. It is untrue that we are cut off from our own culture; on the contrary, we are bombarded by it. The problem is that our secular culture is demeaning rather than elevating.

C. S. Lewis has written particularly well on the nature of reading as an escape. The discussion appears in his small classic of literary theory (the only one that Lewis wrote) entitled *An Experiment in Criticism*. In defending the reading of literature as a beneficial escape (and not automatically deserving of the stigma of being considered *escapist*), Lewis acknowledges that we need to monitor what we escape *to* in our reading experiences.<sup>2</sup> This is exactly where great literature makes its strongest claim to our attention.

The avenues that comprise a Christian defense of literature are tried and true and are essentially three in number. The order in which I will discuss them in the rest of this article is arbitrary, so no importance should be attached to the order in which they appear.

One more preliminary point that I need to make is that when literature is commended to pastors and other church leaders, the discussion almost inevitably gets slanted toward fictional narrative, chiefly novels. But narrative makes up only half of the realms of gold that we call literature. The other half is poetry. If given the choice, I myself prefer to read poems and to give them the reflection they deserve. In any case, as I extol the rewards of reading literature, I would like my readers to have poems in view as well as novels and plays.

### Literature as Entertainment and a Form of Beauty

The Roman author Horace wrote a treatise (*Ars Poetica*) just twenty years before the birth of

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2 C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 69.

Jesus in which he bequeathed a formula regarding the function of literature that has stood the test of time. Horace claimed that literature combines what is *dolci* (literally “sweet”) with what is *utile* (useful). The words used to express this duality have varied slightly from one person to another, but perhaps the preferred formula has been delight and wisdom (or its variant truth). The writer of Ecclesiastes uses that formula near the end of his compilation of proverbs (12:9–10) when he claims to have “sought to find words of delight” and to have written “words of truth.” The Romantic poet Shelley called literature “a fountain forever overflowing with wisdom and delight.”<sup>3</sup> And Robert Frost claimed a poem “begins in delight and ends in wisdom.”<sup>4</sup>

To defend literature for the pleasure that it gives is what I call a hedonistic defense of literature, and it has been a cornerstone of my own thinking on the subject for half a century. There are two sides to such a defense. One is the element of beauty that we find in a well-crafted story or poem. Artistry is another name for it. C. S. Lewis offered the word *deliciousness* as a synonym for such beauty.

There is no need to spell out the details of what makes up artistic beauty in a story or poem. It extends all the way from the overall structure of the work to the very words that the writer has chosen. I am fond of a comment that C. S. Lewis made in defending the importance of form in literature: “Every episode, explanation, description, dialogue—ideally every sentence—must be pleasurable and interesting.”<sup>5</sup>

The other aspect of the delight of literature is its entertainment value, or its status as an enlightened use of leisure time. Again it is beyond the scope of this discussion to spell out what things make literature entertaining. I am speaking of the principle of the thing, so whatever you as a reader

find entertaining in reading a poem or watching a performance of a play is what I am defending. I commend a comment by Charles Williams who follows up his observation that “*Paradise Lost* is much more fun written in blank verse than it would be in prose” with the statement, “Let us have all the delights of which we are capable.”<sup>6</sup>

## The Authentic Voice of Human Experience

Form is half of the literary equation, and content is the other half. Of course works of literature embody ideas and offer some of them for our approval. I will get to that subject eventually, but the forte of literature is not its ability to embody ideas. The truth that literature stands ready to impart is primarily truthfulness to human experience. It is a point of vexation to me that so few people have this category as one of the types of truth.

I will hazard a guess that the element of literature that registers most clearly with my students is that the subject of literature is universal human experience concretely rendered. In fact, I never let my students lose sight of it. It is also my observation that the people who never see the point of literature are the ones who have never been coached to see the recognizable human experiences that every work of literature embodies.

One of my favorite texts for proving this point is the story of Cain (Gen. 4:1–16). The story is briefly narrated, and it takes place at the dawn of history. I theorize to my students that if we can find two dozen universal human experiences in such a text, we can find it anywhere. So my strategy is to stand at the white board and announce that my hand is the pen of a ready scribe, waiting to record the universal human experiences embodied in the story. The answers typically begin with the obvious: sibling rivalry, earning a livelihood, envy, harboring a grudge, murder, lack of self-control.

At that point I declare the floodgates opened, and the answers continue to tumble forth: self-pity, attempted cover-up, exile, making a bad decision

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3 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry* (1821).

4 Robert Frost, “The Figure a Poem Makes,” repr. *Perspectives on Poetry*, ed. James Calderwood and Harold Toliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 350.

5 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 84.

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6 Charles Williams, *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 5.

and having to live with the consequences, a sense of entitlement, etc., etc. I then clinch the point by quoting John Steinbeck's verdict that "this is the best-known story in the world because it is everybody's story, ... the symbol story of the human soul."<sup>7</sup>

Once alerted to this aspect of literature, we can scarcely avoid finding it in the literature that we read or view. I call it knowledge in the form of *right seeing*. As we contemplate the human experiences that a writer puts before us, we see those experiences clearly and accurately. Truth and knowledge are more than ideational. A good photograph or painting gets us to see life accurately, and so does a work of literature. A poem does it in more concentrated fashion than a novel does.

Why is it important for Christians to possess this form of knowledge? My answer is that it is part of our bond with the human race and one that evaporates if we do not renew our contact with it. The pressures of daily living are ready to envelope us and cut us off from broader human interests. We need windows beyond the exigencies of the moment. C. S. Lewis said in regard to literature that "we demand windows. Literature ... is a series of windows, even of doors" (Lewis said this in the same passage at the end of *An Experiment in Criticism* where he famously endorsed literature for "the enlargement of our being" that it imparts).<sup>8</sup>

Let me relate this to preachers and preaching. Those who end up in the pulpit are a self-selecting group right from the start. They love the Bible, and they love theological abstraction. Unless something intervenes, these people tend to produce sermons that whisk us away to a biblical and theological world that is sealed off from daily life. Frederick Buechner wrote about this very insightfully in a book entitled *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (1977), which discusses the need for preachers to tell the truth with an imagination informed by contact with literature as well as a mind informed by theology.

7 John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), chap. 22.

8 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 138.

A visit to a patient in a hospital also pulls a minister back into the world of human experience, but literature covers more territory than our personal routine is likely to do, and it silhouettes human experiences with interpretive insight. The Renaissance essayist Francis Bacon said that "reading maketh a full man." I would challenge all of my readers, but preeminently those who are pastors, to put that to the test. I think the results will be very positive.

### The Intellectual Pleasures of Literature

Although the forte of literature and the arts is their ability to "hold the mirror up to nature"—to be an accurate picture of life in the world—that does not mean that literature is devoid of ideas. When in the first half of the twentieth century poets and critics were obsessed with the theory "no ideas but in things" (implying that literature does no more than embody human experience), poet Denise Levertov provided a counterbalance with the catchy one-liner, "No ideas but in things does not mean no ideas."<sup>9</sup>

Given Horace's division of labor between what is "sweet" (delightful) and what is useful in the literary enterprise, I am certain that most people would put the ideational aspect of literature into the box labeled "useful." I do not question that it is useful, but I consider my encounters with the ideas embodied in literature to be one of the intellectual pleasures of my life.

That literature embodies important ideas is one of the presuppositions that we rightly make regarding literature. A towering literary scholar of an earlier generation spoke of the rule of significance, by which he meant, "Read the [work] as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe."<sup>10</sup> Equally helpful is the statement of novelist Joyce Cary that "all writers ... must have, to compose any kind of

9 Denise Levertov, *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1973), quoted by Leland Ryken in *The Christian Imagination* (Colorado Springs: Shaw, 2002), 143.

10 Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 115.

story, some picture of the world, and of what is right and wrong in that world.”<sup>11</sup>

There are multiple ways in which to encounter the great ideas of the human race. Nonetheless, I incline toward the view of Henry Zylstra that “if you really want to get at the spirit of an age and the soul of a time you can hardly do better than to consult the literature of that age and that time.”<sup>12</sup>

Part of the pleasure that I derive from contemplating and weighing the ideas of literature is akin to the pleasure of a puzzle or riddle. The process starts with figuring out what the writer is saying and offering for my approval. Then I face the task (but it is not burdensome) of testing the intellectual spirits to see if they are from God. Certainly this is a way of being in my own culture but not of it, but one of the great strengths of literature is that its ideas are not limited to our own moment in history. They stretch over the whole expanse of human history. One of the lessons of literary history is that not all of the good ideas were produced in the last fifty years.

When I interact with the ideas of literature, I find it useful to have a roadmap in my mind regarding the intellectual territory through which I am traversing. The type of intellectual or ideational pleasure and profit I gain from literature depends on the category to which it belongs. One category is the literature of Christian affirmation, as in the poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, and John Milton. A second category is what I call the literature of common humanity. An equally good label is the literature of clarification. Such literature does not endorse explicitly Christian ideas, but it clarifies the human situation (including the realm of ideas) to which the Christian faith speaks. Assimilating such literature in a spiritually uplifting manner depends on what a reader does with the ideas that are offered for approval, and I find this a pleasurable challenge.

A third category is the literature of unbelief.

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11 Joyce Cary, *Art and Reality* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 174.

12 Henry Zylstra, *Testament of Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 5.

It espouses ideas that contradict the ideas of the Christian faith and world view. I find that the intellectual effort that such literature requires from me can be a highly profitable exercise. Among other things, it sends me continuously to the Bible to find the standard of truth by which I reject what an author has placed before me.

### Tips for the Journey

My readers will have noticed that I have provided few literary examples of the principles that I have asserted. That is by design. I have provided an outline for which I want my readers to fill in the illustrations. For those who lack sufficient contact with literature to provide illustrations, my advice is to take immediate corrective action.

But doesn't the Bible provide a sufficient sourcebook for a Christian's reading? I remind my readers of a command with which they are thoroughly familiar, namely, the command to sing to the Lord a new song. We do not need literature to provide our world view and doctrinal framework. Nonetheless, as English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge correctly observed, ideas can become so familiar “that they lose all the life and efficiency of truth and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul” (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817). Good literature rescues the great ideas from becoming platitudes and clichés.

I would compare the effect of literature to the effect of a good sermon. Both are capable of providing fresh insights and apt formulations of timeless truths. We do not scorn a good sermon because we already know the biblical text and its theological ideas. I propose that we should equally value what the storyteller and poet can do for us in their handling of human experience and expressing insights more beautifully and powerfully than we have recently (or ever) experienced them.

As a postscript, I find that people shun literature for two main reasons. One is that they do not know why and how literature can enrich their lives. My challenge to such people is the motto of the car salesman: take a test drive. The other category of nonreaders is people who are too busy



to conceive of reading literature as a possibility. My encouragement to such people is to begin modestly, with a fifteen-minute-per-day commitment. ©

**Leland Ryken** *is professor of English at Wheaton College, where he has taught for forty-three years. He has had a publishing career as well as a teaching career. His three dozen books cover a broad range of subjects, including the Puritans, the Bible as literature, and Bible translation. He is the author of The Legacy of the King James Bible (Crossway, 2011).*

# Servant Education

## Geneva College and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church<sup>1</sup>

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2012<sup>2</sup>

by Robert Tarullo

In 1986, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church saw the publication of *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.<sup>3</sup> Included in that anthology was a brief essay reflecting on the connection between Wheaton College and the OPC. The author, Edward L. Kellogg, draws attention to the early years of the OPC and how many of her ministers educated at Wheaton were encouraged to attend the fledgling seminary of the defrocked J. Gresham Machen, Westminster Theological Seminary. While Mr. Kellogg did not have these numbers available to him at the time, by my count, the total number of ministers as of 2001 who graduated from Wheaton was eighty (spanning the years 1905–1993). Indeed most of these men moved from Wheaton to Westminster and into the minis-

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1 I want to acknowledge with thankfulness the assistance that I received from Linda Foh, OPC Web assistant; Becky Phillips, interim director of alumni, church and parent relations; Kae Kirkwood, Geneva College archivist; and John Muether, historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, without whom this little project could not have been completed.

2 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=313&issue\\_id=76](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=313&issue_id=76).

3 Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble, eds., *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986).

try of the OPC.

At the denomination's seventy-fifth anniversary, it may be fitting to reflect upon the connection between Geneva College and the OPC. To be sure, Geneva is no Wheaton. Only twenty-eight ministers of the OPC graduated from Geneva (spanning the years 1920–2002). There is a larger story, though, beyond the students who became ministers in our denomination.

Geneva College has a long and rich history that even antedates Wheaton. Founded in 1848 as Geneva Hall by action of the Presbytery of the Lakes of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, Geneva began holding classes in the western Ohio town of Northwood. Beginning as a “Grammar School,” and after a short period of closure due to debt and the Civil War, Geneva reopened largely due to the determination of John L. McCartney, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in Northwood, along with his conviction for the establishment of a Freedmen’s College. The founding of this institution publicly marked Geneva as having strong abolitionist convictions. “As a result, well into the 1880’s there were African-Americans from the South in the student body.”<sup>4</sup> Geneva’s social concerns remain a steadfast mission of the college. Engraved into the very heart of the college is *Pro Christo et Patria*. The motto of the college is “For Christ and Country.” The goal of the college is to “transform society for the kingdom of Christ.”

After moving to Beaver Falls in 1879, the campus stands with the prominent building, affectionately dubbed “Old Main” (completed in 1881) at its center. Over time, Geneva grew from being a small Christian “Grammar School” into an academic institution offering the Bachelor of Arts and Science, as well as being known for its athletics.

In the 1930s, Geneva received a gift to construct a new library building. The gift was in honor of the Rev. Dr. Clarence E. Macartney. Macartney was the prominent Presbyterian preacher serving the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. Having been reared within the Reformed Presbyterian

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4 David M. Carson, *Pro Christo et Patria: A History of Geneva College* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning, 1997), 11–12.

Church and having grown up on the campus of Geneva College in the home his father, John L. McCartney, built and named Ferncliffe, Macartney knew Geneva well. He spoke there on more than one occasion. McCartney Library stands in honor of a man who had become a colleague and ally of J. Gresham Machen. Together with Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, Macartney's address in 1922, "Shall Unbelief Win?" (a response to Harry Emerson Fosdick's infamous "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"), was a clearly articulated response to modernism, and it raised the banner of Christ in the fight against modernism in the mainline Presbyterian Church. While Macartney supported Machen's new training grounds for the ministry in Westminster Theological Seminary, he would eventually balk at the idea of the necessity of forming a new denomination. While Machen died on January 1, 1937, serving the new denomination, Macartney remained at First Presbyterian Church until his death in 1957 in Ferncliffe, Geneva College. In his autobiography, Macartney would reflect upon his former ally's founding of a new Presbyterian denomination, "The movement was abortive. Only a handful of men, sincere and courageous, however, followed Dr. Machen in the secession."<sup>5</sup>

Despite Macartney's determination to stay in the PCUSA, Geneva College has served the OPC well. Now in its 162nd year as a Reformed and Presbyterian institution of higher learning, Geneva has more recently become a planting ground for the OPC. This new planting ground for the OPC coincides with Geneva's clearer articulation of its Reformed identity. According to Geneva historian David M. Carson, it was not until the 1960s that Geneva began to once again become self-conscious about its "historic roots as a Christian college [which] climaxed in the adoption in 1967 of the *Foundational Concepts of Christian Education*."<sup>6</sup>

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5 Clarence E. Macartney, *The Making of a Minister: The Autobiography of Clarence E. Macartney*, ed. J. Clyde Henry (Great Neck, NY: Channel, 1961), 189.

6 Carson, *Pro Christo et Patria*, xi.

It is at this point in Geneva's history that young men who would become OPC ministers began attending the college. Until 1960, there were only three Geneva graduates who became ministers in the OPC. During the decade of the sixties, no fewer than seven graduates would become OPC ministers. As well, the professor of church history at Westminster Seminary and the first OPC historian, the Rev. Dr. Paul Woolley, received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1969. (In the next decade, Westminster's Harvie Conn would be accorded a similar honor.)

The influence of Geneva College upon the OPC is largely found in its faculty and the local church. As the present author received comments from fellow alumni, a few common themes arose. Geneva provided a foundation in liberal arts that prepared young men for seminary; we were either introduced to or reinforced in the Reformed faith and life, as well as to the OPC through its professors and proximity to the local congregation of Grace OPC, in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Beyond this, Geneva, along with Westminster Seminary, also became the institutional support behind the OPC's controversial inner-city educational ministry, the Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS), based in Philadelphia.

Formally organized in 1978, CUTS could trace its roots to Emmanuel Chapel, an inner-city Philadelphia home mission work of the OPC, where OPC minister Bill Krispin served as evangelist from 1968 to 1975. Geneva's historic concern for racial relationships among the people of God may explain its academic support for CUTS. The opening paragraph of the center's constitution expresses a theology of racial reconciliation as a basis for doing ministry:

Early in our nation's history the church was divided into alienated units when white Christians failed to receive their black brothers and sisters into the fullness of fellowship and ministry in the church.... The unity of the body of Christ necessitates that urban and non-urban churches today actively seek ways together of

meeting each other's needs.<sup>7</sup>

To this end, the Geneva College Program offered one major leading to a BA degree in biblical studies with an urban ministry emphasis. Through the OPC's Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, the center would "enable the OPC to begin new [urban] churches in the company of committed friends rather than in isolation."<sup>8</sup>

As I reflect upon my years at Geneva, I am in awe of God's sovereign handiwork. Like others before me, I was well prepared for seminary through Geneva's rigorous Christian liberal arts program. For those who attended Geneva in the sixties and seventies, the influence came through Johannes G. Vos, Robert B. Tweed, and John H. White. According to alumnus Mark R. Brown, pastor of Westminster OPC, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, Johannes Geerhardus (more familiarly, J. G.) Vos, the son of Princeton Seminary's renowned professor of biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, was a particularly important influence. Brown remembers the younger Vos "as a kind and gentle man with Reformed piety mixed with humor rather than stuffiness." Vos and Tweed strongly encouraged Geneva graduates to enroll at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Of J. G. Vos's influence, former student, colleague, and president of Geneva, John H. White wrote:

The Reformed community owes Dr. [J. G.] Vos a deep debt of gratitude because several of his father's works were substantially edited and rewritten by him. *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* was edited and rewritten sentence by sentence by Dr. Vos in order to make it more readable and useful. *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* was assembled from old syllabi, stu-

dents' notes, and his own class notes. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* was assembled in a completely rewritten form from mimeographed editions and lecture notes by Dr. Vos, and a detailed index was added by him. Humanly speaking, the revival of interest in "Vosian Biblical Theology" would not have occurred without J. G. Vos.<sup>9</sup>

While neither father nor son would become members of the OPC, the younger Vos continued the influence his father exerted on the denomination. Students of Vos, both father and son, became entrenched in biblical theology. In many ways, Geneva proved to be the introduction for some to the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos. This would later become reinforced at Westminster Theological Seminary where many of them were ushered off for pastoral training.

If Charles G. Dennison was correct when he wrote of Geerhardus Vos's influence upon the OPC,<sup>10</sup> then certainly his son would have relayed similar influence as well. By all accounts, each displayed a keen exegetical eye through the lens of Reformed biblical theology. Thankfully, their ability to convey that exegesis with the humility of Christ would be an influence of great import to the OPC.

There were other factors as well. For this author, the influence came from Dr. Byron G. Curtis. His Bible and Hebrew classes flamed a love for the Old Testament. His love for God and the language of the Scriptures was infectious.

But for me and many others, it was the local church that was most influential. Grace OPC in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, began under the ministry of the Rev. Donald M. Poundstone in 1970 just in time for several new students eager to learn about

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7 Iain Crichton, "Empowering for Effective Urban Ministry: The Center for Urban Theological Studies—Philadelphia," *Urban Mission* 5 (November 1987): 36.

8 *Ibid.*, 35. For further discussion of CUTS and the OPC, see D. G. Hart, *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1956–1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 206–10.

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9 John H. White, ed., *The Book of Books: Essays on the Scriptures in Honor of Johannes G. Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), ix–x. My thanks to Byron Curtis for alerting me to this resource.

10 "Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in *History for a Pilgrim People: the Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed. Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2002), 67–87.

the OPC. His ministry encouraged young men such as Robert Eckardt (class of '74), Robert Harting (class of '74), and Robert Tanzia (class of '74) to pursue the ministry in the OPC.

The ministry of Grace OPC was bewildering to me at first, reflecting this newcomer's shallowness and ignorance of the Reformed faith. On the invitation of a classmate, Chad Bond (now an OPC minister), this newly converted mainline Episcopalian took a forty-minute drive to the Pittsburgh suburb of Sewickley. There Charles G. Dennison preached powerful sermons that were not for the faint of heart. After a few weeks I departed, determined never to return. A year later, I returned at the persistent requests of my friend. Several months and many inquirers classes with Pastor Dennison later, I professed my faith for the first time in a Reformed and Presbyterian Church in May of 1995.

It was the combined influence of the faithful ministry of Grace OPC with Pastor Dennison, the wise session and loving congregation, along with the excellent required and elective Bible and language classes at Geneva, that influenced me to enter the ministry of the OPC.

Without these influences, how would I have ever managed to climb into the bell tower of Old Main determined to read through Vos's *The Wonderful Tree* with Sarah Bingham, now my wife? Nor would I breathlessly try to explain Vos's two-ages diagram on a napkin while I was parked behind McKee Hall after a "Calvin Forum" book club, a ministry of Grace OPC.

In so many ways, Geneva College and the local church of Grace OPC, Sewickley, shaped who I am now, serving as a pastor in Newtown, Connecticut. Charlie Dennison once wrote, "History is what God does to you."<sup>11</sup> Truly, I am not alone in attesting the fact that Geneva College has influenced the OPC in some of her student body becoming ministers. God has worked through so many secondary causes to bring about mature men serving in our midst as moderators, general sec-

retaries, regional home missionaries, foreign and home missionaries, and pastors of the local church whose desire it is "not only to preach Christ, but also to live Christ, even as they preach."<sup>12</sup>

The success that Geneva has had in producing ministerial members for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church owes by and large to a unique synergy between the instruction in the classroom and the preached Word from the pulpit. As this essay has suggested, some of the principals in that arrangement—J. G. Vos and Charles Dennison—are now passed from the scene. Time will tell whether the college will continue to bear fruit for the OPC.

As Kellogg suggested, Wheaton was arguably the greatest feeder to the OPC ministerial ranks in the denomination's earliest years. After World War II, Calvin College may have assumed that role. Of course, many other Christian colleges have served the OPC well (among them Gordon, Dordt, and, especially in recent years, Covenant). But pride of place for the past quarter century may go to Geneva College. Its ties to the OPC, though often indirect and subtle, have been a noteworthy feature of the story of the OPC. ©

**Robert Tarullo** is the pastor of Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Newtown, Connecticut.

<sup>11</sup> "Vos and the OPC," 67.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

# The Education of a Monster

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by James S. Gidley

You might wonder how an engineer came to be so interested in a piece of English literature from the British Romantic period.<sup>2</sup> I was reading about technology and society, and I repeatedly encountered authors who used *Frankenstein* as a metaphor for technology in general. A strong current of thought about technology—both among intellectuals and in the general public—is to view it as a monster out of control, dehumanizing us and destroying the fabric of our society. I thought that I had better get to the bottom of the matter and find out what *Frankenstein* was all about.

In the process of doing that, I became hooked on the story itself. It is simultaneously a popular novel and a great novel of ideas. I have approached the novel with a good deal of skepticism about whether it was really about technology. My mature conclusion is that it does say something about technology, but that you have to pay attention to much deeper issues in the story before you can decipher what cautionary tale Mary Shelley might actually be telling. I have taken a journey whose point of departure was technology, and I have come back to technology with a much deeper appreciation of what ails us in the early twenty-first century. Yes, although *Frankenstein* was written almost two hundred years ago, it is startlingly contemporary.

Before digging into the significance of the novel, we must pause to examine what the story actually says. In short, we need to take some time to examine the *real* story. If you are familiar only

with film versions of the story, you will need to do some rethinking, for all the movies that I have seen get some major things wrong—even my favorite, the Mel Brooks version, *Young Frankenstein*. It will be convenient to think about the true story by examining three myths about the novel.

## Myth No. 1: The Creature Was Made by Stitching Together Parts of Dead Bodies.

This myth was started by an inattentive early reviewer, and it has stuck ever since. It has been deeply embedded in popular consciousness by the classic 1931 movie version of *Frankenstein* starring Boris Karloff. But there are many evidences in the novel's text that Mary Shelley did not think of her "hideous progeny" in this way. Of course, she had to be quite vague about the technology involved, but the evidence is strong nonetheless. I only have time to make two points: (1) Victor Frankenstein explicitly disavows the ability to raise the dead. If he could not raise the dead, how could he raise parts of dead bodies? (2) He says that he purposely made the body quite large—about eight feet tall—to make the work on the fine structures of the creature's anatomy easier. Where would he find assorted human body parts to make up a body eight feet tall?

You may be wondering why this is important. It is important because there is no possibility of resurrection or redemption in *Frankenstein*. It is a story of creation, fall, and damnation. As a story of creation, it has much more in common with recent science fiction stories about robots than appears on the surface.

## Myth No. 2: Victor Frankenstein Was Overjoyed with His Scientific and Technological Triumph in Bringing a Sentient Being to Life.

This myth is embedded in our consciousness again by the Boris Karloff movie version, in which a triumphant Frankenstein, in the presence of a roomful of witnesses, cries out exultingly: "It's alive!" From this scene we get one of our stereotypical images of the mad scientist, exulting over a

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=314&issue\\_id=76](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=314&issue_id=76).

2 The paper was originally a presentation at a Geneva College faculty luncheon on April 7, 2005.



hideous triumph while the witnesses and the audience are chilled to the bone. But in the real story, Victor Frankenstein creates the monster entirely alone; he never has an assistant, and there is no witness to the moment of creation except himself. In the real story, Victor Frankenstein is *himself* horrified by his creature, and immediately abandons it. When it pursues him into his room, he dashes terrified into the streets, and the creature wanders off into the forest.

This abandonment of the creature is of central significance to the whole story. It was the central vision of the story from the first moment that Mary Shelley conceived of it, according to her account in the preface to the 1831 edition:

I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the workings of some powerful engine, show signs of life.... His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken.<sup>3</sup>

There are various important consequences of this vision of the horrified creator. One of the most important, in my view, is that Mary Shelley's story of creation matches deism perfectly: the creator finishes his masterwork and then abandons it to its own devices.

### **Myth No. 3: The Creature Was an Inarticulate, Stumbling Hulk.**

Again the 1931 film version has trumped the novel itself in popular consciousness. The creature played by Boris Karloff never says a word—until the 1935 sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, and even then, he speaks largely in monosyllables and short declarative sentences of broken English. The creature of the novel, however, is, if anything, more articulate than his creator! How he gets to be so is one of the tales I have to tell. For *Frankenstein*, among other things, is a novel about education. This leads us to my title theme: “The Education of

a Monster.”

### **The Education of a Monster**

In fact, there are three tales of education in *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein narrates the story of his childhood and young manhood, and in so doing, he tells us about his own education and that of Henry Clerval, his boyhood best friend. The creature himself narrates the story of his own education to a stupefied Frankenstein, who has not seen his own creature for almost two years since that fateful night in which he ran from him in terror.

The tales of education are not merely circumstantial detail in *Frankenstein*. Both of Mary Shelley's illustrious parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, had written about education, and Mary was quite familiar with their writings. *Frankenstein* is a fictional laboratory of education.

I'll begin with the education of Henry Clerval, Victor Frankenstein's boyhood friend. Henry is fascinated as a child with Romantic literature: knights in shining armor and so forth. His education was humanistic. When he finally joins Victor at the University of Ingolstadt, just after Victor has created the monster, Victor suffers a mental and physical breakdown, and Henry nurses him back to health. Victor's recovery is completed by joining Henry in the study of oriental languages and literature. The message is that humanistic study is life-giving.

But that is not the whole story! In the end, Henry is murdered by the monster without ever knowing what it is—Victor never tells him his dark secret. That is to say, Henry's humanistic education leaves him defenseless against the destructive forces let loose in society by Frankenstein's scientific education.

As a child, Victor had joined Henry in his literary education, but he had not been as enamored of it as Henry was. A crucial event, early in the novel, is when Victor discovers a book written by Cornelius Agrippa, a renaissance alchemist and magician. The writings of Agrippa have become occult classics. Victor goes on to other occult

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 9.

writers, and he attempts to perform the magical science that he reads of. Yet he is unsuccessful, becomes disgusted with his favorite authors, and turns his back on science until he goes to the University of Ingolstadt.

There, he encounters science professors who debunk the so-called science of Cornelius Agrippa, adding a theoretical refutation of Victor's favorite authors to the disillusionment that he has already experienced. Victor then goes on to excel in the best of the modern science of his day, principally chemistry and physiology. Mary Shelley goes out of her way to emphasize that Victor's success at creating a living, rational being is not the result of magic or supernatural effects; he uses no incantations and calls on no divine, angelic, or demonic powers. His is a triumph of the best science of Shelley's day.

Critics have argued over whether Shelley sees superstitious, medieval alchemy or objective, modern science as the culprit that lets loose the monster. In my view, this is a false dichotomy: it is not either/or; it is both/and. In bringing Frankenstein into the world of natural science by way of medieval alchemy and superstition, Shelley is connecting the sorcerer with the scientist. In large measure, we owe to Shelley the figure of the mad scientist. The mad scientist is the lineal descendant of the sorcerer.

By extension, Shelley is connecting the whole body of modern science with sorcery. This is the deep paradigm underlying the use of the Frankenstein metaphor by anti-technology writers. Anti-technology writers do not fear the failures of technology but its successes. In an earlier age, Europeans feared supernatural powers—the demonic forces at the disposal of the sorcerer. Since our culture, generally, no longer fears the supernatural, a new fear is substituted: fear of the powers of science.

The effect of Mary Shelley's portrayal of Frankenstein is to create an atmosphere of what I call the natural supernatural: the production of stupendous feats, ordinarily associated with supernatural powers, by purely natural means. This is deeply connected to the Enlightenment worldview, in

which the supernatural is discredited. Where then can a vision of horror arise? Only from within the natural world itself. Therefore, our desupernaturalized world itself becomes both the source and the arena of supernatural effects, mirroring the Enlightenment's collapsing of the supernatural into the natural realm.

Frankenstein is not the hapless bumbler that some of the critics would make him out to be. He is all too powerful and successful. His creation threatens humanity just as it threatens humanism. If a man can create a living, sentient, rational creature, then the humanities are in principle subsumed into the natural sciences.

Now we must hasten on to consider the education of the creature himself. After Frankenstein abandons him, the creature wanders into the forest, where he begins to learn by direct sensory experience. He learns about light, darkness, cold, heat, hunger, pain, and so forth. He learns to use fire; he does not become irrationally afraid of it. He passes this whole first period of his existence with little or no contact with human beings, but his early encounters with humans prove to be disastrous. He is uniformly feared and hated for his hideous appearance.

Having been violently rejected by humans, the creature seeks a hiding place. He finds refuge in a hovel adjoining a rustic cottage. There he is able to conceal himself, and he finds that he can observe the cottagers through a small crack in the wall. He begins to learn language by observation. His language acquisition is greatly accelerated by the arrival at the cottage of an Arabian woman, Safie, whom the cottagers proceed to teach French. The eavesdropping monster learns more quickly than the Arabian.

Which leads us to the creature's book learning. His higher education consists in the knowledge of just five books, carefully selected by Mary Shelley. First, he overhears the cottagers reading a book to Safie to help her to learn French. It is *The Ruins of Empires* by Constantin Volney. Published in 1793, *The Ruins* is essentially a defense of the French Revolution and a trenchant attack on all forms of monarchy and organized religion, which

Volney views as intimate allies.

A key passage in *The Ruins* reads like the story of the creature itself, in summary form, from chapter 6, “The Primitive State of Man”:

Formed naked in body and in mind, man at first found himself thrown as it were by chance, on a rough and savage land: an orphan, abandoned by the unknown power which had produced him.<sup>4</sup>

Volney’s theology is simply deism: he is describing the god who creates and then abandons his creation, exactly as Victor Frankenstein does. The monster gains from Volney a grounding in the Enlightenment worldview.

At this point in the story, the creature finds a satchel in the forest, containing three books: *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, by Goethe, Plutarch’s *Lives*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Each of these books advances the creature’s understanding.

*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774, is generally regarded as the beginning of the Romantic movement in European literature. The plot is a simple story of unrequited love leading to the suicide of the title character. But it is told with such skill and emotional power that it had to be banned in several countries to stem the growing tide of suicides among young men who identified with the title character. *Werther* teaches the creature of the power of emotions. Even more importantly, reading *Werther* stimulates the creature to ask such questions as “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?”<sup>5</sup> Significantly, neither Henry Clerval nor Victor Frankenstein had ever asked such questions. They knew—or thought they knew—only too well who and what they were.

Plutarch’s *Lives*, published in the second century AD, is a manual of ancient pagan virtue. Plutarch arranges his biographical sketches in

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4 Constantin F. Volney, *The Ruins, or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires: and The Law of Nature* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 22.

5 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 131.

pairs, each containing one Greek statesman and one Roman, followed by a comparison of the two. Plutarch teaches the creature what virtue is—pagan virtue, that is, not Christian.

Next, the monster learns from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* what it would mean to have a personal relationship with his creator. The story teaches him how his creator has wronged him. His unknown creator has provided him with no revelation regarding his origin, purpose, or destiny. Even more importantly, the creature realizes that he is one of a kind. As such, he is denied all communion with human beings or any other rational creatures. In his own words, “Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the creature reads Victor Frankenstein’s laboratory notebook, which he had discovered in a pocket of the coat that he had taken with him when he wandered out of Frankenstein’s laboratory. In the notebook, he learns both his creator’s name and native city, as well as the story of his own origin. This at last gives the answer to his questions. He finds that he is not the exalted companion of God and angels that Adam was, but merely an assemblage of matter. This is the intellectual center of the novel. The creature is purely physical; any intelligence or emotion that he exhibits is purely the result of physical causes.

This conception was in fact the genesis of the whole story. Mary Shelley describes the way that her theme developed in her mind in this way:

Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and [Percy] Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated.<sup>7</sup>

If so, then it is natural to expect that in due

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6 *Ibid.*, 133.

7 *Ibid.*, 8.

time, we would learn the secret of our own physical makeup and be able to manufacture ourselves. Here we have the whole point of the story. And the whole horror of it, as well.

What *is* the point of all this?

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* continues to resonate in the contemporary world because its horror is rooted in the presuppositions that are widely held in the modern West. In so far as our educational systems are rooted in those same presuppositions, then they must be productive of the same sort of horror. What is the anatomy of that educational horror?

### The Destruction of the Humanities

As I have noted before, if human beings are merely assemblages of matter, then the humanities are subsumed under the natural sciences. The humanities have no distinct subject matter, for everything human is ultimately explainable by the interactions of chance and necessity with matter-energy. For example, the whole literary output of a Shakespeare is merely the product of his physiology and environment, which are in turn the result of biochemical reactions, which are in turn the result of the physical interactions of elementary particles. Everything, ultimately, is physics.

Within this worldview, the humanities are defenseless. They must perish, as Henry Clerval did, at the hands of the monster. The reality underlying the symbolism is that the knowledge-product of all-subsuming natural science destroys humanistic knowledge. There are certainly evidences of this in the academy: humanities instruction is under siege and—to change the metaphor—seemingly rudderless. Meanwhile, the natural sciences cruise along, robust and potent.

### The Deification/Demonization of Natural Science

Frankenstein achieves godlike powers with his science. Prior to the Romantic period, no author would have referred to herself as “creative.”<sup>8</sup> Mary

Shelley was part of the movement that desacralized the word “create.” An anonymous reviewer of the first edition of the novel highlights the historical transition in these words:

We are accustomed, happily, to look upon the creation of a living and intelligent being as a work that is fitted only to inspire a religious emotion ... the expression “Creator,” applied to a mere human being, gives us the same sort of shock with the phrase, “the Man Almighty,” and others of the same kind in Mr. Southey’s “Curse of Kehama.”<sup>9</sup>

As I have said already, the horror of Frankenstein is not failed science but successful science. What if it is really true? What if science is really capable of manufacturing a person? You get the theme of all the robot stories of science fiction, including *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *I, Robot*. Wedded to evolutionary thinking, the horror of the robot is that it will be the superior species that has better survivability than *Homo sapiens*. The robots will win, and humanity will become extinct. Thus, science assumes godlike powers of destruction as well as creation.

The technology is at our doorstep, or so the scientists and technologists think. Let me cite two examples. Rodney Brooks, head of a robotics laboratory at MIT, writes:

The body, this mass of biomolecules, is a machine that acts according to a set of specifiable rules.... The body consists of components that interact according to well-defined (though not all known to us humans) rules that ultimately derive from physics and chemistry. The body is a machine.... Every person I meet is ... a machine—a big bag of skin full of biomolecules interacting according to describable and knowable rules.<sup>10</sup>

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emerita of English at Geneva College, at an event shortly before the occasion on which this paper was originally given.

9 Anon., review in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1818, reprinted in J. Paul Hunter, ed., *Mary Shelley, Frankenstein*, Norton Critical Edition (London: W. W. Norton, 1996), 195.

10 Rodney Brooks, *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will*

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8 This observation was made by Dr. Ann Paton, professor

Therefore, he argues, his robots must eventually be accorded equal rights with humans.

In Japan, robot-making has become big business. In the 2005 issue of *ASEE Prism*, the journal of the American Society for Engineering Education, there is a news article about the latest robots on the Japanese market. We read of “Robots Who Can Schmooze”:

The antidote to becoming the world’s fastest graying society? In Japan, the solution is obvious. Recruit intelligent machines to help care for, entertain, and comfort the elderly.... One of the latest incarnations is a chatty 18-inch model, named *ifbot*, that has attracted strong advance orders despite a hefty price tag of nearly \$6,000. Programmed to comprehend and assemble millions of phrases, this bot is geared to serve as a companion and senility-prevention device for the elderly. A menu of 15 programs enables it to discuss the news, quiz its owner, and even prompt a round of karaoke.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Fight to the Death between the Sciences and the Humanities**

The well-known antagonism between the sciences and the humanities in the academy is not a petty turf war. It is a Darwinian struggle for survival. Shelley is telling us that the sciences must win, but that it will be a Pyrrhic victory—science will win us only despair and death, as Victor Frankenstein did in the end.

### **The Inescapable Religious Foundation of Education**

Only the monster encountered the question “Who am I?” in his education. The answer is both the meaning of his education and the key to the novel. Today, as in Mary Shelley’s day, great hopes were placed upon education as a cure for all human ills. Only educate people correctly, they were

told, and we are told, and the evils of society will be greatly ameliorated, if not eradicated.

*Frankenstein* is a horror tale for the educators. What if it’s all wrong? What if education merely confirms the student in hopelessness and meaninglessness? What if the answer to the question “Who am I?” is “You are not a who, but a what; not an I, but an it”? The right question is “What is it?” and the right answer is, “It is an assemblage of matter-energy governed by chance and natural law.”

What is the way out? I can only be suggestive. I find it helpful to think in terms of the relationship between word and matter. In the modern scientific paradigm, matter precedes word. That is, matter-energy has existed for billions of years, human speech only for the last few tens or hundreds of thousands of years. In other words, the universe is fundamentally material and impersonal. Words and persons ultimately derive their existence and their meaning from matter. It is my conviction that this leaves words and persons without real meaning.

On the other hand, the Bible presents us with an account of creation in which words precede matter-energy. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The verbal conception of light exists prior to the incarnation of light as matter-energy. And behind the words of creation stands him who *is* the Word. Now we have a created universe that is imbued with word through and through. Words imply speakers and hearers—in short, persons. The words proceed from three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The universe is personal. In such a universe, both words and matter have meaning. I trust that that is the universe in which we actually live. ☉

**James S. Gidley**, a ruling elder at Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pennsylvania, is a professor at Geneva College, where he is chairman of the Engineering Department. He is also a member of the Christian Education Committee and the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training.

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*Change Us* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 173–74.

<sup>11</sup> Lucy Craft, “Technology: Robots Who Can Schmooze,” *ASEE Prism* 14, no. 7 (March 2005): 15.



# Steering a Course between Fundamentalism and Transformationalism: J. Gresham Machen's View of Christian Scholarship

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November and December 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Dariusz M. Bryćko<sup>2</sup>

Christian religion flourishes not in the darkness but in the light. Intellectual slothfulness is but a quack remedy for unbelief; the true remedy is consecration of intellectual powers to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Machen did not present his views on Christian scholarship in a systematic manner, and therefore analyzing his philosophy of education can at times be challenging—yet it is not impossible. Machen extensively addressed education, and his opinions on scholarship are spread throughout his speeches, essays, books, and book reviews. We also possess a transcript of Machen's testimony before the U.S. Congress against the act proposed to form the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of the current discussion about the nature of Christian

scholarship and education, and on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Machen's death, I would like to reflect on his educational writings and what I have come to call his "militant view of Christian scholarship," which may perhaps serve as a middle way between those who question the idea of Christian education and those who see a direct biblical imperative for it.<sup>5</sup> Further, Machen has been credited with fostering a renaissance of academic pursuits among fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals in America (both free and confessional) from his day until the advent of Dutch Neo-Kuyperianism (sometime in the 1960s), and it seems worthwhile to revisit his writings in light of the current spiritual and academic identity crisis of American Christian scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

George Marsden, in his book *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, argues that most early opponents of liberalism who became leaders in the fundamentalist and (later) evangelical movements were in some way connected to Machen.<sup>7</sup> The list of familiar people and institutions Machen directly influenced is long, so let us mention just a few, such as Harold Ockenga, the founder of Fuller and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminaries, *Christianity Today* magazine, and pastor of the historic Park Street Church in downtown Boston; Carl McIntire, the popular broadcaster and founder of the Bible Presbyterian Church; Francis Schaeffer, the well-known Christian intellectual whose L'Abri community in the Swiss Alps became an intellectual refuge for European evangelicals;<sup>8</sup> and Samuel Suther-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=330&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=330&issue_id=79); [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=337&issue\\_id=80](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=337&issue_id=80).

2 The research for this essay was made possible thanks to generous support from the Center for Christian Thought at Biola University, where I spent the spring semester of 2012.

3 J. Gresham Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 152.

4 For a complete bibliography of Machen's writings, please see Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble, eds., *Pressing toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1986). My appreciation goes to D. G. Hart and John Muether, who pointed me to some helpful sources.

5 I am referring here to the recent exchange in *Ordained Servant* between David C. Noe and Benjamin W. Miller, as well as to the current debate between the Two-Kingdoms and Kuyperian camps. See also: William D. Dennison, "Is Classical Christian Education Truly Christian? Cornelius Van Til and Classical Christian Education" in *Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2011), 101–25.

6 George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 149.

7 Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 149.

8 *Ibid.*, 183.



land, the president of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, under whom the institute founded and accredited Talbot Seminary.<sup>9</sup> Further, Cedarville and Bryan Colleges both offered their presidencies to Machen, Columbia Theological Seminary and Southern Presbyterian Seminary offered him New Testament professorships, and Canada's Knox College asked him to be its principal.<sup>10</sup> Also, Machen was one of the main founders of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which came into existence not only due to his initiative but also his family fortune. Finally, if we add that the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Moody Bible Institute asked Machen to speak at public events and zealously sought his support, it seems safe to say that the renaissance of academic pursuits among conservative evangelicals through the 1960s could, in large measure, be credited to Machen.

When it comes to the secondary literature, we have a few biographies of Machen and other helpful sources dealing with his theology. However, Machen's philosophy of education has received only minimal treatment and is a topic that deserves further attention.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Biola in its early days hired conservative Presbyterians (such as Paul Aijian, Dean Nauman, and Vernon McGee) who taught at Talbot and who in the mid-1950s were challenged by the Los Angeles Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA to dissolve their relationship with the school as "the spirit, doctrinal position and program of the church" were different from the Presbyterian stance. In response to this Samuel Sutherland wrote an article in which he quotes extensively from the Westminster Confession, showing how the Bible Institute of Los Angeles was more faithful to historic Presbyterianism than the mainline Presbyterians were. He writes, "Shades of John Calvin, John Knox, John Witherspoon, and a great host of other theological spiritual giants of former generations! These men held the same doctrines which were enunciated in the great Westminster Confession of Faith and which has stood as a mighty confession of faith through the centuries as it bred and fed spiritual giants!" See Samuel Sutherland, "Modernism and Los Angeles Presbytery" in *King's Business* 45, no. 9. (Sept. 1954): 14–17. I am thankful to Dr. Fred Sanders of Biola's Torrey Institute for his assistance in finding these materials.

10 D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 105.

11 Carl Trueman, foreword to J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), ix–xv; Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and*

Perhaps the most insightful analysis of Machen's views of science can be found in D. G. Hart's book *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, which we will later bring into our discussion. We also will find George Marsden's earlier analysis helpful, as he offers insights on Machen's Southern influences and his use of common sense realism. Marsden traces the decline of Machen's popularity among evangelicals to two causes. The first was the early 1960s critique made by the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Edward J. Carnell, that Machen lacked vision and greater involvement with non-Presbyterians. The second cause Marsden gives for Machen's declining popularity was the growing influence of the nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed perspective embodied in the writings of Abraham Kuyper.<sup>12</sup>

### What Makes Scholarship Intellectual?

Machen has often been labeled a fundamentalist—and in many ways he was, as he shared the majority of his doctrinal convictions with those who, early on, represented the fundamentalist

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*Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); Terry Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism 1881–1915* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2001); Henry W. Coray, *J. Gresham Machen* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981); Allyn C. Russell, *Voices of Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); Paul Woolley, *The Significance of J. Gresham Machen Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1977). See also: George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

12 "Yet Machen remained controversial, and even many evangelical scholars repudiated his heritage. The most notorious example came in 1959 when Edward J. Carnell, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, devoted a chapter in his volume *The Case for Orthodox Theology* to the 'cultic mentality' of Machen. Repudiations of Machen's narrowness have been frequent since then. Almost all evangelical scholars who are not strictly Reformed have found his Presbyterian confessionalism too narrow, and even many of the strictly Reformed have rejected his Princetonian apologetics for Kuyperian models, or have been unhappy with his insistence on ecclesiastical separatism." Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 184. For more see: George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 188–92.

camp and expressed their views in the *Fundamentals of Faith*, a set of ninety essays that the Bible Institute of Los Angeles published in twelve volumes between 1910 and 1915.<sup>13</sup> Machen also was a major source of inspiration and intellectual ammunition for the fundamentalist and later neo-evangelical camp in its struggle against liberal efforts to redefine the historic Christian faith.<sup>14</sup>

However, there were some differences between Machen and the fundamentalists. First of all, Machen had had an elite education. A graduate of Johns Hopkins University, the University of Chicago, and Princeton, Machen also pursued foreign studies at Marburg, Germany, under Wilhelm Herrmann, with whom Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann also trained.<sup>15</sup> Politically, Machen was a Democrat with a strong libertarian bent. He stood against the religious mainstream of his day by opposing prohibition, opposing prayer and Bible teaching in public schools, and even openly promoting the rights of non-Protestant religious minorities and sects.<sup>16</sup> Culturally, Machen was a Southern gentleman, coming from the upper

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13 See also Annette G. Aubert, “J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002): 337–62. Aubert carefully argues that Machen’s critical yet careful response to Barth set him apart from the anti-intellectual fundamentalist response. She writes: “The basic point for Machen was that one needs to possess knowledge about a subject in order to point to its errors. This was a general principle that Machen applied in his own approach to liberal scholarship,” 341.

14 Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* became one of main tools of defense against liberal attacks on fundamentalists. See Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2001), 193. However, as Hart notes, the book was written mostly for a Presbyterian (not fundamentalist) audience and thus its fullest application could never be realized among non-Reformed ecclesiastical bodies. Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 65.

15 Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 32–33.

16 For the scope of this discussion we will concentrate only on some of those differences; however, it is worth mentioning the following: Machen refuted the church’s direct involvement in politics, did not join the Prohibition movement or the anti-evolution crusade, felt uneasy with the emotion-driven religion of the revivalists, argued against teaching Bible and prayer in public secular schools, supported the rights (free speech) of Mormons, Jews, and other religions for the full exercise of their religion, and was sympathetic to the fundamentalists in their common goal to preserve orthodox Christianity. He was a libertarian who opposed child labor legislation, national parks (but not preservation of nature), and Philadelphia’s ordinance against jaywalking. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 184.

Baltimore elites with high family connections, including the president of the United States, a close friend of the Machen family.<sup>17</sup>

However, Machen’s Ivy League education, almost aristocratic background, and uncommon political views were *not* what set him apart most from the fundamentalists. It was rather the growing anti-intellectualism and non-confessionalism of the fundamentalist camp that kept him from fully identifying with the movement. This is well illustrated by the fact that in 1927 Machen politely declined to become the president of the non-denominational university named for William Jennings Bryan, the prosecutor in the famous Scopes “monkey trial.” In his letter declining the offer, Machen wrote:

I never call myself a “fundamentalist.” There is indeed, no inherent objection to the term; and if the disjunction is between Fundamentalism and Modernism, then I am willing to call myself a fundamentalist of the most pronounced type. But after all, what I prefer to call myself is not a “fundamentalist” but a “Calvinist” — that is, an adherent of the Reformed Faith.<sup>18</sup>

There are numerous reasons why Machen declined this particular offer, and these are better understood in the context of the entire letter. But it is apparent from the quoted text that, when asked to lead a nondenominational, fundamentalist university, Machen preferred to be identified with a *particular Protestant confession*. We should not underestimate this point when seeking to understand Machen’s approach; however, for the purpose of this presentation, we will not delve into Machen’s ecclesiological and confessional stands, as they are less essential to his views on Christian education (which go beyond Presbyterian and Reformed identity). Here we would like to emphasize

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17 Katherine Lynn Tan VanDrunen, “The Foothills of the Matterhorn: Familial Antecedents of J. Gresham Machen” (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2006).

18 “Dr. Machen Declines the Presidency of Bryan University,” repr. in *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* 28 (Sept. 1927): 16.

that Machen turned down a chance to preside over an institution so closely associated with the Scopes trial.

Machen knew William Jennings Bryan, and Bryan personally asked him to testify in the trial, but Machen withheld his support from a cause that did not seem essential in the battle against liberalism. Hart argues that this act showed Machen to be committed to the university world and confirmed his stand against anyone who would separate Christianity from science, even fellow believers. For Machen, the dialogue about faith and science was essential to refuting the liberals and thus to preserving the historic Christian faith, because science has the ability to verify that the Christian faith is based on historical facts, confirming the truthfulness of Christianity. In Machen's view, the "trueness" of the Christian religion was deeply rooted in actual, historically verifiable events, and in this sense theology as a science was not different from any other scientific inquiry; after all, both theology and chemistry are concerned with the "acquisition and orderly arrangement of truth."<sup>19</sup> Thus using biblical interpretation to disqualify the claims of science was, to Machen, unacceptable. That being said, we note here that Machen was not arguing that true faith in God could be acquired by, and/or limited simply to, an intellectual argument or assent. For Machen, as for other conservative Presbyterians, faith ultimately comes only by the mysterious and creative power of the Holy Spirit enabling one to trust in Christ's atoning work and follow his commands.<sup>20</sup>

It was the fundamentalists' insistence on literal six-day creation that alarmed Machen the most—not because they held to this interpretation personally, but rather because they turned it into the litmus test for proving one's Christian orthodoxy. In Machen's view, this position hurt the Christian cause because it minimized the significance of the

Fundamentals of Faith, which included Christ's divinity, the Second Coming, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the infallibility of the Bible, and the historical reality of miracles. Machen felt that fundamentalists had a low view of natural revelation, and left no room for academic discussion about the findings of science and how they could relate to biblical interpretation. To be sure, Machen saw the dangers of naturalistic evolutionism, but he also believed that science must have an important voice in the discussion even if it cannot be treated on an equal basis with biblical revelation.<sup>21</sup>

The anti-intellectualism of fundamentalists also became evident to Machen by their stress on a personal experience of salvation, suggesting that spiritual intimacy and subjective experience somehow carried superior value to the knowledge acquired through toilsome study of Bible, original languages, and theology. He was convinced that religion without science would lead to superstition or false religion based on feelings and emotions—the very definition of religion that liberals tried to advocate. Against revivalism and pietism, Machen argued that education and knowledge were necessary for effective preaching because religion is primarily doctrine oriented, and experience must follow—never the other way around. He wrote:

Men are not saved by the exhibition of our glorious Christian virtues; they are not saved by the contagion of our experiences. We cannot be the instruments of God in saving them if we preach to them thus only ourselves. No, we must preach to them the Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only through the gospel which sets him forth that they can be saved.<sup>22</sup>

Because faith consists of trust, Machen rejected the so-called "simple faith" proclaimed

19 J. Gresham Machen, "What Fundamentalism Stands For Now," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 118.

20 Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 144.

21 Hart, *Defending the Faith*, "Machen tried to construct a mediating position that subordinated the naturalism of liberal Protestantism to the supernaturalism of fundamentalism but still kept the two ideas together," 104–5.

22 Machen, "Christian Scholarship and Evangelism," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 141.

by some revivalist preachers, for it is impossible to *trust* someone unless we first determine whether he is even trustworthy. In Machen's view, we must possess knowledge to have true faith in Christ. He wrote, "What these advocates of a 'simple faith' which involves no knowledge of Christ really mean by 'simple faith' is faith, perhaps; but it is not faith in Christ. It is faith in the practitioners of the method."<sup>23</sup> Machen worried that many conversions that take place upon so called "simple faith" are nothing else but a psychological manipulation. He contrasted these false conversions to biblical examples of true conversions, which always contain a doctrinal element. He recalled Peter's sermon at Pentecost, which included facts about Christ and not just an account of Peter's own personal experience; the conversion of the jailer in Philippi where Paul and Silas preached to him the "word of the Lord"; and the words of Jesus when he addressed the theological inquiry of the Samaritan woman about the proper place of worship.

We ought to note here that although Machen was a proponent of highly educated clergy, he did *not* argue that all evangelists must necessarily be scholars. However, at the same time, he maintained that "evangelists who are not scholars are dependent upon scholars to help them get their message straight"<sup>24</sup> and that the most powerful evangelism in the history of the church has been done by scholars.

Machen refused to overlook the anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalists with whom he shared so much in common because he was convinced that it would hurt the movement, leading to the decline of theology and the spread of populism in Christian faith and practice.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as surprising as it may at first sound, anti-intellectualism was one of his main critiques of *liberalism* as well, so to tolerate it among fundamentalists would not be fair. Granted, the liberal expression of anti-intellectualism was different; nevertheless, Machen

could not ignore the fact that both the fundamentalists and the liberals were guilty of it.

Machen criticized liberal theologians for abandoning the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation, allowing the Bible to become an ineffectual and useless book, a collection of inspirational stories describing various human emotions. For Machen, Christianity was either based on historical facts or it was philosophically bankrupt, perhaps able to sustain morality for a while but not the gospel.<sup>26</sup> He once wrote that "a gospel independent of history is simply a contradiction of terms"<sup>27</sup> and that "the foundation of the church is either inexplicable, or else it is to be explained by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But if the resurrection is accepted, then the lofty claims of Jesus are substantiated; Jesus was then no mere man, but God and man, God come in the flesh."<sup>28</sup>

Further, Machen argued that modernists degraded science by excluding from it the sphere of religion. This separation of reason from faith led to decadence in the academic community, producing a "horrible Frankenstein"<sup>29</sup> whose knowledge and skill hurts humanity. Machen wrote:

I think we can say that science alone, unless something else goes with science, is bound by an inexorable logic to result just exactly in that decadence which so distresses.... In fact, science has served to improve enormously the technique of tyranny in our days as over against the cruder tyrannies of fire and sword which reigned in the past. It is in accordance with an inexorable logic that Hitler is practicing fiendish wickedness in Germany today in the name of science.... The fact ought to be perfectly clear to every thoughtful observer that humanity is standing over an abyss. When

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23 Ibid., 138.

24 Machen, "Christian Scholarship and Evangelism," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 141.

25 Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 95.

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26 Aubert, "J. Gresham Machen and Theology of Crisis," 346.

27 Machen, "History and Faith," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 105.

28 Ibid.

29 Machen, "The Necessity of the Christian School" in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 168.

I say humanity, I include America; indeed I am thinking particularly of America. Russia and Germany are already in the abyss. But how shall it be with our country?<sup>30</sup>

If we consider that Machen wrote these words before the Second World War, we have reason to stand astonished by his prophetic voice.

The anti-intellectualism of the liberals also became evident to Machen by their widespread acceptance of the modern pedagogical method. Machen observed that liberals were preoccupied with the “method of study” and emphasized practical rather than theoretical knowledge. This issue surfaced during his disputes with Charles Erdman, professor of practical theology at Princeton Seminary. Erdman, supported by the new president of Princeton, J. Ross Stevenson, advocated a curriculum that downplayed the study of biblical languages and reduced core biblical and theological courses for the sake of practical electives, with strong emphasis on pastoral care and spiritual formation. This reform Machen strongly opposed, lamenting that the seminary would not produce “specialists in the Bible” but rather congregational CEOs (if we were to use the contemporary term).<sup>31</sup>

For Machen, the modern pedagogical obsession with the method of acquiring knowledge instead of the knowledge itself was defeating the very purpose of education. He wrote: “The modern conception of the purpose of education is that education is merely intended to enable a man to live, but not to give him those things that make life worth living.”<sup>32</sup> Also, the main role of the academic instructor had been reduced to the “developing of the faculty of the mind” and no longer with transmitting knowledge. All of this, Machen ironically concluded, led modern educators to a great discovery: that it is “possible to think with a completely

empty mind.”<sup>33</sup> This pursuit would lead American education to complete disaster, Machen argued, where shameful superficiality and ignorance of the most basic facts about the world would become a new norm. He wrote:

We shall never have a true revival of learning until teachers turn their attention away from the mere mental processes of the child, out into marvelous richness and variety of the universe and of human life. Not teachers who have studied the methodology of teaching but teachers who are on fire with a love of the subjects that they are going to teach, are the real torchbearers of the intellectual advance.<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, this pedagogical anti-intellectualism is something Machen also observed among fundamentalists, whose Bible colleges and institutes often sought after quick and practical education for the sake of evangelism and mission work or spiritual formation, rather than training reflective and critically thinking graduates. This deeper training was something he desired to achieve with the newly founded Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

### **What Makes Education Christian?**

Presbyterians in America were not always strong advocates of distinctly Christian education, and in many cases were comfortable supporting public and private schools that did not possess explicit Christian identity. This was not the case with the Dutch Reformed churches, which much earlier came to advocate distinctly Christian education. In large measure, the growth of Christian scholarship among the Dutch is credited to Abraham Kuyper, the renowned Reformed theologian and politician who, in 1901, became prime minister of the Netherlands. Politically, Kuyper introduced a new model of society in which various religious and social groups enjoyed separate yet

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30 Machen, “The Christian School: Hope of America,” in *Education, Christianity and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1994), 135–36.

31 Machen, “The Minister and His Greek Testament,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 211.

32 Ibid.

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33 Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 135.

34 Ibid., 137.



equal spheres of sovereignty.<sup>35</sup> This political system enabled the Dutch Reformed to develop a network of Christian schools, including the well-known Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Kuyper's political model fell out of grace, as Dutch society perceived it as highly divisive. Despite this setback, the Dutch Reformed continued to promote Christian education, supplying powerful theological justification for it. Further, many followers of Kuyper immigrated and became some of the most outspoken supporters of Christian scholarship on the American continent—something that, as Marsden notes, competed with the classic Presbyterian model. Neo-Kuyperians also had a deep impact on the philosophy of cultural involvement held by many mainline evangelicals (such as the late Chuck Colson and others). It is important to note here that the Dutch Reformed philosophy of Christian education was partially due to the amicable political situation in the Netherlands, where churches, with the government's help, were seeking to fulfill their cultural mandate in the sphere of culture and education—something that became very important for the Dutch, especially during the Second World War, during which Dutch churches took a stand against Nazi Germany and German Lutherans who failed to oppose (and even supported) Hitler.

Perhaps because of their initial success, Kuyper and his followers assumed a triumphalist tone in proclaiming their ideas. This is apparent in Kuyper's famous speech in which he said, "There is not a square inch in the world domain in our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'" and more explicit when he wrote:

Calvinism means the completed evolution of Protestantism, resulting in a both higher and richer state of human development. Further ... the world-view of Modernism, with its start-

ing-point in the French Revolution, can claim no higher than that of presenting an atheistic imitation of the brilliant ideal proclaimed by Calvinism, therefore being unqualified for the honor of leading us higher on.<sup>36</sup>

Kuyper's triumphalism, which sounds so odd—if not vexing—today, was not out of the ordinary for the intellectual elites of the early twentieth century, and in many ways embodied the optimistic expectations of those who taught that the approaching era would be a "Christian century," or, as in the case of Kuyper, a Calvinist century. Kuyper's triumphalistic Calvinism and high expectations of Reformed Protestantism went beyond the church and evangelism. It became a worldview that penetrated political, social, and cultural convictions, seeking to transform the whole of human society and culture. This worldview found its stronghold in Western Michigan.

Without a doubt, Machen and Kuyper shared much in common. As Calvinists, both were committed to the historic Christian faith and adhered to creeds of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. They were also influential in their day—part of the upper class with political, religious, and cultural connections. Finally, in 1898 Kuyper delivered the famous Stone Lectures at Princeton, which continued to be discussed when Machen attended and later started teaching at Princeton. In Machen's speech, titled "Christianity and Culture," delivered in 1912 at the opening of the fall semester, we can hear echoes of Kuyper's triumphalistic transformational imperative.<sup>37</sup>

However, Machen later moved away from Kuyperian ideas, forming his own views on faith, culture, and Christian scholarship. It has been observed that Machen's nonmilitary service with the YMCA in France during the First World War had a powerful impact on him. Experiencing the horrors of war far from the comforts and luxuries

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35 Richard Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 33–57.

36 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 41.

37 Machen, "Christianity and Culture," delivered at the opening of the fall semester at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1912. It is available in Machen's *Selected Shorter Writings*, 399–410.



of American life planted doubts in Machen's mind about whether the twentieth century really would bring peace, prosperity, and the growth of the Christian faith. His optimism continued to wear out later, after he returned to America, where he carefully observed the rise and spread of Nazism, Fascism, and Marxism.<sup>38</sup> Further, the reorganization of Princeton Seminary and the Presbyterian Church's acceptance of the Auburn Affirmation<sup>39</sup> caused Machen to realize that the challenges facing the church might have been greater inside the church than outside of it. All of this eventually brought him to believe that the church, when set on "redeeming the culture," loses its integrity and becomes very much like the surrounding culture.

In effect, Machen developed a vision that no longer directly burdened the church with the task of cultural transformation. Instead it set before the church the spiritual goal of proclaiming the gospel through Word and sacrament. Although Machen no longer saw a direct role for the church to affect culture, this did not mean that he withdrew from or avoided political and cultural involvement in society. Quite the contrary: Machen's activism continued when he addressed a number of political and social issues, including prohibition, jaywalking, prayer in school, environmental preservation, and the establishment of the Department of Education, against which he testified before the U.S. Congress. However, his activism here was motivated more by his libertarian and civic (rather than purely religious) sensibilities. As Hart puts it:

Machen was not implying that Christianity is unrelated to any range of activity beyond the ministry or fellowship of the church. Instead he was raising questions about the much more difficult issue of how Christianity is related

38 Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 137, 154.

39 In May 1924, many ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the USA signed a document that pledged their fidelity to the ministers who no longer affirmed the Fundamentals of Faith (the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, Christ's bodily resurrection, and the authenticity of miracles). The document was supported by moderates who, although they did not agree with modernists, saw it as necessary to preserve the unity and liberty of the church.

to these other areas of human activity [and how].... Christians, even Reformed ones, may actually give different answers to the questions about the best form of government, cultural and religious diversity in a single nation, the value of mountain climbing or the significance of advanced learning.<sup>40</sup>

The conviction that Christianity was *not* able to provide a sufficient basis for public life in a pluralistic American society came from Machen's deep conviction that "historic Christianity was fundamentally narrow, exclusive and partisan."<sup>41</sup> Thus Christians who used the church as a vehicle for political involvement were in danger of being intolerant or of treating the Christian faith instrumentally, to promote morality or American culture.

The spiritual aspects of Machen's Christianity become evident in his commencement speech, titled "Consolations in the Midst of Battle," delivered at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1931, when he said:

Remember this, at least—the things in which the world is interested are the things that are seen; but the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal. You, as ministers of Christ, are called to deal with the unseen things. You are stewards of the mysteries of God. You alone can lead men, by the proclamation of God's word, out of the crash, and jazz and noise and rattle and smoke of this weary age into the green pastures and beside the still water; you alone, as ministers of reconciliation, can give what the world with all its boasting and pride can never give—the infinite sweetness of the communion of the redeemed soul with the living God.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, Machen argued that the spiritual direction of the church needs to be ac-

40 Hart, introduction to Machen's *Selected Shorter Writings*, 14.

41 Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 138.

42 Machen, "Consolations in the Midst of Battle," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 205.

accompanied by a strong militant approach, which, as he argued, stands in continuity with the New Testament's witness. He writes, "Every really great Christian utterance, it may almost be said, is born in controversy. It is when men have felt compelled to take a stand against error that they have risen to really great heights on the celebration of truth."<sup>43</sup>

The theme of the spiritual militancy of the church finds its best application in Machen's view of Christian scholarship. In "Facing the Facts before God," a speech he delivered before the League of Evangelical Students, Machen compared the situation in which the church found itself to the biblical battle of King Hezekiah, described in the book of 2 Kings. He warns believers against the danger of complete annihilation if they do not seek their refuge in the Lord, writing: "Do you think that this is a happy or blessed age? Oh, no my friends. Amid all the noise and shouting and power and machinery, there are hungry hearts. The law of God has been forgotten, and stark slavery is stalking through the earth—the decay of free institutions in the state and a deeper slavery still in the depths of the soul."<sup>44</sup> It is when we read words such as these that we see Machen no longer possessing the optimism and triumphalism of his earlier days of Kuyperian Calvinism. Instead, he holds to a pessimism that can be overcome only when the Christian seeks refuge in God by claiming his revealed Word, and openly challenges the world with it. Rhetorically, Machen expresses this challenge in militant terms.

Machen is not interested in negotiating with modernism (or the culture) because he ultimately sees it as anti-Christian and anti-academic in nature, seeking to destroy not only the historic Christian faith but scholarship altogether. Thus he calls for battle, and for conservative Protestant theologians who are committed to biblical truths and serious intellectual engagement to aid the

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43 Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Defense of Faith," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 149.

44 Machen, "Facing the Facts Before God," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 199–201.

evangelistic work of the church, writing that

evangelists, if they are real evangelists, real proclaimers of the unpopular message that the Bible contains, are coming more and more to see that they cannot do without those despised theological professors at all. It is useless to proclaim a gospel that people cannot hold to be true; no amount of emotional appeal can do anything against truth. The question of fact cannot permanently be evaded. Did Christ or did he not rise from the dead; is the Bible trustworthy or is it false?<sup>45</sup>

However, theologians are not the only ones who can be involved in truly Christian scholarship. For Machen, all academics, to some extent, are to participate in it; that is, if they continue to take Christian revelation into consideration in their academic work. He explains:

A Christian boy or girl can learn mathematics, for example, from a teacher who is not a Christian; and truth is truth however learned. But while truth is truth however learned, the bearings of truth, the meaning of truth, the purpose of truth, even in the sphere of mathematics, seem entirely different, to the Christian from that which they seem to the non-Christian; and that is why a truly Christian education is possible only when Christian convictions underlie not a part, but all of the curriculum of the school. True learning and true piety go hand in hand, and Christianity embraces the whole of life—those are great central convictions that underlie the Christian School.<sup>46</sup>

So then, for Machen, non-Christians can effectively practice the non-theological sciences (or disciplines), as "all truth is God's truth"; however, he believed that modernity's antireligious bias had rendered this impossible. Therefore, Chris-

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45 Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Defense of Faith," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 146.

46 Machen, "The Necessity of the Christian School," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 172.

tian academics need to take a stand not only to defend Christianity but also the integrity of faith and science. *This* is where Machen’s philosophy of Christian education takes root, rather than a biblical imperative to make Christian education binding or compulsory, as was the case with the Dutch Reformed. For Machen, defending the integrity of a discipline itself is in the Christian’s interest, as both theology and philosophy (or, the truths found in every discipline) are true and cannot contradict one another.

On the margin, it could be argued that this approach has a long trajectory in the Protestant approach to education, and can be traced back to the Calvinist theologian, philosopher, and pedagogue Bartholomäus Keckermann (ca. 1572–1609) who, during his tenure at the Academic Gymnasium in the Polish city of Gdańsk (Danzig), implemented a curriculum reflecting this conviction. Since Keckermann’s work influenced Reformed academics in Europe and the New World, we can suspect that it also had an impact on the way some at Princeton viewed the relation between theology and science.<sup>47</sup>

On a practical level, Machen argued that Christian education must be all-encompassing and in clear contrast to secular science, which does not take divine revelation into consideration. This comprehensive approach to Christian education must originate with *doctrine* and not with a general Christian ethos in the schools. In other words, Christian education is not so because it is done by Christians, but rather because of its content. An

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47 Keckermann writes: “True philosophy in no way disputes sacred theology,” and elsewhere, “In sum, the natural knowledge of God is not contrary to the supernatural, knowledge gained from nature is not repugnant to knowledge gained by grace, the book of nature does not overturn the book of scripture: therefore neither does philosophy conflict with theology.” For these quotes and a discussion, see Richard Muller, *After Calvin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122–36, 127–28. See also: Edmund Kotarski, Lech Mokrzecki, and Zofia Głobiowska, eds., *Gdańskie Gimnazjum Akademickie. Szkic z dziejów*, vols. 1–4 (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008); William, T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Seventeenth Century Cambridge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Joseph Freedman, “The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 141, no. 3 (1997): 305–28.

institution whose primary goal is to promote Christian culture, civic society, gender equality, or social justice is not what Machen had in mind. Instead, he saw Christian scholarship as based on a set of nonnegotiable principles expressed in Scripture and the historic confessions, and anyone departing from these in the name of academic freedom was no longer practicing scholarship that could call itself “Christian.”

Machen set forth as a positive example the classic Roman Catholic system of education, which roots the whole academic curriculum in the context of established doctrine and with consideration for natural law. Scripture and the creeds guide students in the discovery of the natural world, and that forms the dialogue with the non-Catholic and secular culture. Further, studying ancient languages and authors, logic, and metaphysics is an essential prerequisite for any fruitful academic labor.<sup>48</sup> This model of Christian education sees the world as *already* integrated where sciences are consecrated to the person and work of Christ and his church; and where the students who are broad in their interests, cultured, and well rounded are always ready to defend the hope they have in Christ.<sup>49</sup>

In the face of the modern hostility toward historic Christianity among secularized academics and liberal theologians, Machen argues for the necessity of *narrowly defined* Christian scholarship. For Machen, Christian scholarship becomes essential not only for the proper functioning of the church but also of science itself. Just as the church desperately needs well-educated scholars who will defend the historic Christian faith and her truth claims, so also science needs to be practiced in an unsecularized form. Machen held that faith and science must relate to each other, otherwise neither would be able to find truth—or, worse, science without religion would fall into decadence,

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48 Machen, “The Minister and His Greek Testament,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 210.

49 Machen, “Consolations in the Midst of Battle,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 204.

while religion without science would become superstitious.

The reactionary nature of Machen's philosophy of Christian education caused him to adopt a militant tone, helpful in communicating great urgency, as well as the antithetical relationship between the church and the world. Further, Machen's definition of Christian scholarship is narrow, pointing to doctrinal orthodoxy and ecclesiastical commitment rather than to the general religious ethos of the school or its honorable heritage. Community-oriented goals—such as the preservation of liberty, civic society, or culture—are not the direct tasks of Christian scholarship (nor of the church), just as they are not the goal of even nonreligious academic work, but rather are by-products (or desirable side effects) of education. Chasing after the *results* of education—no matter how noble—instead of its *principles* is a dangerous exercise in utilitarianism, defeating the purpose of scholarship and rendering it inherently unreliable. At the same time, liberty, civil society, tolerance, and open dialogue are naturally and organically preserved when good scholarship is practiced, and most effectively when Christian scholarship is practiced. Therefore, while it is not the direct task of Christian education to promote these values, they are indeed promoted when Christian scholarship is practiced faithfully. ©

**Dariusz M. Bryćko, Ph.D.**, is a member of Harvest OPC in Wyoming, Michigan, and volunteers as director of Tolle Lege Institute. His new book, *The Irenic Calvinism of Daniel Kalaj: A Study in the History and Theology of the Polish-Lithuanian Reformation*, is now available from Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

# ✦ 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.

## Performance Sports

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Eutyclus II

Organized sports are an attempt, through regimentation (uniforms and trophies) and rhetoric (rah-rah boosterism and coach talk), to give an inherently pointless activity some kind of point, to inject purpose into play.<sup>2</sup>

Two friends and colleagues of mine each dropped a casual comment that landed like a bombshell. Paraphrased, the comment went something like this: "The most basic distinction in music is the difference between participatory music and performance music." This is the kind

of obvious-yet-bombshell comment that, once the wreckage is cleared, troubles one for the remainder of one's life (Thanks a lot, men!). Like most other obvious-yet-bombshell observations, the comment has a life of its own, once dropped. Its applicability is not limited to music, but extends to other human endeavors also.

Unwittingly and unintentionally, I discovered another arena of the bombshell's applicability during Lent this spring. I had never observed Lent before (though I have toyed, from time to time, with giving up my mother-in-law for Lent, but I digress ...), and still have no religious or theological reason for doing so, but I decided on a whim to give something up for forty days or so. Not desiring to belabor the matter of deciding what to give up, I elected to give up performance sports in their entirety—no March Madness, no Masters Tournament (neither of which, I believe, I had missed in over forty years), no SI.com, no ESPN, nada. The only theoretical exception would have been to observe my students performing sports live, and this exception remained only theoretical.

My first (and surprising) observation on the experiment was that it was a good deal easier than I had thought it would be—no increased heart rate or sweating, no sneaking a peek at someone else's TV or computer, no visiting of a sports bar, etc. My second observation was that I gained about a day of week (I now observe an eight-day week, which gives me a substantial competitive advantage over those of you who observe a seven-day week, though this merely equalizes the fact that I am one-seventh as productive as most people anyway). If one watches one or two basketball games a week, "checks the score" on ESPN or *Sports Illustrated* online a few times daily, etc., before long it adds up to about a workday. So not only did I not experience any *negative* reactions (withdrawal), I experienced an unanticipated *positive* result—more time to do other things with my labor and leisure (in part, I memorized Tennyson's *Ulysses*, which I later "read" at a poetry recital).

My third observation is the bombshell/gift that keeps on giving (or taking, depending on one's point-of-view): Why on God's green earth should

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=328&issue\\_id=78](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=328&issue_id=78).

2 Louis Menand, "Glory Days," *The New Yorker*, August 6, 2012, 64.

anyone watch someone *else* play a game? Let me clarify that I raise no question about participatory sports, for which there have been many excellent rationales from the ancient world to the present: for example, participatory sports teach teamwork, cultivate personal fitness, and teach self-control in the face of defeat or victory. But for all the defenses of participatory sport (ancient and contemporary), has anyone attempted the bootless task of attempting to defend *watching* others participate in sport? How much teamwork does one develop by sitting on a couch in a room by himself watching others play baseball? How much personal health is developed by sitting on said couch? How does watching someone else win or lose cultivate equanimity in the face of defeat or victory?

Okay, perhaps that was too many rhetorical questions in sequence, but you get the point. Are there or were there ever any good arguments for *observing* sports, rather than for *participating* in them? There is, of course, the ubiquitous commercial argument (Nike makes tons of money by advertising in such venues), but that argument works equally well for the hula hoop, the Ginsu knife, prostitution, or practicing law (not that the latter two are always easily distinguished)—hardly the kind of argument that would satisfy a philosopher. If the only justification of a behavior or product is that it makes money, then almost anything can be justified. Why not just sell cocaine?

What about the entertainment argument? Isn't there a place in life for entertainment? Is it not proper, on some occasions, to take respite from one's duties and labors, to enjoy some moments of reverie? Yes, yes, and yes, but none of these affirmations justifies (by itself) the behavior of watching others perform sporting activities. One is still faced with answering this question: Assuming that leisure is a valid pursuit (and I argue vigorously that it is), and that entertainment is one legitimate category of leisure, why should observing others participate in athletic activity be the chosen form of entertainment? Why not listen to a cellist? Why not read a poem or novel? Why not attend a symphony or community theatre? Why not compose haiku, or play Scrabble, or serve a meal at a

soup kitchen, or volunteer at the local hospital, or become a Scout leader, or hunt deer?

Observing others participate in athletic activities may be justifiable in the minimal sense that it is not inherently unlawful or destructive (to others, anyway). But such justification does not give it preferred status to any of the other activities mentioned above, nor does it justify the enormous amount of time so many in our culture give to it. Had I, for instance, given up listening to the cello for Lent, I would not have gained a day a week. Giving up watching sports *did* give me an additional day weekly (and keeps on giving—who needs the Olympics!).

I somewhat fear that I may develop the snide, holier-than-thou perspective of a recent religious convert or a new vegetarian—who out-Pharisees all the Pharisees who ever lived—but I digress. Awareness of the tendency—one hopes—may provide some prophylaxis against the tendency. On my better days, I don't feel superior to those who observe sports; I feel as though I stole a fresh-baked cookie and didn't get caught. I merely munch my newly gained treasure quietly, without a cause. I leave it to Mayor Bloomberg to make the practice illegal. (How did such a wealthy, privileged person become such a Puritan? Did his mother not breast-feed him?) It is enough for me to exercise my own liberty by making other choices.

The sputtering I hear in the background is not my neighbor attempting to start his lawn mower (an event accompanied with artless cursing); the sputtering I hear is the attempted self-defense of a behavior that the vast majority commits unreflectively. Everyone does it; no one knows why. ©



# ✦ Servant Reading

## Book Reviews

### Miss Betsey

by Eugene Genovese

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Charles M. Wingard

*Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage*, by Eugene Genovese. Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009, 144 pages, \$25.00.

Two of America's odder contemporary historians are Eugene Genovese and his late wife, Elizabeth (Betsey) Fox-Genovese, who died in 2007.

Although the couple's scholarly works cover a diverse range of subjects, it is the antebellum South's story, told through the eyes of slave and slave owner, for which the Genoveses will be long remembered. Distinguished by a comprehensive examination of the era's primary source materials, their scholarship never fails to impress and enlighten. Only 150 years have passed since the War Between the States, but the Old South is truly another world, one to which the Genoveses skillfully introduce students with the single most valuable gift great historians bestow—understanding of a people and their culture. As a minister, I especially appreciate the thoroughness and sensitivity with which they treat Southern religious life. Through

the years, Eugene Genovese has become one of the premiere expositors of the Southern conservative intellectual tradition.

But what's odd about this couple is not their first-rate scholarship, but their intellectual and spiritual journey, from atheistic Marxism to their conversions to Roman Catholicism in the 1990s. This was not your ordinary marriage.

*Miss Betsey: A Memoir of Marriage* is Gene Genovese's moving, provocative, and humorous tribute to his beloved wife, an extended reflection on the rich life they shared—from their first date to her death in 2007 after many years of physical decline and debilitating sickness.

Gene and Betsey's first date was their first meeting. His first impression of her was "Death Warmed Over," the effects of her battle with hepatitis and anorexia evident. He describes the evening:

When I arrived at five p.m., Betsey looked terrible. At six or so, she wasn't all that bad. At seven she had become sort of nice-looking. By eight, sitting across a table at Restaurant le Maître [*sic*] Jacques, she had blossomed into lovely. When I left her at one a.m. with a kiss on her forehead, she was radiantly beautiful. Almost forty years later, she was in immeasurably worse shape than when I first laid eyes on her. Physically broken and fighting for life, she was unable to get out of bed by herself; barely able to walk; wracked by relentless, searing pain. Still radiantly beautiful. (7)

Campus run-ins with fellow Marxists were not uncommon. The Genoveses deplored intellectual sloppiness and political correctness. On occasion, when debating or speaking to ostensibly Christian audiences, they found themselves—two atheists—articulating Christian doctrine for the sake of intellectual honesty.

While teaching at the University of Rochester in the early 1970s, Gene and Betsey were invited to a public forum by two Catholic chaplains, liberation-theology Marxists. Quickly the chaplains had cause to regret the invitation. While confessing their commitment to work with the priests toward

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=295&issue\\_id=72](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=295&issue_id=72).

common political goals, the Genoveses asserted the incompatibility of materialistic Marxism and Christianity. Things grew hot. The author recalls:

In the end, we were driven to defend Catholic theology against “dissident Catholics” who had no time for the fundamentals of Catholic theology, Church doctrine, and the teaching of the Vatican. So there we were, nonbelievers and committed Marxists, fervently defending the doctrines of original sin and human depravity against professed Catholics who replaced the ostensibly dated teachings of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas with those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Karl Marx of the utopian *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*—the jejune “early Marx” whom neither Betsey nor I ever took seriously. (71)

In 1975, after speaking at a Unitarian church on the subject of slavery, members eagerly invited him to join their congregation. His atheism was no obstacle. Most of the congregation didn’t believe in God! After all, how could anyone believe in a God who permitted natural disasters, like the recent earthquake in Nicaragua, which claimed the life of baseball star and humanitarian Roberto Clemente en route to deliver aid to quake victims?

I gasped. How could well-educated and intelligent people talk such rubbish? Stunned and momentarily forgetting my atheism, I responded with an impassioned defense of Christian theology. I may not have believed in God, but I considered their objections an insult to my intelligence. I interpreted their remarks as meaning that God, to be worthy of worship, had to do whatever they wanted Him to—that God had to follow the dictates of their various consciences. I reminded my Unitarian hosts of the words of Genesis 23:50 [*sic*]: “The thing proceedeth from the Lord. We cannot speak unto you bad and good.” (73)

I confess that I am fascinated by the Genoveses’ intellectual pilgrimage and turbulent campus adventures, told within the context of a

moving love story. Their marriage was marked by mutual devotion, affection, tenacity, and cheerful perseverance in the face of trials.

With thanksgiving the author concludes:

Betsey was the love of my life, and I have had no prouder yet more humbling sense of fulfillment than the knowledge that I was the love of hers.

With Betsey, my life was blessed. (137) ©

**Charles M. Wingard** is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, serving as pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama.

## Prayers of the Bible

by *Susan Hunt*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2012<sup>1</sup>

by **Cynthia Rowland**

*Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth*, by Susan Hunt. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, viii + 155 pages, \$12.99, paper.

*Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth, Leader’s Guide*, by Susan Hunt. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011, vi + 172 pages, \$14.99, paper.

In her latest book, *Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth*, Susan Hunt follows a similar vein as her previous books with her emphasis on equipping women with sound, Reformed theology. Mrs. Hunt is a Women’s

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=299&issue\\_id=73](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=299&issue_id=73).

Ministry Consultant for the Presbyterian Church in America's Christian Education and Publications Committee. She has authored several books, all with a focus of encouraging women to embrace true theology and apply it to their lives. A favorite, *The True Woman*,<sup>2</sup> challenges women to set aside the lure of today's feminist agenda, which creates "the new woman," as Hunt terms it, and embrace the Bible's plan for a woman's life which creates "a true woman." In this latest work, *Prayers of the Bible*, Hunt explores biblical theology and the truth of Scripture by examining select prayers in the Bible.

Hunt states the purpose of this book in the introduction: to answer the question, "How do we learn to pray?" Her theme verse for the book is Psalm 145:18: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." If I were to summarize its purpose in one phrase, it would be that it is to teach women how to pray *in truth*.

Hunt writes twelve chapters, each of which explores a prayer in Scripture and hones in on a theological truth. She begins chapter 1 by examining Paul's prayer of doxology in Ephesians 1:1–14. From this prayer, she draws out the concept of the trinity and the function of each person of the trinity. Relating the roles of the trinity to the male/female distinction of human beings and tying it into Genesis 1–3, she teaches the truth of gender distinctiveness and woman's role as helper. Finally, she introduces the idea of the covenant of grace and the concept of redemption. Each chapter applies the truth learned to a practical question: "How do we call on God in truth?" The answer to that question in this chapter is "with gratitude for our redemption" (24). Chapter 2 examines Jesus's high priestly prayer from John 17 and ties it to the theme of glorifying God. In answer to the question, "How do we call on God in truth?" Hunt replies: "1) Pray for His glory and 2) Pray according to His eternal plan and purpose" (35).

The structure of each chapter works nicely as a devotional. Each chapter follows the same

format: a prayer is studied, a theological truth relating to this prayer is introduced, the question "How do we call on God in truth?" is answered, a real-life anecdote is conveyed, and application/assignment questions (in a section called "reflect and pray") are given at the end. The "reflect and pray" section contains excellent, stimulating questions and encourages probing introspection designed to help mature the reader and solidify the chapter's subject matter. I found that each chapter fits nicely with a week's devotional time, allowing a reader to study one prayer and corresponding theological truth per week.

Along with the book, Hunt has designed a leader's guide which would fully equip a women's Bible study leader. The guide has a complete agenda for each study along with hand-outs and ideas for developing or strengthening relationships within the group. Susan's ideas and agendas are a result of her many years of experience leading women's groups. Having led several studies myself, I can see how this material would be extremely useful and time-saving.

Readers might also be interested in another book on the topic of prayer that takes a fairly different angle: Paul Miller's book *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*.<sup>3</sup> This book provides a unique perspective on prayer as a relationship, where prayer is likened to a "feast." Miller effectively tackles head-on the difficult issues of praying when it doesn't seem like your prayers ever get answered (he calls it "the desert") and of Jesus's seemingly over-the-top promise that if we ask for anything in his name, he will do it (John 14:14). He addresses how our cynical cultural attitudes are bleeding over to our Christian worldviews and ultimately to our cynicism in prayer. Most importantly, he emphasizes our utter helplessness without prayer. This book also comes with a DVD seminar conducted by Paul Miller and a study guide for use in a group setting. I highly recommend this series as a companion study as it focuses on additional prayer issues.

2 Susan Hunt, *The True Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

3 Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2009).

In a world in which the church is surprisingly ignorant of or progressively shedding the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, I am encouraged to read sound books like the ones that Susan Hunt is writing. Truly, sound theology is the foundation of Christian maturity and effective prayer. This book certainly challenges women to study the Scriptures daily and apply its truth to their lives and prayers. ©

**Cynthia Rowland** is a member of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church(OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire.

## Pastors in the Classics

by Leland Ryken, Philip Ryken, and Todd Wilson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Pastors in the Classics: Timeless Lessons on Life and Ministry from World Literature*, by Leland Ryken, Philip Ryken, and Todd Wilson. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012, 185 pages, \$16.99.

English professor Leland Ryken conveys his life-long passion to interest Christians and pastors in the value of the best literature in this brief volume. He does this with his son Philip, president of Wheaton College, and pastor Todd Wilson, senior pastor of Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park, Illinois. As far as I know, this book is unique in distinguishing literature that deals with pastoral life

and ministry.

The book consists of two parts: a guide and a handbook. The first twelve chapters consist of a guide to the most important books in the genre. A concise survey of the work provides themes and interpretive analysis to whet the reader's appetite. The second part consists of fifty-nine brief book summaries for further exploration. The brilliance of this arrangement lies in its extension to the handbook of the trust the authors build in the more comprehensive coverage in the guide.

Of the listed titles, I was pleased to discover authors of which I knew nothing, such as John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927), as well as titles I had not expected to find, such as John Updike's *A Month of Sundays*. Then there are books that I was aware of, but had never had an interest in reading, until I read the comments of the Rykens and Pastor Wilson. I also discovered books by authors I know, but books of which I was unaware, like Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1855).

Some classics, such as *The Scarlett Letter*, are known by most only anecdotally. The description in the guide portion of the book corrects common misconceptions, like the idea that Nathaniel Hawthorne is simply unmasking an inherent flaw of Puritan orthodox Christianity—the hypocrisy and censoriousness, especially of its clergy. The authors set the value of this classic in a whole new light by demonstrating Hawthorne's interest in portraying Christianity at its best as a religion of forgiveness and grace.

The twelve books explored in detail in the guide portion make up a hundred pages, while the fifty-nine listed in the handbook cover only a little over seventy pages. The pattern of analysis in the first section invites the reader to employ the same as he reads the works suggested in the handbook, which dedicates slightly more than a page to each work. The guide begins with a brief description of the book, followed by a taxonomy of the contents, with author, dates, length, present publishers, genres, setting, characters, and plot summary. Then the main themes and value of the work for the minister are explored, with provocative questions for reflection or discussion interspersed.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=308&issue\\_id=75](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=308&issue_id=75).

It took only a few of the descriptions of these masterworks in clerical literature to convince me of this book's immense value. The self-reflection that even these brief introductions stimulate is enough to invite the pastor to begin the journey of reading or rereading the classics themselves. The subtitle sounds to me like something an editor suggested. "Timeless lessons" doesn't do justice to the nature of the classics. Each embodies aspects of the ministerial vocation as it appears in actual life settings in story form. As the introduction so well states,

The literary author's first task is to present human experience. This means that the subject of literature is human experience concretely presented. A work of literature is not primarily a delivery system for an idea; it is an embodiment of human experience. A work of literature is a house in which we are invited to take up residence and out of which we look at life. (13)

This has Leland Ryken's fingerprints all over it. His article in *Ordained Servant* (May 2012), "Why Read Literature?" would make a superb introduction.

Unlike the school marm approach to the classics, pressing the *duty* of reading the time-honored tomes, this book invites the reader through the special interests of the pastor, to enjoy a kind of reading that at once delights and edifies. Many pastors avoid fiction because of the mistaken notion that it does not deal with real life the way nonfiction does. Another way of stating this is that fiction does not address the immediate needs of the minister in his vocation. A quick perusal of the first few suggested books should quickly disabuse the reader of these notions. The unique exploration of human existence and experience offered by well-crafted fiction provides the pastor with insight that ordinary life may not afford.

My only criticism is an editorial problem. It would have been helpful to list authors as well as titles in the table of contents, since this also functions like an index. An alphabetical list of authors would also be useful, especially since the book

functions as a reference tool. I would enjoy seeing a similar treatment of poetry for pastors.

One cannot overestimate the value of this work, both for its function as an introduction to an excellent selection of fiction and for the insight ministers will gain from reading these works. In *Pastors in the Classics*, the value of good fiction as an entrée into the human condition is simply focused on the minister's life—a very clever and worthwhile way to catch the attention of the clergy.

Once the appetite is whetted, my hope is that pastors will realize the great value of good fiction, whatever its subject matter. Entering into various worlds of reflection on the human situation can only enrich our ministries. ☺

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

## Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books

by Tony Reinke

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online May 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Diane L. Olinger

*Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, by Tony Reinke. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011, 202 pages, \$15.99, paper.

Much of Tony Reinke's book *Lit!* is autobiographical, reflecting his journey in literature (89). He

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=307&issue\\_id=75](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=307&issue_id=75).

doesn't consider himself a natural born reader or scholar, but one who developed these characteristics, in spite of himself, as a result of his desire to learn more and more about Christ. Speaking of his conversion experience, he writes: "The sight of Christ's glory permanently changed my life. And it forever changed how I read books." Reinke is a theological researcher, writer, and blogger who has worked for C. J. Mahaney (who provides a foreword for *Lit!*) and Sovereign Grace Ministries. The title of the book refers to "the motto of the reading Christian": "In your light do we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

The book is separated into two parts: a theology of reading (chapters 1–6), and a collection of practical suggestions for readers (chapters 7–15). With respect to his theology of reading, Reinke begins with the idea that there are essentially two categories of literature: Scripture, which is inspired, inerrant, and supreme; and everything else, which is not. Reinke encourages us to "read the imperfect in light of the perfect, the deficient in light of the sufficient, the temporary in light of the eternal" (28). Christians can read a broad array of books to their benefit, but only if they read with the discernment that comes from a biblical worldview (59). Fallen creation "continues to emit the Creator's glory, a glow that can be found in the pages of great books" (16).

Reinke presents a theological justification for reading non-Christian books (which he defines as books not written by Christians or not written from "an explicitly Christian motive" [65]). In doing so, Reinke acknowledges that Christianity is positioned antithetically to the world. We must read with an awareness of the gulf fixed between ourselves and the greater part of contemporary literature (60). However, Reinke insists that non-Christian literature has value as a bridge over this gulf. A biblical example is provided by Paul's address to a pagan audience in Acts 17. Paul proclaimed that what the pagan poets sought in Zeus and other deities could be found only in the living God. In other words, non-Christian literature, whether it be Greek poetry, business or scientific texts, or modern fiction, begs questions that can

only be resolved in Christ (73). Realizing this "will protect us from posturing ourselves *only* antithetically to the religious impulses of our culture" and will allow us to "discover that non-Christian authors occasionally articulate genuine spiritual desires that we know can be satisfied nowhere else but in the living original, in the essence, in Christ himself" (75).

So, while Reinke cautiously embraces non-Christian literature, he warns us against an uncritical stance toward "Christian literature." He writes, "The most treacherous spiritual dangers arise from theologically twisted books written by wolves in sheepskin" (60). Heresies necessarily spring from the church. Reinke sees one of the greatest pitfalls, not in theological tracts, but in poorly chosen Christian "how-to" books which may "feed a person's doubt, entrench a soul in legalism, and ignite a heart with self-righteousness" (100).

In the practical part of *Lit!* Reinke gives us many tips and tricks he has found useful as a reader, including reading with a pen in hand, how to find more time in the day for reading, and doing "background checks" on authors. Reinke advises readers to adopt any of these tips that prove useful and ignore those that don't. (Much of this section sounds like something my fourth and fifth graders would go over in a study skills unit for reading class—will anyone who needs this advice make it this far into Reinke's book? I'm not sure.)

In this second part of the book Reinke also gives advice on what to read: begin with Scripture and theological books, which kindle spiritual reflection and increase knowledge of and delight in Christ; follow that with reading to accomplish certain ends, like initiating personal change and pursuing vocational excellence; and finally read to enjoy a good story (95). Of particular interest among Reinke's comments on what to read are those concerning fiction that depicts sin. According to Reinke, the authors (Christian and non-Christian) who are most aware of man's sinfulness are those who are most in tune with the reality of this world (126). He quotes Christian novelist Larry Woiwode: "If sin isn't mentioned or depicted, there's no need for redemption. How can



the majesty of God's mighty arm be defined in a saccharin romance?" (124).<sup>2</sup> So, how much sin is too much in our books? This is a difficult question, says Reinke, and readers must listen carefully to their consciences.

Mahaney's foreword tells us that "*Lit!* is a book for nonreaders" (14). As such, much of the book is likely to be "preaching to the choir" for OS readers, at least as far as theological reading goes. However, even avid readers will enjoy Reinke's musings on a multitude of reading-related subjects, from the benefits of exercising our imaginations with fiction (including fringe benefits to our reading of image-filled biblical passages, like those in Revelation [88–89]) to the need for Christian stewardship with respect to technology (e-readers, blogs). In fact, one of the best features of *Lit!* is that Reinke has managed to cover such a wide range of topics in a relatively short book. It is sure to prompt fruitful discussion at a Christian book club or in a young adult Sunday school class. ©

**Diane L. Olinger** is a member of Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Glenside, Pennsylvania.

# A Vision for the Aging Church

by James M. Houston and Michael Parker

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by Ross W. Graham

*A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors*, by James M. Houston and Michael Parker. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011, 265 pages, \$24.00, paper.

The fastest-growing segment of the population of the United States is the oldest, those over the age of eighty-five. As baby boomers age in a period of escalating health and longevity, we will soon see a four-generational family structure as the norm. Caregiving will become the twenty-first century's greatest test of character, and fifth commandment issues will require the church to take parent care readiness seriously.

These are some of the demographic and ecclesiastical observations offered in a provocative and forward-looking examination of the impact the increasing population of seniors will have on the American church. But *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* is much more than an inventory of problems that will be faced by the church because of the increasing number of seniors within her ranks.

James M. Houston, founding principal and emeritus professor of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and a senior fellow of the C. S. Lewis Institute, at age eighty-eight, writes from personal experience of the subject matter. Michael W. Parker, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Retired [AMEDD], brings a

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2 Citing Chris Stamper and Gene Edward Veith, "Get Real: Master of Reality Fiction, Acclaimed Author Larry Woiwode Has Found Christ, But Can He Find an Audience?" *World Magazine*, July 4, 1998.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=332&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=332&issue_id=79).

physician's perspective to the book. And his post-retirement concentrations on gerontology, mental health and aging, and academic research make for a confident march through such complicated issues as exploring the myths and realities of aging successfully, and facing Alzheimer's disease.

The book unfolds in a sometimes-tedious address of a wide range of theological interests within evangelicalism that will not be of great use for the readers of this review. But four themes emerge from these pages that make the book worth digesting for pastors and other ordained servants.

### **A Biblical Perspective on Aging**

“Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you” (Deut. 32:7). This verse unfolds for the authors both how the church is to understand and value her seniors and how those seniors are to play a vital role in ministry to the whole body of Christ. The example of those who are living close to their lifespan should infect others with a joyous way of life. While seniors often tell young people that the best times of their lives will be their school years, how much better if Christians can tell them from experience that life rightly lived goes on getting better. Writing a friend just a month before he died, C. S. Lewis said, “Autumn is the best of seasons, and I'm not sure that old age isn't the best part of life” (183).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Need for a Vigilant and Caring Church in the Future**

The twenty-first century will see elder caregiving as the single most important human resource issue in the church as well as in the workplace. As American society becomes increasingly secular, churches must be vigilant to strive against the rising social and medical unacceptability of dealing with an aging population and against attempts to

conserve economic and medical resources at the expense of seniors.

But aging seniors are unwilling to talk about end-of-life care plans or discuss their final wishes with their children. They see themselves as healthy and so do their children. So just as the current generation of pastors has insisted on premarital counseling to address life-long marriage issues, this same moral authority may need to be employed by future generations of pastors to equip families with future parent care plans.

### **Facing the Problem of Dementia**

One in two people over the age of eighty suffers from some form of dementia. And given the exponential increase in the number of seniors who will be in that category as baby boomers continue to age, issues related to the care and well-being of those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia will be matters with which churches must prepare to deal.

But Christians in a state of advanced dementia, having lost mental memory, can remain secure in the Father's everlasting arms. God's memory of us qualifies us as persons, even if we are in an advanced state of dementia. God and others now hold our memory instead, as loving recorders of our own past. But pastors will need to work hard to develop the necessary skills and plans to enable families to prepare for this coming crisis in care for their family members.

### **Late Life Significant Living**

Aging seniors are a resource and should be looked to for providing ministry rather than only being the recipients of it. Most seniors are experiencing less disability than ever before, and disease and functional decline are now compressed into a brief period of three to five years before death. With this in mind, churches will do well to point this mature workforce toward the significant roles God has planned for them to play among his people. Seniors are needed as mentors and examples to the young, encouraging, nurturing, and being lovingly involved in their inner lives. Seniors are

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis quote is from Armand Nicholi, *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 232.

also needed to serve as examples of what it means to finish well. Staring death in the face reveals its powerlessness over eternity. And allowing others to experience the death of a Christian friend has the capacity to make the faith of the living stronger than it was before.

We read in the Bible countless examples of late-life contributors to God's purpose, such as Moses, Joshua, and John. Old age does not mean we are sick and frail. The old can continue to learn, to change bad habits, and to contribute in meaningful, eternal ways to God's kingdom. ©

**Ross W. Graham**, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is general secretary for the denominational Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension.

## Ten Myths about Calvinism

by *Kenneth J. Stewart*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2012<sup>1</sup>

by **Darryl G. Hart**

*Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*, by Kenneth J. Stewart. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011, 301 pages, \$24.00, paper.

Orthodox Presbyterians (along with other conservative Calvinists) get nervous when they see the word *broad* applied to Reformed Protestantism.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=333&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=333&issue_id=79).

After all, the existence of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, not to mention other conservative Reformed communions, is tethered to resisting the increasing breadth of the historic Protestant church. Lefferts Loetscher's book, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (1954), for instance, documents the doctrinal latitude that prevailed within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and employs the word *broad* to characterize the very developments that led conservatives to oppose liberalism and found a new Presbyterian communion. Orthodox Presbyterians might not draw the line that narrowly, as if that is the best way to describe a Reformed church. But breadth has always connoted unacceptable latitude for conservatives.

Kenneth J. Stewart's use of the word in his subtitle, *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*, is both odd and telling given the record of conservative Presbyterians' opposition (both OPC and PCA) to theological liberalism. Potential readers should not dismiss the book because Stewart approves of breadth—he does, after all, want to recover Reformed Protestantism's breadth. Still, the author's word choice is indicative of his purpose. "Extremists" (12) have had too much sway within contemporary Calvinism for Stewart's taste. His book is designed to walk Calvinists away from the cliff of self-destruction back to the safety of moderation. The word he uses to describe this better place is "mainstream." Stewart believes he has found this valuable moderate understanding of Calvinism and by clearing away the ten myths in which both Calvinists and non-Calvinists traffic he provides Reformed Protestants with a healthier understanding of their tradition.

Of the book's ten myths, four are ones of which Calvinists are guilty and six are common among non-Calvinists. This uncanny resemblance to the Decalogue begins with an inversion of the first commandment—if people are to have only one God, Calvinists, according to Stewart, are wrong to have only one founder of Calvinism. The Covenant College professor argues correctly that Calvin was only one of many Reformed Protestant

churchmen so that appeals to the Geneva pastor to settle debates miss the Reformed tradition's variety and breadth. The next two myths more or less follow from this. Calvin's view of predestination is not the standard for Calvinism (#2) any more than TULIP (Stewart does not attribute this to Calvin) should be the measure (#3). Rounding out the myths that Calvinists tell about themselves is one that says Calvinism is skeptical of revival and pietism (#4). Myth four is one case where Stewart gives evidence—most of the others he attributes to the mythological “some,” “many,” and “most,” such that a reader wonders who exactly these extremists are. Stewart apparently knows.

The other six myths involve complaints about Calvinism by outsiders. These include: hostility to missions (#5), indifference to moral living (#6), support for theocratic governments (#7), opposition to the arts (#8), advocacy of male chauvinism (#9), and encouragement of racism (#10).

The net effect of Stewart's demythologization is not simply to present a more complicated view of Calvinism but also a less conservative and more progressive Reformed tradition. In his chapter on gender Stewart, for instance, describes Calvin as “progressive” for his time on women's roles (229). This gives the book a feel of doing for the history of Calvinism what John Frame did for the regulative principle of worship—namely, redefine it so that the definer is now in the mainstream of the new definition. First, Stewart reconceives Calvinism by taking better account of Reformed Protestantism's various streams of historical development. Then, he presents a different view of Calvinism on a variety of modern topics like politics, race, and gender. The result is a Calvinism that is not combative in the church and appealing to its cultured despisers. Stewart's breadth, then, is twofold—first, a broader historical account and second, a more inclusive version of contemporary Calvinism.

This leaves Stewart's reconstruction in a major bind because his call for inclusion winds up being divorced from historical recovery. Instead of going back to the sources, Stewart wants to point out the breadth of early Reformed Protestantism apparently to argue for contemporary broadness. Whether

the diversity of older Reformed voices will support contemporary progressivism is a question that generally haunts proponents of breadth.

Stewart's appeal to diversity has its moments. For instance, in his historical recovery he is right to remind Calvinists and others that John Calvin was only a convert to Protestantism some twelve years after Ulrich Zwingli's initial reforms in Zurich, which were technically the beginning of Reformed Protestantism. Meanwhile, Geneva was relatively late to the Reformed world, after other Swiss cities such as Basle and Bern. In other words, Calvin did not found Calvinism and his writings are not the urtext for the Reformed tradition. At the same time, in Stewart's haste to back away from the full-throttled Calvinism of the Five Points, he shows a remarkable disdain for Dutch Calvinism and the Synod of Dordt. He writes that Presbyterians owe “no explicit loyalty to the Canons of Dordt” except to the extent that Reformed teaching is embodied in the Westminster Standards (90). He adds that lots of participants in the new Calvinist movement—Southern Baptists, Charismatics, Anglicans—also have no obligations to acknowledge Dordt, as if any of these Protestants are tied to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (91). To be sure, Dordt was a response to real diversity within the Dutch churches about predestination and its implications. But Dordt itself was an international synod that gained the approval of Reformed churches throughout Europe (and it was hardly at variance with the Westminster Assembly). Stewart's appeal to diversity, in other words, is selective and betrays an attempt to fashion a Calvinism friendly to the broader evangelical world.

The Calvinist history which Stewart seems most interested to recover is not Calvin's teaching on predestination or seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy reflected in Dordt and Westminster but the Calvinist renewal movements of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here the book's conclusion is telling. Stewart describes five movements of Calvinist resurgence, few of which were based in the Reformed churches or held to the Reformed confessions but often took shape in para-church agencies highly beholden to the

revivalist side of experimental Calvinism. The first and most recent are D. Martin Lloyd Jones and James Montgomery Boice. In the second, Stewart lumps together the Sovereign Grace Union and isolated Reformed leaders like J. Gresham Machen, Arthur W. Pink, and Louis Berkhof. The third example of Calvinist resurgence was Abraham Kuyper and neo-Calvinism. The fourth was the early nineteenth-century revival associated partially with Robert Haldane but that took root across Europe and helped in part to bring Calvin's works back into circulation. The last instance of resurgence was the Great Awakening of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. These movements yielded a Calvinism that was "new-old ... a fusion of elements from long ago with contemporary developments" (288). They also represent the kind of Calvinism Stewart thinks "we" need—"fewer angular, sharp-elbowed Calvinists who glory in what distinguishes their stance from that of others and a lot more supporters of the Reformed faith who rejoice in what they hold in common with others" (289).

Whether Stewart's historical revisionism will yield the kind of smooth and generous Calvinism for which he hopes is questionable since the very distinction he makes between the good and bad kinds of Calvinism rests on doing exactly what he forbids—namely distinguishing one kind from another. It is also not clear whether Stewart himself is up to the challenge of Calvinist diversity since he ends his brief for a kinder, gentler Calvinism with Calvin having the last word. "Calvin, after all, insisted he would if necessary 'cross ten seas,'" Stewart writes, "if he could promote agreement in the central doctrines of the faith with fellow believers" (290). The book that precedes this last sentence is well worth the read because it is filled with important historical material. Whether the evidence permits a breadth of interpretations is not something that Stewart admits. ©

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

# ✦ Servant Reading

## Review Articles

### Confident of Better Things

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2012<sup>1</sup>

by Wayne Sparkman

*Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger. Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011, 520 pages, \$12.00.

A book worth rereading! As I was saying (*New Horizons*, Oct. 2011), it's not easy to review, in short compass, a book with twenty-six authors. So I was pleased when Dr. Reynolds invited a longer review of *Confident of Better Things*. This is a handsome book, well-made and inexpensive, with substantive content that will reward. At this price, buy copies for your elders as well, plus one for the church library.

To begin with general orientation, the volume is arranged in five categories—history, theology, Christian education, missions, and ecumenicity—appropriately chosen divisions, since these are also characteristic concerns of the OPC. Typographical errors were mercifully few in the volume and seemed to appear mostly in the last few chapters. A

minor improvement might have been made to the order of articles in the Christian Education section had the more foundational Dennison article been first, followed then by Tyson on Catechesis, Gidley on preparation for ministry, Tracey on the importance of the languages, Pearce on internship and Reynolds on the true character of the Lord's herald, in that order. In that way, the articles would have displayed a more logical progression. Finally, Tom Patete's article could have been moved to the History section, following Roger Schmurr's article, where their stories would form an interesting comparative.

#### Part One: History

1. "The Significance of Paul Woolley Today," by John R. Muether (7–23).

In the History section, the editors write the two opening chapters of the book. John Muether provides an enjoyable look back at the life and ministry of Paul Woolley, one of the "lesser lights" of early Westminster, without whom the institution might have floundered. It could be argued that Westminster Seminary would never have come into existence without the involvement of Robert Dick Wilson, and in a similar way, that Westminster simply could not have continued but for the efforts of Paul Woolley. He was the faithful servant God used to keep things moving forward, yet without his taking center stage.

2. "How Evangelical Is Rome? Van Til, Strimple, and Roman Catholicism," by Danny E. Olinger (25–48).

With this chapter, my eyes were opened to the OPC's long tradition of apologetics with reference to Roman Catholicism. Here Danny Olinger provides an overview of that tradition, briefly looking back at Loraine Boettner's work before giving close consideration of the work of Drs. Van Til and Strimple, the strength of whose apologetic rests in maintaining the primacy of "God and his revelation through Christ in the Scriptures, refusing to sacrifice the 'either/or' teaching of the Scripture, as affirmed in the Protestant Reformation, for a 'both/and' theology to justify a common cultural pur-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=289&issue\\_id=71](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=289&issue_id=71).



suit.” This tradition continues with Olinger’s own “Primer on Vatican II” (*Ordained Servant*, Oct. 2010) and most recently with David VanDrunen’s article on “Inclusive Salvation in Contemporary Catholicism” (*New Horizons*, Oct. 2011).

3. “First—but Not the Last: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church over the Past Fifty Years,” by Roger W. Schmurr (49–71).

Roger’s chapter is told with a refreshing honesty which may strike some readers as at times a bit too honest. But there is value in having such honesty in print, even if others might occasionally tell a slightly different story. All of this forces us to search out the matter more deeply, and that is a positive thing. From his early years, under the ministries of Al Edwards and Henry Coray, to his first pastorate on the other side of the country, to his long involvement with *New Horizons* and later with Great Commission Publications, Roger’s chapter provides a walking tour and might well have been titled “A History of the OPC as I have lived it.”

4. “The Legacy of Charles Hodge,” by Alan D. Strange (73–84).

With two major biographies of Charles Hodge released in 2011, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*, by Paul Gutjahr (OUP, March 2011) and *Charles Hodge—The Pride of Princeton*, by W. Andrew Hoffecker (P&R, Nov. 2011), Dr. Alan Strange’s chapter provides some excellent reflection which should be brought to your reading of either of these recent volumes. Prior to these works, the last was *Charles Hodge Revisited*, edited by John W. Steward and James H. Moorhead (Eerdmans, 2002). Dr. Strange takes opportunity to spar with Moorhead on several points as he explores the question of Hodge’s legacy and whether the OPC has remained true to that Princeton heritage of orthodoxy and piety.

5. “Confessing the Reformed Faith: Our Identity in Unity and Diversity,” by Richard A. Muller (85–97).

Dr. Muller’s chapter was originally a NAPARC address delivered in 1993 and then published in

*New Horizons* (March and April, 1994). Muller’s denominational affiliation is with the CRC and as such he is the first of three ecumenical representatives included among the authors of *Confident of Better Things*, the other two being Tom Patete (PCA) and Dr. Robert Godfrey (URCNA). Muller’s article is also one of only two chapters in the book which have previously been published.

The crux of his message is that “Reformed unity is a unity of faith represented as a spectrum of opinion—a unity within boundaries.” Muller concludes his message with this exhortation: “I would simply commend to you our great heritage and commend to you as well the work of holding fast to what is most valuable in our tradition for the sake of our present and future work in the service of the gospel. Our unity will appear clearly in the declaration of our faith through our distinctive confessions and through the reflection of our confessional heritage in our forms of worship. Our Reformed *identity* depends on our willingness to declare our confessions and in so doing to confess the faith.”

## Part Two: Theology

6. “Is Classical Christian Education Truly Christian? Cornelius Van Til and Classical Christian Education,” by William D. Dennison (101–25).

This was one chapter that left me wanting more. I’d like to see Dennison develop these ideas further. Perhaps something along the lines of a Van Tilian alternative to Doug Wilson’s *Repairing the Ruins*. That project is suggested when Dennison summarizes Van Til in contrast to Wilson, stating in a footnote (p. 123) that “On the contrary, Van Til understood the demise of the nineteenth century as being rooted in the secular and pagan elements of autonomy carried forward from the classical world.” Our schools need a curriculum such as Dennison hints at in his conclusion, a “method of education . . . grounded in the self-contained and self-sufficient God of Scripture whose ontological triune Being knows the facts, interprets the facts, and creates the facts in accordance with

his sovereign plan in revelational-history.” Now, what exactly does that look like, and how does it work itself out in book-to-book curriculum?

7. “Ecclesiastes: Wisdom for a Pilgrim Church,” by Stephen J. Oharek (127–46).

Oharek tackles the Book of Ecclesiastes, with a view to its application to the life of the OPC and her people. He concludes that “this book is *Christ’s* story, which is why it is *our* story, the story of redeemed pilgrims making their way through a fallen world.”

8. “‘The Lord and Giver of Life’: Cessationism in Service of Catholicity,” by Mark A. Garcia (147–67).

One of two chapters dealing with the subject of spiritual gifts, this chapter by Mark Garcia might be considered preliminary or general to the subsequent and more specific chapter by Dr. Richard B. Gaffin. We have here an excellent Reformed corrective on the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. Garcia quotes George Smeaton to good effect, “Wherever Christianity has been a living *power*, the *doctrine* of the *Holy Spirit* has uniformly been regarded, equally with the atonement and justification by *faith*, as the article of a standing or falling *church*.” Garcia concludes that “a sound biblical understanding of the ultimacy and the necessity of the Spirit’s ministry of producing and cultivating God’s glory in the church—the *telos* at the heart of covenantal cessationism—goes hand in hand with that unhesitating affirmation.”

9. “Tongues Today?” by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (169–84).

As Garcia noted in his chapter, the covenant-historical form of cessationism that summarizes Gaffin’s views has also come to characterize the OPC in this matter of spiritual gifts. Dr. Gaffin presents us with material originally prepared for publication, but by God’s providence withheld until now and no doubt honed by further reflection. Brick upon brick, Gaffin carefully builds his case, yet with no intent to slight or demean those who differ. He concludes, “the New Testament passage that perhaps more than any other speaks of the full

and mysterious dimensions of the Spirit’s activity that searches out even ‘the deep things of God’ (1 Cor. 2:10) beyond our comprehension, makes clear at the same time that this profound probing of the Spirit elicits and produces in believers, and does so just as it engages our spirits (v. 11), conformity to ‘the *mind* of Christ.’ (v. 16).”

10. “The Gospel and Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutics,” by Lane G. Tipton (185–213).

Tipton’s chapter is one of three that employ the original languages, leaving the book still well within the reach of any serious reader. Even in these articles where the languages are used, the alert reader should be able to follow the author’s arguments. Yet I expect lay readers will find Dr. Tipton’s article among the deepest waters in the book and so would advise them to read it last. Get this well in hand before beginning: “It is time to proclaim clearly and without reservation that Christ enters the Old Testament through its front door, so that biblical symbolism in the Old Testament both communicates the saving truth of Christ’s person and work and that truth runs organically through to its fulfillment in Christ’s death and resurrection.”

11. “Was Adam Historical?” by Robert B. Strimple (215–22).

Truth is by nature timeless. Dr. Strimple’s contribution to this volume has been published three times previously but could not be any more appropriate for inclusion, particularly in light of recent debates over this past summer. The inevitable unraveling effect of error is explored to its end. “If the historicity of the first Adam is considered irrelevant to us, why then should the historicity of the second Adam not also be irrelevant to us?”

### Part Three: Christian Education

12. “Biblical Languages and the Art of Gospel Preaching,” by Stephen J. Tracey (225–44).

For all the time, money, and heartache spent learning Greek and Hebrew, are you amazed at how quickly it slips away? Most pastors maintain their skills at some minimal level, enough to get

by, but Stephen Tracey builds his case that first, our faith rests upon the very Word of God, and second, quoting Martin Luther, that “it is inevitable that unless the languages remain, the gospel must finally perish.” Or as Samuel Miller exhorted, “be ready, on all occasions, to explain the Scriptures ... not merely to state and support the more simple and elementary doctrines of the gospel; but also to elucidate with clearness the various parts of the sacred volume, whether doctrinal, historical, typical, prophetic, or practical ... be ready to rectify erroneous translations ... to reconcile seeming contradictions; to clear up real obscurities ... in general, to explain the word of God, as one who has made it the object of his deep and successful study.”

13. “Faith and Learning in the Presbyterian Ministry,” by James S. Gidley (245–65).

Presbyterians have always sought an educated ministry, but what constitutes adequate preparation? The MTIOPC program has been one successful approach to augmenting the seminary curriculum, the requirement of an internship is another. Perhaps we might argue the church’s burden for the careful preparation of her ministers should begin in grade school! But above all our author would remind us that it is God who calls ministers, and that institutional training is secondary to God’s preparation of the man.

14. “Fulfilling the Great Commission through Pastoral Internships,” by Ronald E. Pearce (267–76).

Ron Pearce sketches the outlines of a well-designed internship program, and the proof of this discipleship program has been displayed over the years in the number of men equipped to stay in long-term, fruitful ministry. As we stand on the shoulders of other saints, it should be noted that Pearce himself interned under the Rev. George Scipione.

15. “Catechetical Instruction in the OPC,” by Thomas E. Tyson (277–87).

In this chapter Tom Tyson lays out the goal and duty of catechesis, a brief history of the prac-

tice in the early church, the “what” and “how” of teaching it, and then concludes with a review of the practice of catechesis within the OPC. Keep in mind that the practice shouldn’t just be limited to our children. Getting parents to catechize their children is also a clever way of educating the adults.

16. “By the Grace of God It Was Done! Reflections on Great Commission Publications,” by Thomas R. Patete (289–309).

Patete is the second ecumenical author for our book, and the PCA author presents a concise, readable history of Great Commission Publications, from the OPC origins of GCP on through the organization’s thirty-six year history. The *Trinity Hymnal* has been central to this story and deserves its own fuller account, if someone will write that someday.

17. “A Medium for the Message: The Form of the Message Is Foolish, Too,” by Gregory E. Reynolds (311–34).

Having attended Westminster Seminary with Greg Reynolds as a classmate, and watching his career over the years, it is particularly interesting to read this chapter as something of a capstone to his doctoral dissertation. The foolishness of the herald as messenger forces the message of Christ to the forefront and reminds us that salvation is the Lord’s monergistic work. As regards a proper humility before the Lord, there is a great consonance here with the editors’ opening note, that “the way to Christ is found through the conviction of sin.” (1).

#### **Part Four: Mission of the Church**

18. “The World Is Not Enough: The Priority of the Church in Christ’s Cosmic Headship,” by A. Craig Troxel (337–65).

“The biblical truth of the headship of Christ was key to the Reformers in their systematizing of a coherent ecclesiology, and it continues to receive its due in the Reformed family as the ‘first principle’ and the ‘keystone’ of Reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiology. In a very real sense, the Reformation was an attempt to recover the headship of Christ in the church.” And so it continues

today, where to cite but one example, debate over biblical worship and the regulative principle is at heart a debate over Christ's headship.

19. "Called to the Ministry," by Bryan D. Estelle (367–75).

The Lord watches over each of his dear children, guiding and enabling them, to his greater glory. The calling and responsibility of ministry is too daunting but for the fact that Christ is at work in your life, that you might have fellowship with him and that you might lift up his name, drawing others to the table in sweet communion.

20. "Power in Weakness," by Mark T. Bube (377–409).

Building from James Thornwell and John Piper, Mark Bube presents his case "that worship lies at the heart of missions, that a right zeal for the glory of our God is what drives the hearts of his people in missions."

21. "Church Planting in the Presbytery of the Southwest, 1997–2010," by Gary W. Davenport (411–23).

"A new congregation earnestly prays for the Lord's provision for the many obvious needs in a young body. One regular prayer is for the Lord to give the people the eyes of faith to see his provisions come to pass. Nothing happens by accident or coincidence. All motions of creation and the actions of men are governed by God's most wise and sovereign hand. As we ask, seek, and knock, the Lord does attend to even the most incidental details." Would that congregations continue to earnestly pray and seek his face, imploring the Lord to save a dying world.

22. "The Ruling Elder in Church Planting," by John S. Shaw (425–43).

Where would the church be without its ruling elders, without mature leadership? "The growth of the church depends on ruling elders uniquely equipped with these qualities: a heart for the extension of the church; a recognition that the gospel is the first priority of the church; experience as an elder in other churches; an ability to think conceptually (and flexibly) about the church; the heart of

a servant; and a willingness to suffer and die for the sake of Christ and his church."

## Part Five: Ecumenicity

23. "The Glorious New Zealand Experiment," by Jack W. Sawyer (447–70).

An interesting story and worth telling. Sawyer traces the often parallel paths of the OPC and the Reformed Church of New Zealand. The ties have been so close that an account of the OPC would be incomplete without reference to the RCNZ. I would like to see a comparable account of the work in Uganda. One profitable, humorous aside, on page 461: "Van Dalen, a Dutch speaker himself, also figured out that the key to reading Van Til was to understand that he seemed to be 'thinking in Dutch but writing in English.'"

24. "The Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel," by Robert B. Needham (471–84).

Along with Tom Patete's telling of the history of GCP, I greatly value Bob Needham's account of the Joint Commission. These are important stories that bear witness to the Lord's work in what are often difficult places. The final pages of Needham's article are useful for their scriptural defense of chaplaincy. My archivist's heart has me hoping someone is carefully preserving a set of the monthly Prayer Plea.

25. "Reflections on the OPC and the UR-CNA," by W. Robert Godfrey (485–94).

Dr. Godfrey's ecumenical concern for the larger Reformed community is near legendary, by way of his essay "A Reformed Dream." He quotes Machen and reveals his own heart as well: "Is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life? Is there no place where two or three can gather in Jesus' name, to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race, to forget human pride, to forget the passions of war, to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife, and to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the Cross? If there be such a place, then that is the house of God and that the gate of heaven. And from under

the threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive the weary world.” It is a dear, sweet picture of the earthly refuge that is the church, and I fear the coming years will only make that refuge all the more precious and rare. May we all, as God’s people, be a humble, praying people.

## Conclusion

26. “The Audacity to Be Reformed: The OPC and the Next Twenty-five Years,” by J. V. Fesko (497–510).

Dr. Fesko offers an apt word which is at once a reflection on the OPC’s past, as well as her future challenges: “The church is not built upon adiaphora. Fundamentalism is not the way to promote the gospel or protect the church. On the other hand, we need not dilute the message of the Reformed faith; nor can we make the truths of Scripture less offensive if we simply ignore or hide them...We must not allow internecine discussions over debatable matters [to] distract us from the more fundamental and crucial mission of spreading the gospel to a lost and dying world” (510).

If God has so equipped a little church with a big mouth (cf. 466n38), may her voice always be full with the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To God alone be all glory. ©

**Wayne Sparkman** is director of the PCA Historical Center and a ruling elder in Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in St. Louis, Missouri.

# The Joy and Work of Prayer

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by Alan D. Strange

*Prayer*, by Ole Hallesby, translated by Clarence J. Carlsen. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994, 208 pages, \$8.99.

Prayer is both the greatest privilege and the hardest work. There is, at times, a sweetness and joy in prayer unlike anything else, and there is, at other times, an incomparable agony and misery in prayer. We are told to “pray without ceasing,” and the other commands of perpetual obligation in the latter part of 1 Thessalonians 5 tend also to be associated with prayer, commands to “rejoice always,” “give thanks in all things,” and the like. As important as the Word and sacraments are, particularly the preaching of the Word, we are not commanded to “do them” unceasingly as we are prayer. Prayer is commanded corporately, in public worship, privately, and secretly (WCF 21.6).

WLC 178 defines prayer as “an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.” This is a rational, and right, definition of prayer. Yet prayer is also a mystery that surpasses the comprehension of us all. It’s hard to reduce what prayer is to mere words, because, as the hymn says, “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, unuttered or expressed.” Some say that the Word and sacraments are objective—God speaking to us—and prayer is subjective—us speaking back to God. And yet, it is God who moves in us so that we pray, Christ who ever lives to make intercession, and the Spirit who works in us to pray and himself prays for us with unutterable groaning. Prayer is not a solitary

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=297&issue\\_id=73](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=297&issue_id=73).



activity. It is made to the Father in the Son by the Spirit. It is God himself working in us, breathing through us, as it were, back to himself, lifting us up so that we have fellowship in prayer in the heavenly places with the triune God.

Many saints grow discouraged in prayer, finding it to be more difficult than they think it should be. If it's an offering up to the Father of our desires, in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, how difficult could it be? Given the great salvation that we have in him, would we not be most eager to confess our sins and acknowledge his mercies? These and other matters associated with prayer are addressed with great skill and insight in the timeless work on prayer by Ole Hallesby (1879–1961). This is no new book but a classic written by a Norwegian pietist pastor, who also worked as a seminary professor in Oslo for many years, having been imprisoned in World War II for his resistance to the Nazi regime. This is a book that has gone through dozens of editions since its first publication in 1931 and that Augsburg Fortress Press keeps in print.

A few caveats about Hallesby's book. As a conservative pietist, he has some theological positions out of sync with confessional Presbyterianism, evident at points where he treats predestination, the extent of the atonement, and like issues. He tends toward the mystical at times, giving mild credence to visions and other non-cessationist phenomena. All told, however, his theology is better than one might expect, particularly as it pertains to the plight of man and the sole sufficiency of Christ our redeemer. In fact, what he gets right in this book more than makes up for his theological deficiencies. This is one of the best books that I have ever read on prayer, and likely to be of significant comfort and help to saints struggling with the holy calling of prayer.

In his first chapter, a long one entitled "What Prayer Is," we can immediately and thankfully sense the difference between this work and so many others on prayer, particularly of the last half-century. Most books on prayer of recent years have had the "how to become a prayer warrior" flavor about them, leaving honest souls weighed

down, feeling that sinners the likes of us have little hope of ever growing in our prayer lives. Hallesby is quite different, immediately acknowledging the depth of our plight and treating the whole subject of prayer with refreshing honesty. Hallesby deals at some length with our helplessness and faith, arguing that prayer consists largely of two things: the recognition on our part of our utter helplessness, and the belief that Christ is the only one who can do something about it. We must recognize, because we are creatures, and sinful ones at that, that we are helpless. That alone, however, would lead to despair. The realization of our helplessness must be coupled with faith, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only one who can do us poor sinners any good. In one sense, Hallesby says time and again, prayer is simply letting in Christ who is knocking at the door of our heart. God both initiates prayer and is its answer.

Hallesby deals with "Difficulties in Prayer" in chapter 2. Many believers wonder how prayer has gone from being the delight that it was earlier in their Christian lives to the burden that it often becomes. In part, Hallesby writes, this is due to several difficulties: we think that we must help God to fulfill our prayers; we think that prayer involves commanding God to do our bidding; and we fail to pray in Jesus's name. Failing to pray in Jesus's name means failing to rest profoundly in him, failing to see our prayer chamber as a resting place "in which we lie at the feet of Jesus and point to all those things which we lack and which make our hearts tired and weary" (61). We need to recover that sense of rest in Christ so that we would look forward to entering into prayer.

Prayer is resting in Christ, but prayer is also work to which we are to be committed throughout the whole of our Christian life. Chapter 3 is about this holy work and calling: It was the calling of the apostles to conquer the world by and through the work of prayer. Hallesby suggests that we should pray for all that we encounter, and if that seems an undue burden, he suggests that since we criticize others easily and quickly, why not pray for them instead? We need to come to see that prayer is the most blessed work in which we can engage. It



is, in fact, “the most important work in the kingdom” (70). I recall visiting a dear saint years ago when I was an intern. I sought to encourage her that, though home-bound, she could still play an important role in the life of the church by study and prayer. My suggestion yielded something I did not expect: she reluctantly revealed that she read the Bible through seven times a year and prayed at least two hours daily, including through the local church directory (of over two hundred members) daily and the entire OP directory weekly. What a mighty work in which she was engaged! I left duly humbled, realizing what a spiritual pygmy I was compared to this giant.

I also recall encouraging my father-in-law when he was downcast because he was no longer able to be active in all the life of the church as he had been. As I told him, he may have been the most important member of the church, because of the amount of time that he spent in prayer for the church, his family, friends, and neighbors. Hallesby rightly argues that prayer is a prerequisite to all the other work of the church, to preaching, pastoring, etc. Because prayer gives expression to our utter dependence, the Lord is often pleased to use that to make effectual the other means of grace. The means of grace are efficacious only as the Spirit of God empowers them, and prayer is that needy posture whereby we seek the Spirit’s blessing on the appointed means. Without prayer, all of our preaching and sacramental administration remains fruitless. Prayer is that waiting upon God in which we acknowledge that he and he alone can bless, and we look to him for that blessing in all the means that he has appointed.

Chapters 4 and 5 are on “wrestling in prayer.” Many Christians express perplexity as to why prayer entails so much difficulty and suffering. Hallesby answers:

If prayer is, as we have seen, the central function of the new life of faith, the very heart-beat of our life in God, it is obvious that our prayer life must become the target against which Satan directs his best and most numerous darts. (89)

The enemy appeals to our carnal nature, seeking to enlist the cooperation of our flesh in the battle against our prayer life. All of our difficulties in prayer arise because “we are not in harmony with the Spirit of Prayer” (100). Because of our persistent fleshliness and neediness, all prayer ultimately becomes prayer for “the Spirit of Prayer” (101). The last chapter of the book, chapter 11, treats the need of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Prayer (169–76).

It is often, wrongly, thought that wrestling in prayer means wrestling with God until he yields up what it is that we seek. But, Hallesby declares, such a notion is pagan. In fact, Hallesby insists several times in this book, those who say “we should pray ... in order to get God to give us something” (153) reveal that their view of prayer is not Christian but pagan. Though passages like Genesis 32:22–32 and Matthew 15:1–8, not to mention Luke 18:1–8, might suggest to some that wrestling in prayer does mean “seeking to get something” from God, “our striving [in prayer] is a struggle, not with God, but with ourselves” (110). It’s a struggle with our selfishness and our sense of ease. Hallesby has a wonderful treatment of this (as he does of many of the biblical passages treating prayer), ending with a helpful treatment on prayer and fasting, the last being a lost discipline among the broader Christian public.

In chapter 6, Hallesby addresses misuses of prayer, such as that of James and John in their request to sit on Jesus’s right hand in the coming kingdom. Hallesby notes how tenderly the Lord treats James and John, though the disciples are angry with them. The Lord is quite kind to us, giving us what we need and withholding what we don’t need, answering our prayers always for our good and his glory, even when we misuse prayer (James 4:3). In chapter 7, Hallesby addresses the meaning of prayer: “Prayer is given and ordained for the purpose of glorifying God” (129). Doubtless we receive many benefits; in fact, we receive just what we need in prayer. And the wonderful truth is, that which we most need as God’s children, and that which most glorifies him, are one and the same. Prayer is coming to him in acknowledged helplessness.

ness, giving everything over to the Lord, resting and trusting in him to do what is most needed, and waiting upon him. This is what Paul did. He prayed three times to be relieved of his thorn in the flesh. The Lord told him that he would continue to suffer, because, in Paul's weakness, the Lord's strength was made perfect (2 Cor. 12:9–10). Even Jesus prayed three times for the cup to depart. But he also prayed, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (KJV Luke 22:42). The ultimate goal of prayer is not that our way would prevail but that our hearts would be brought into perfect conformity with his and that our ultimate prayer would be "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (KJV Matt. 6:10).

In his chapter 8 on "forms of prayer," Hallesby's pietism shines through, especially in his conviction that prayer should be "free and spontaneous" (137). He is no fan of prayer books, though I would advise a judicious use of things like *Valley of Vision*, the *Trinity Hymnal*, the *Book of Common Prayer* (1928 or before) to help us, particularly one struggling in forming prayers. He then lists five kinds of prayers (supplicatory, thanksgiving, praise, conversation, and wordless). There is no explicit mention of confession of sin here, though presumably it's part of supplication (for forgiveness); it's still odd given the book's constant emphasis on how weak, needy, sinful, and helpless we are that there is no explicit section here on confession of sin. Nonetheless, he gets at the heart of prayer several times in this chapter, writing, "to pray is to let Jesus into our lives" and "prayer is the breath of the soul" (145). While he is hardly a confessional Calvinist, we ought not too quickly to dismiss his statements about "letting Jesus in." The first chapter sets this plate well and convincingly: Jesus initiates the relationship, but we must ever open up ourselves to him, and this is no small part of prayer.

He also deals in chapters 9 and 10 with "problems of prayer" and the "school of prayer," in which we work through objections and are taught the necessary self-denial for prayer. In terms of the later, all self-denial comes from the Spirit enabling us to die to the flesh so that we might live to prayer.

As far as the problems of prayer are concerned, Hallesby lists five, including: How can prayer, being weak, accomplish great things? Why should we pray? Does God need intercessory prayer? Is prayer consistent with God's government of the world? And does God answer the prayers of the unconverted? These and other answers can be found in Hallesby's warm, encouraging, and helpful book. A series of study questions for each chapter, under the rubric of Review, Examine, Apply, Compare, and Think have been added in more recent editions of the book.

It's impossible to replicate in a review the encouragement and, frankly, delight that this book affords. One is often asked to write in an area of expertise. Who can say that they are such on prayer? I am certainly not, but I have read a few books and preached a bit on the subject. There are excellent things by John Owens, Matthew Henry, and many other older writers on prayer. There are some good things by newer writers, particularly on the Lord's Prayer. But for the struggling and the discouraged, for those keenly sensing their helplessness, I have not read anything in memory more fitting than Hallesby's work on prayer. If that "sweet hour of prayer" seems to be eluding you, perhaps it would be worthwhile to peruse (prayerfully, of course) Hallesby's modern classic. ☺

*Alan D. Strange is associate professor of church history and theological librarian at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and associate pastor of New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in New Lenox, Illinois.*

# Spiritual Theology

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by Alan D. Strange

*Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*, by Simon Chan. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998, 300 pages, \$23.00.

Let me offer two reasons for reviewing a book published in 1998. First of all, the distinguished editor of this journal asked me to. Secondly, though the book is more than a decade old and a number of books like it have been written since then, the basic theme of this book is a popular one of the last quarter century: doctrine and practice, theology and spirituality, have frequently been divorced and need instead to be integrated. I agree that we do not want to separate theology and praxis—who would want to? I also agree that we tend to, not just in the post-Enlightenment era, but since Eden. It's altogether too common for us to settle for what Jonathan Edwards called “purely theoretical speculative knowledge,” in place of affective, hearty Christianity (this volume has, by the way, a rather interesting treatment of Edwards's *Religious Affections*, 214–220). There is, however, as one might suspect, more to this story than just that. Though Chan's theme is rather ordinary, he pulls off his treatment of spiritual theology with deftness and skill, though not without some cavils from those of us who are Reformed. There is, in other words, that which Chan offers herein that's insightful and helpful, and there's that which he offers which is dubious, especially with respect to his non-cessationism and mysticism.

The work is titled *Spiritual Theology* and serves as a kind of synonym for another word frequently used therein: “spirituality.” I learned at Westminster Theological Seminary from Professor Gaffin, Philip Hughes, and others that, properly,

“spiritual” (as in the spiritual man of 1 Corinthians 2), and its cognates, indicated not the quality of the subject but the reality of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality, taken thusly, means that which comes not by the agency of man but by the agency of the Spirit of God. Interestingly, the word “spirituality” is often nowadays pitted against “religion” so that one commonly reads that this or that celebrity, while not being a practitioner of, as is often put, “organized religion,” is, nonetheless, “a very spiritual person.” Presumably, the inward is identified with spirituality and the outward with religion. Adhering to religion then is taken as merely outward and thus inherently hypocritical. Spirituality is perfectly acceptable in this schema because it's an inward virtue that does not have or require outward observances. It is true that one may have the merely outward, as did the Pharisees. The falsehood present here, however, is that true inward spirituality never manifests itself in outward religious organization and observances. One may be religious without being spiritual; one cannot be spiritual, however, without being religious.

The church, to come at it from another angle, is both an organization and an organism, having both outward religious forms and inward spirituality (the latter pertaining to those who have saving faith). This assertion ties in with the nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterian notion of the “Spirituality of the Church.” Yes, the doctrine of the spirituality of the church has to do with the proper province of the church over against other divinely ordained institutions like the state and the family. The task of the church is a spiritual one (the gathering and perfecting of the saints) and she uses spiritual means (the Word, sacraments, and prayer) to carry it out, bearing the power of the keys, not of the sword (as does the state) or the rod (as does the family). The power is said to be spiritual because her task is carried out in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers the means of grace so that the church might be gathered and perfected. So there is a tie between the way that we use spirituality as Presbyterians when we speak of the spirituality of the church and the way that the broader theologi-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=298&issue\\_id=73](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=298&issue_id=73).

cal world uses spirituality to indicate the spiritual life that the Christian faith produces.

Chan begins his work with a first chapter setting forth the nature and criteria of Christian spiritual theology. He starts by noting that in the past, the term “spirituality” applied simply to religious life. Now “a sociocultural movement, an interest group or a particular cause or concern” can be denominated as a “spirituality,” so that we speak today, for example of “small-group spirituality, marriage spirituality, and single-life spirituality” (15). Thus spirituality is “understood in terms of personal (but not individualistic or private, since the Christian life is always defined by a person’s concrete existence within a community) relationship with God,” but not simply subjectively. Chan intends to treat spirituality as it is biblically, not just “a phenomenological description of spirituality” but faithfulness to the “given” that describes the Christian community: “the Christian story revolving around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.” That story is the one “that gives shape to our lives and defines the nature of our existence as a Christian community” (16).

Chan proceeds to talk about the nature of spiritual theology (“spirituality is the lived reality, whereas spiritual theology is the systemic reflection and formalization of that reality”), spiritual theology as a theological discipline, its relation to other theological disciplines, and a survey of types of spirituality. Chan sets forth formal criteria for an adequate spiritual theology: comprehensiveness, coherence, and evocativeness. The rest of this orienting introductory chapter was devoted to material criteria for a Christian spiritual theology: the global-contextual criterion, the evangelical criterion, and the charismatic criterion. This sets the plate for the rest of the book, together with what Chan calls ascetical theology, basically the living of a disciplined Christian life.

The book is divided into two main parts: the theological and the practical (“the theological principles of spiritual theology; the practice of the spiritual life”). The theological enjoys, after the first foundational chapter described above, treatment in chapters 2–5. Chapter 2 treats the

doctrine of God as the foundation of Christian spirituality. Chan rightly understands that the doctrine of God is foundational to the rest of the theological loci and thus to any development of a spiritual theology. The God that we worship is both transcendent and immanent, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Over against Jürgen Moltmann, Chan argues transcendence, insisting that though the West may be taken up with God’s immanence, the East wants also to emphasize his transcendence, particularly an East that has been so in the thrall of earthly potentates through the centuries. And over against social trinitarianism, which Chan believes threatens to turn into tri-theism, Chan argues an emphasis on the oneness of God, favoring Augustine’s psychological model of the Trinity. He criticizes all the demythologizing that reduces Christian experience to sociology. Clearly, in all this, he resists the West’s rationalistic reduction of the faith while remaining sensitive to the need not to give way to mysticism, although in general his spirituality comes out too mystical and charismatic for those wanting to develop a Reformed spiritual theology.

In chapter 3, he treats sin and human nature. He does recognize sin to be more radical than does Roman Catholicism, even using the phrase “total depravity” several times to describe our fallen condition. He identifies himself with Augustine in this. But he also differs from Augustine in arguing that sin is relational as much as, if not more than, forensic. He says that sin is “less a legal problem than a family problem (as expressed in the parable of the prodigal son)” (61). What he seems to forget is that the prodigal son was a son and that we are such, after the fall, only by adoption, which is a legal declaration that provides the basis for restored relationship. Chan is to be commended throughout this book for seeking to be balanced, trying to find the best in each tradition (Roman, Eastern, and Protestant), though also failing to be as critical as he should at points. His criticism of the overly legal nature of Protestantism is not as careful and balanced as it should be, however. He does take sin quite seriously, though, and calls for a disciplined approach to the Christian life that fights the

devil, the flesh, and the world and seeks to recognize the alien character of the church in a hostile world. One of his strengths in chapter 5 on the church as the community of saints is to argue, on the one hand, against a ghettoized church, and, on the other hand, an overly relativized church that loses its pilgrim character and its witness to a sinful world. One thinks of D. Martin Lloyd-Jones's dictum that the church does the world the least good when she seeks to be most like the world. This is clearly the sentiment of Simon Chan.

Chapter 4 deals with salvation and the life of spiritual progress, in short, the doctrine of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Chan notes that Gnosticism, neo-Platonism, and Buddhism see salvation as deliverance from a transitory history to a timeless eternity. Christianity, in contrast,

takes history with the utmost seriousness because the experience of personhood [and “personality rather than its extinction lies at the root of the Christian conception of the ultimately real”] involves real continuity between the historical present and reality beyond the present, which is traditionally called eternity. (78)

This sort of observation is one of the work's strengths, especially its observations about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, met by the broad orthodox Christian tradition. Chan proceeds at some length to unpack grace and its effects, discussing justification, sanctification, and glorification, offering some helpful insights of Calvin and the Puritans, as well as views of other traditions, ending with a discussion of perfection, which he affirms, though more modestly asserted than is often the case (if such can be said). We already noted chapter 5 on the church, but Chan is to be commended in seeing all of this theology as developed and lived out in the life of the church and the communion (or community) of the saints.

The second part of the book takes what Chan has developed in the first part, in examining the traditional theological loci, and seeks to apply it to life, examining how this faith that we profess is lived out among us. This involves a variety of disci-

plines whereby we embody and practice the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints. We confessional Presbyterians may understand what the doctrine of the spirituality of the church means in one sense, as we've seen above; however, in the sense of a lived-out faith, the true spirituality of our faith, we may fall short. The temptation of some traditions, the charismatic, for instance, is to privilege Christian experience over Christian doctrine, to settle for shallow doctrine that's an inch deep and a mile wide. And such shallow theology undermines rich experience, yielding instead immaturity and Christian adolescence. The Reformed, on the other hand, have such rich theology and yet sometimes settle for beautiful doctrine not lived out.

To be sure, a lack of vibrant spirituality is not what marks our tradition at its best, and even in many of its historic expressions. But, if there's one thing that has marked Old School Presbyterians in more recent years, it is great doctrine—accompanied by lives that are sometimes spiritually barren. So we need spiritual discipline. We need among us a hearty spirituality. Chan starts with prayer in chapter 6. This is clearly the fountainhead of our spirituality. This heads part two of the book “because prayer is the first act that links doctrine to practice, and all the other exercises are simply elaborations of this primal act” (125). He discusses prayer as act and habit, the divine initiative in prayer, growth in prayer, praying by the rule, and other matters.

Now we could wish for a fuller exposition in this second section of the book of what marks a healthy Reformed and Presbyterian spirituality: a vigorous use of the means of grace (Word, sacraments, and prayer) as is fitting in the public, private, and secret spheres. We have the Family Directory of Worship from Westminster, as well as the Directory for the Public Worship of God. We are to be seeking the Lord personally in prayer regularly, as well as praying in our families, catechizing, and using all of our time, treasures, and talents, to the glory of our great God and king. There's too much mysticism, monasticism, and charismatic flavor in Chan's view of spirituality. Again, however, a judicious use of this book by someone from our

tradition, particularly by a well-trained pastor or other church member, may prove beneficial.

Spiritual breadth of this sort, as long as we are discerning, can be quite helpful. In chapter 10, for instance, Chan discusses a rule of life, with a view to encouraging the broad laity to benefit from the best of monasticism. He does not call for the church to live under the Rule of St. Benedict, but rather calls for us all to have scheduled times of devotional prayer, and to avail ourselves of a wide variety of spiritual disciplines. These are helpful but are, arguably, best packaged within our tradition. The problem is—do we attend to these things? Some Orthodox Presbyterians these days seem to think that Sabbath observance is the only thing needful. Sabbath observance—neglected as a subject by Chan—admittedly is necessary for a vibrant spirituality, but it is not sufficient. We need in addition to the Lord’s Day all the spiritual disciplines during the week that will keep us mindful of communion with God and each other: all those things, in other words, that make for vital spirituality and are not a burden, rightly understood and employed, but an incomparable blessing.

After discussing prayer fairly extensively, Chan proceeds, in chapters 7–9, to treat various spiritual exercises focusing on God and self, the Word, and the world. With respect to the first, Chan deals with the practice of the presence of God, conformity to the will of God, fidelity to grace, and self-examining prayer. With respect to his treatment of the Word, rather than a focus on preaching as a divine act (he thinks Protestants have too much focus on this to begin with), he urges a spiritual reading of the Word and meditation on the Word. While there are useful insights here, this is altogether too mystical for me in its attempts to bypass reason and appeal directly to emotion. And in the chapter on the world, he deals not only with questions of political engagement, but has an interesting treatment of spiritual friendship. Spiritual friendship is not quite the same as spiritual direction, the subject of chapter 12. Chan thinks that the Anglican and Roman Catholic practice of spiritual directors ought to be employed by all of us in some measure, and he is convinced that,

without such directors, real spiritual growth will likely be stunted.

One may wonder why all the fuss over spirituality anyway since, as some assert, our standards don’t address it (I’ve heard some say something like this before). I believe that our standards do address the spirituality of the church, both in terms of the proper province of the church and in terms of the church being a spiritual agency, the body brought into being by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our standards do teach that our faith has an accompanying spirituality, or as Calvin put it: love is the fruit of faith, obedience follows trust. Before addressing some ways in which our standards address the kinds of matters that pertain to spirituality, it might be helpful to note, contrary to much popular perception, that spirituality, and particularly the development of the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, is central to the Reformed project. One might read a work like Chan’s, with all of its mystical, perfectionist, and non-cessationist sensibilities and feel that we Reformed are lacking when it comes to the Holy Spirit and spirituality: This is not at all true. This is why it might prove helpful to note here that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as we know it is a distinctly Protestant (and Reformed) development.

Before Calvin, who Benjamin Warfield rightly denominated the “Theologian of the Holy Spirit,” the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit was underdeveloped in the church, particularly in the Western church, and tending to be mystical in the Eastern church. One can witness its absence from the ancient and medieval church, where there was a great deal of development of the doctrine of God and the person of Christ. The work of Christ was developed in Anselm’s theology and languished in the East where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit tended to be decoupled from Christ and his Word. One does not find a full treatment of the Spirit in Thomas’s *Summa Theologica* or any other such work until Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Previously, as with Aquinas, theologians would proceed from Christology to ecclesiology (bypassing, largely, pneumatology or soteriology), which means of course that the means of grace



must work on their own steam, as it were. It's unsurprising that the misguided doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments (as *ex opere operato*) developed. Calvin changed all of this in his momentous Book III of the *Institutes* (treating the work of the Holy Spirit), preceding Book IV on the church. Calvin argued that all the blessings and benefits of Christ do us no good, in fact, as long as we remain outside of him. It is the Holy Spirit who brings Christ to us and us to Christ. This is the heart of any real doctrine of spirituality.

How is this insight of Calvin expressed in our standards? This reality is vividly realized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 25 and 26. The former chapter, 25, is on the doctrine of the church, while the latter chapter, 26, is on the communion of the saints. The relationship of those two chapters has very much to do with true spirituality. Chapter 25 sets forth what the Bible teaches about the invisible and visible catholic church. It then proceeds to address matters pertaining to the visible church: it possesses the means of grace, out of it there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, it differs in time and place in purity and visibility, there will always be some visible witness, and Christ alone, and not the pope, is its head. Chapter 26 picks up on the invisible again, at least in the first section, teaching that

all saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces ... and glory: and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces.

To whom does this refer? The elect, who, as "members of the invisible church ... enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory" (WLC 65). Chapter 26 starts by highlighting that those in whom the Spirit has truly worked, the elect, enjoy union with Christ and communion with their fellow believers. This is true spirituality. The questions in the Larger Catechism from here to WLC 90 make it clear that it is only those in whom the Spirit works who enjoy all the blessings and benefits of Christ, as opposed to those who are

in the visible church only.

As important as the visible church is—all those in whom the Spirit has worked are to be, and usually are, in it—not all its members partake of true Christian spirituality, because not all of its members enjoy the efficacious grace given by the Holy Spirit in the exercise of the means of grace. This is why we have not only a chapter on the church, but a chapter on the communion of the saints following it. We can think of these two as addressing church as institute and organism, religion and spirituality, the outward and the inward. We must not pit these against each other but insist on both. In recent years, not only have partisans of Federal Vision, but others tending toward formalism (resting in the outward forms), sought to downplay these realities. The answer to our perceived spiritual ailments is not an over-objectification of the visible church and the means of grace but a vibrant visible church leading to a vital spirituality. An overstress on the outward is a departure from the witness of our standards particularly and that of the Reformed faith more broadly. My bringing this up is not meant to create doubt, whereby timorous souls wonder, "Am I elect or not?" Rather it is meant to encourage us to remember that the means of grace are not ends in themselves but means to an end—and Christ is that end. All the means are to lead us to rest and trust in Christ alone. That is the beginning and the end of true spirituality—life in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chan has produced a work on Christian spirituality fitting for evangelical theology. It is important for us as Presbyterians to attend to this sense of spirituality, as well as the spirituality of the church in the Old School Presbyterian sense. This is part of what we do when we address the question of union, the union of saints with Christ. It is only those in whom the Spirit has worked, who are part of the invisible church as well as the visible church (ordinarily). It is only those in the communion of saints that enjoy such union and all the blessings and benefits of it, as elaborated in the Westminster Larger Catechism from questions 65–90. It is these who enjoy union and communion with the triune

God and their fellow saints, both now and forevermore. Much work is being done with respect to union. Books have been published, and the blogs are ablaze with discussions about union with Christ. Some disagreements have surfaced among those committed to the Westminster standards over whether union must be preceded by justification. These debates, however, should not deter us. We need to continue to work on matters related to our union with Christ and come to as much agreement as we can. We need to make sure that we have a vibrant Reformed spirituality that accompanies and follows our cogent Reformed theology. ©

*Alan D. Strange is associate professor of church history and theological librarian at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and associate pastor of New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in New Lenox, Illinois.*

## Faith and Reason

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by **Stephen A. Migotsky**

*Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*, by Vern S. Poythress. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006, 381 pages, \$20.00.

The relationship between science and Christianity is often oversimplified by Christians with the result that special revelation (Bible) and natural revelation (science) are deemed incompatible, or one undervalued. Meditating on Scripture and medi-

tating on creation are both means of grace from the two important revelations from God—special and general revelation. The Christian’s life is strengthened by both. Specifically, Christian books about science can help us appreciate the glory of God, the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28), and the brokenness of this world—“vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2). On the other hand, misleading books on science can also do much damage to the Christian.

### Strengths of the Book

Poythress (Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Westminster Theological Seminary) is concerned that people have misunderstood science and biblical theology. He argues that most believers are influenced by the false idea that being a believer is somehow incompatible with being a scientist. This causes believers to conclude that scientific work is not really biblical. In Adam’s role as ruler over the world, Poythress appropriately calls Adam the first scientist. Adam was to accomplish the cultural mandate by scientific work. Useful examples of wrong thinking about creation are given with Poythress’s correctives. God is described as the source of the goodness of creation and the regularity of creation (Gen. 8:22). Excellent biblical support is given for these concerns.

All human knowledge and reasoning are suspect.

Spectacular as modern science may be, it is still subject to limitations because humans do the work. We are finite and fallible, and after the fall we are sinful. The Christian view of the world provides clear space for science, but also indicates some limits.... Scientists’ constructions of scientific laws are not the *real* laws, but an approximation or the best guess about the laws. [italics his] (160)

When Poythress discusses the apparent discrepancies between special and general revelation, he is very helpful. God’s twin revelations are not and cannot be in conflict.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=303&issue\\_id=74](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=303&issue_id=74).

The key to an insightful resolution of discrepancies may crop up anywhere. It could be in the details of evidence. It could lie in a subtle or radical revision of some unexamined assumption. It could lie in some new theory superseding the old. It could lie in a worldview that distorts one's understanding. It could lie in the joint effects of more than one area. (43)

In the case of apparent discrepancies between the Bible and science, we must therefore be ready to reexamine both our thinking about the Bible and our thinking about science. We must not assume too quickly that the error lies in one particular direction. In the modern world, we find people who are always ready to assume that science is right and the Bible is wrong. Or, contrariwise, others assume that the Bible is always right and modern science is always wrong. (43)

But the Bible *is* always right, and should be trusted on that account. Likewise, God's word concerning providence is always right and trustworthy. But modern science, as a *human* interpretation of God's providence, may make mistakes. Our *interpretation* of providence may need revision. And our *interpretation* of the Bible may need revision. [*italics his*] (43)

Galileo's opponents claimed that he must be wrong about the movement of the sun and the earth, because, they alleged the Bible clearly taught the earth was immovable. (44)

Poythress identifies special problems with interpreting providence and general revelation. "Modern science, as typically practiced, is idolatry" (56). Poythress describes that idolatry in clear terms related to the human desire for independence from God and the desire to be powerful.

Poythress is a deep thinker in biblical theology, mathematics, and science. He carefully and biblically takes on the controversial subjects of creation, length of days of creation, the age of the earth, and evolution, as well as topics in phys-

ics, chemistry, and mathematics. These are deep waters for most readers, but Poythress is careful to help the non-scientist and non-mathematician. The book could be subtitled "A Christian Philosophy of Science," since much of what is discussed is what was called natural philosophy in the Middle Ages and philosophy of science today. For example, one chapter is "Debates About What Is Real." Any reader willing to put on his "thinking cap" will benefit from reading and rereading several of these chapters. They are outstanding.

### General Weaknesses of the Book

The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) indicates the idolatrous nature of fallen humanity's creative work, including modern science. The Babelites wanted fame and had developed a technology and architecture that was impressive (Gen. 11:6). God frustrated the Babelites in order to restrain their "science." God deliberately frustrated the "scientists," "engineers," and builders of Babel. Why did God do this? Does God continue to do so in similar or other ways? Poythress doesn't ask these questions. Unfortunately, Poythress doesn't discuss Babel, and doesn't see God still deliberately frustrating human understanding and achievement.

There is a difference between Adam's prelapsarian world and today's world. God cursed the earth and creation is now "futile" (Gen. 3:17, Eccl. 1:2, Rom. 8:20-22). Paul describes creation as being subject to *ματαιότης* (*mataiotēs*) *futility, purposelessness, transitoriness*<sup>2</sup> (Rom. 8:20-22). In Ecclesiastes, the scientific study of fallen creation is described as an impossible job. "Scientists" try to find the solution to puzzling observations of God's creation and plan, but they will not succeed because God has made creation crooked and things are missing (Eccl. 1:14-15). All things that happen in this fallen world are really unpredictable and uncontrollable ("shepherding the wind" Eccl. 1:14).

Poythress does not discuss God's curse on cre-

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2 W. Arndt, F. Danker, and W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 621.

ation as making today's science ultimately "futile, or vain." Because of man's idolatrous rebellion, God has not only frustrated the Babelites, but any scientific attempt toward perfect knowledge and control. Additionally, the redemption of Christ has not changed the brokenness of creation. Poythress writes: "Science is intended to be a task pursued and carried out in a spirit of praise. In science, we think God's thoughts after him, and praise rises in our hearts as we see more of his wisdom" (339). Pre-fall Adam's science would have seen God's "very good" purposes and thoughts in the original "very good" creation. Praise would have attended Adam's science; it *was* very good. Praise can still attend a believer's scientific study of creation, but the world now is very, very corrupt and broken. God's creation today is not the world that God declared was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), nor is man's perception of it. Ecclesiastes 7:29 describes mankind's sinful interpretation of God's world: "God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." It seems appropriate to temper Poythress's conclusions about science, to include God's curse on creation. The scientist in heaven will not see a broken, futile, dying world, but a world in its consummated, glorious, and perfect state. *That* world will perfectly reflect God's glory. In this one we only see "dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). We wait for a new science of the new heavens and new earth. We wait for a completed redemption.

Meantime, Poythress is correct: in God's creation we can see something of the glory of God, but it is not the glory as God created it, or of the consummation.

### **Apologetic Weaknesses of the Book**

Poythress's solid Van Tilian apologetics is evident in this book. However, there is a distinction between the belief required in scientific inquiry (a common grace) and saving faith (a redeeming grace). A casual reader might think non-Christian faith and saving faith were on a continuum. Atheist and agnostic scientists believe in God (13). The following quotes illustrate what is meant by a non-Christian's faith.

He [Christ] gives blessings even to those who are still in rebellion against him. Because of our rebellion, we do not deserve to retain functioning minds.... If we nevertheless get benefits when we deserve the opposite, we are receiving a redemptive blessing. It does not mean that we ourselves as individuals have received personal salvation from Christ through faith. But if we are non-Christians, *we have a kind of shadow of this faith in the confidence* that we can receive and use what we do not deserve—although our confidence is distorted by ingratitude and pride. [italics mine] (174)

For physics and chemistry, Poythress sees a trinitarian nature in Newton's Laws of Motion. Poythress finds the Trinity in the Third Law of Motion—"To every action there is always opposed an equal and opposite reaction" (295).

Harmonious knowledge exists within the Trinity in three "perspectives." This unity in diversity reflects itself in human experience, in that we can take a diversity of perspectives and imagine what things look like from someone else's point of view. This capacity for perspectives gets used in the understanding of Newton's Third Law. (296)

Poythress goes on to describe how the proportionality of mathematics relates to the mathematical proportions of both the tabernacle and God himself.

And this idea of proportionality, as we have seen, reflects the proportions in the tabernacle, and these reflect the imaging process that has its origin in God himself. God has left a witness to himself inside the mathematics that Newton used to describe force and motion! (304)

The simple proportionalities in physical laws are a form of "imaging," like proportionalities in the tabernacle of Moses. God impressed these symmetries and proportionalities on the world as a reflection of himself and his own

beauty and symmetry. (312)

While the proportionality of the tabernacle tells us about God, the proportionality in the *human endeavors* of physics and math do not necessarily reflect God's nature. This interpretation of mathematics and physical laws seems to go beyond what "by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture" (WCF 1.6). Additionally, Newton's Laws of Motion have been found to be inaccurate and wrong. They are useful, but wrong. Did God "impress" Newton's erroneous physical laws on the world to reveal "his beauty and symmetry"? There is some beauty and mathematical harmony and symmetry in science, but scientific observations are, at times, chaotic. For example, experiments may have undermined a fundamental assumption of physics: nothing can go faster than the speed of light (*Nature*, Sept. 23, 2011). Experimental data keep messing up tidy, pretty scientific theories. There is symmetry, logic, and beauty in a chess game, but the chess game was not part of God's original creation and it does not reflect God's glory directly. In God's creation there is also ugliness, death, decay, destruction, and disorder.

Man's desire to force the world into a mathematical system may reflect a sinful desire. To use science, engineering, and mathematics to accomplish the cultural mandate is part of God's common grace for all men. But, man's desire for complete control and understanding will never be realized. Poythress presents the mathematical descriptions of creation as only reflective of the goodness of God's creation. Poythress discusses the fallenness of man's thinking extensively, but only once mentions the fallenness of the world as it now is. (121) The frustration encountered by scientists in attempting to solve the puzzle of "nature," should lead them to repent.

Poythress overemphasizes the goodness and harmony of this world without acknowledging its brokenness and temporariness. Scripture describes creation's destruction as judgment on "the Day of the Lord" (i.e., 2 Pet. 3:10–13). Poythress sees mostly goodness and order in this present earth (23). This is most evident in his speculations about

the Trinity being revealed in physics, chemistry, and mathematics.

For Poythress, almost anything a mathematician can create reflects God's character, unity and diversity and the Trinity. "Mathematics offers a wonderful display of God's wisdom for those who are awake to its beauties and to God who ordained those beauties" (326). Math is beautiful and orderly. It also gives descriptions of natural phenomenon! However, what if mathematics is a man-made Tower of Babel seeking to reach heaven by human effort, not by God's grace and faith?

For the thoughtful reader there are additional authors who address related issues of faith and science. Two are worthy of note—Bacon and Bayle. Francis Bacon reacted against the Aristotelian scholasticism of the sixteenth-century church. Bacon found scholasticism to be sterile, useless, and enslaved to five or six Greeks. He described the crucial need for observation in *The New Organon*. This is a book which few study today. Bacon writes that reason is limited by various Idols of the Mind—Idols of the Tribe, Cave, Marketplace, and Theatre. These correspond to the limits due to fallen human nature, to prejudices of individuals, to inaccuracies of words, and to acceptance of received authority, respectively.

The relationship between reason and Christian faith was addressed by Pierre Bayle (1647–1706, French Calvinist) in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Similar to Bacon, Bayle both valued and was skeptical of human reasoning. Bacon's solution was to have men gather experimental data, lots of it, and formulate and test their theories and repeat the process. Bayle's solution was to emphasize the necessity of Christian faith which trusts special revelation *alone* and remains skeptical of human reason, or observation.

Reading Poythress, Bayle, and Bacon will be fruitful for anyone with a very long attention span. None of these men are "sound bite" compatible. Study science and faith with them. While this review has spent more words on perceived weaknesses, don't think the book is unworthy of your attention. Perhaps, it is because the book is so strong in general that its weaknesses "popped out"



to this reviewer. To a lover of music, the few notes that are played out of tune stick out in an extraordinary symphony. In summary, *Redeeming Science* is an extraordinary symphony for the lover of God's Truth. ©

**Stephen A. Migotsky** is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as the pastor of Jaffrey Presbyterian Church in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

## Words Made Flesh and Fresh

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by **Danny E. Olinger**

*Words Made Fresh: Essays on Literature and Culture*, by Larry Woiwode. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011, 191 pages, \$24.99.

Larry Woiwode wouldn't remember me from our brief meeting twenty years ago. Then a ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Woiwode was a commissioner to the Fifty-ninth General Assembly being held at Geneva College and had accepted an invitation to teach the adult Sunday School class at Grace OPC, Sewickley. After the service, I was among those with Woiwode invited to Charlie and Ginger Dennison's house for lunch. I sat quietly as Charlie, Woiwode's friend and my pastor, questioned him about his comments in the class regarding John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Charlie loved Bunyan's heavenly-mindedness. Woiwode, while appreciative of Bunyan's message and vocabulary, and urging the

reading of the book, preferred literature more connected to the earth.

My recollection is spotty because my purpose that day was very exact. Charlie wanted me there to hear Larry Woiwode's voice; if possible, to hear him read from one of his books. The secret to reading Woiwode, Charlie contended, was to catch his cadence. Get the rhythm of the sentences, and the struggle Woiwode intends with his fiction comes into clearer focus.

Reading Woiwode's essays in *Words Made Fresh* brought that day back to my mind. Charlie was right in emphasizing the lyrical character of Woiwode's writings. Every sentence counts, and not just for content. The ordering of the words, the sound, even the punctuation, the late comma being his favorite mark, all have their perfect place in his writing. Alter one clause, lift one sentence, ignore the rhythms that flow from reading the words, and violence is done to the oral effect of the entire work.

But, I wish now that I had paid closer attention to the two friends' debate over place. *Words Made Fresh* reveals the intimate connection that exists for Woiwode between words and geography, or better, words flowing from place. Woiwode argues in these essays that place is the foundation of fiction.

Never straying far from these central tenets, the ten essays are divided between penetrating looks at literary figures (Wendell Berry, John Gardner, John Updike, and William Shakespeare) and at cultural attitudes towards guns, home schooling, and media. Woiwode explains that the title has a two-fold purpose. It deliberately reflects the incarnation "because it was with the incarnation that writers outside the scope of the Hebrew and Greek texts began to understand how a metaphor of words could contain the lineaments and inner workings of a human being" (13). The title also indicates that each essay has been revisited and modernized, so as to be made fresh.

### Essays on Culture

The book's opening essay, "Guns and Peace,"

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=305&issue\\_id=75](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=305&issue_id=75).



first appeared in *Esquire* in 1975. The original audience is important because Woiwode's opening sentence—"Once in the worst of a Wisconsin winter I shot a deer, my only one, while my wife and daughter watched"—accomplishes two purposes at once. It reminds the Eastern literary elite that Woiwode is a stylist of the first order. But, at the same time, it confronts their prejudice that life only takes place inside their isolated world. Woiwode recalls his love of guns as a boy, and his use of them in hunting and recreation as an adult. However, the keynote of the piece is not guns, but rather death. Death haunts him. His conscience insists that he was the one that deserved being shot and not the crippled deer. And yet, holding the .22 rifle he realizes he is the deer's vision of approaching death, and it makes him recoil. He confesses that he lives alone in New York City because of his brutish behavior, his wife and daughter separated from him and living in Chicago. In this existence, he no longer has a romantic attachment to guns, only an emptiness as the sun goes down on his life.

In the afterword to the essay, added specifically for this volume, Woiwode reflects, "What I deserved led me to understand the full and free payment of my just deserts." He continues, "In this incarnation I own firearms, mainly for predators, especially rabid ones, and I do not cling to them as I cling to the faith that reunited my wife and me and caused our internal lives and the lives of our children to blossom and prosper in peace" (22). Woiwode emphasizes the impact of the gospel upon his life in his making fresh the title. For *Esquire*, it was "Guns." Now, it is "Guns and Peace."

In "Deconstructing God," Woiwode confronts the cultural bias that exists against those who prefer to home school their children. He examines Warren Nord's 1995 book *Religion and American Education* and agrees with Nord that education in America became secularized primarily through the liberalizing of American religion. Liberals placed confidence in human reason to determine what is right and what is wrong. This led to the displacement of Christianity in education, not religious neutrality in education. Nord observes, "For public education to be neutral, for it to minimize the

extent to which it actively discourages religion, it must take religion seriously as part of the curriculum" (129).

Woiwode admits that while it may be choking on a gnat to criticize Nord's treatment of the history that led to the federal monopoly on public education, he regrets Nord does not comment upon "the auspicious moment that forestalled, anyway for fifty years, government autocratic hegemony" (131). That moment was the February 1926 United States Senate and House hearings on a proposed Department of Education, where among those testifying was J. Gresham Machen. In his testimony, Machen argued that the proposed goal of uniformity in education was not only misguided, but also would be destructive to the country. Standardization, said Machen, is a good thing in making Ford automobiles. It is a bad thing for the education of human beings. And, to accomplish this standardization would require federal aid, and federal aid always comes with strings attached.

Despite these misgivings, Machen's greater concern was the philosophy that the children of the state must be educated for the benefit of the state. Looking at pre-World War II Europe, Machen argued that this principle of education could be found in its highest development in Germany and in its most disastrous form in Soviet Russia. When pressed at the hearings if he knew of any federal interference with the operation of any private or church school, Machen responded that his concern was not his own institution but the principle of religious liberty in education.

Some eight-plus decades after Machen's testimony, and three decades after Jimmy Carter finally established a Department of Education, Woiwode contends that Machen has proven prophetic. The standardized United States educational system is an abject failure and has forced parents to look for alternatives in teaching their children. Woiwode writes, "What profession has the highest percentage of children in private schools? Public school teachers. Dire indicators suggest that nearly half of all high school graduates are illiterate. This, as surely as public education's hostility to religion, has encouraged the home-school movement"

(137).

The last essay on culture, “Dylan to CNN,” finds Woiwode fondly remembering Bob Dylan’s role as minstrel in the early sixties versus the tone-deafness of the modern media. Woiwode argues that Dylan not only gave voice to what everyone was thinking, but also was Shakespeare-like in never underestimating the basic intelligence of his audience.

Woiwode suggests that when Dylan stopped talking openly about Jesus Christ, it didn’t mean that he had turned away from faith in Christ. Not knowing Dylan’s heart, who could argue with Woiwode what Dylan’s motives were? But Woiwode continues to press the issue in a way that suggests confusion over the gospel and the doctrine of the church. He writes:

I’m not his apologist (think, though, of the license and backsliding we tolerate in ourselves) but I suspect he found the liberty of serving his Savior in his art rather than always assuming a churchy confession. This may be a loss to those who found faith through him, but his end is the celebration of God in the discipline and art of song and the good news that true art can bring. (146)

Vocation is one thing, confession is another. But Woiwode fails to indicate that vocation can never be a substitute for confession. It is not that Bob Dylan needs to talk about Jesus before playing a song. Rather, it is that Mr. Zimmerman (Dylan’s birth name) needs to confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord before the church and live in keeping with that confession as a member of the church. Individualism justified in the name of art is not biblical. Rather, as Calvin rightly argues in Book IV of his *Institutes*, perseverance in the faith is connected with the church.

## Essays on Literature

“In Views of Wendell Berry,” Woiwode finds a fellow author driven by the same impulses that push Woiwode’s own writing—faith and land. Woiwode writes, “If I had to distill the import of his

thought, I might put it like this: All land is gift, and all of it is good, if we only had the sensibilities to see that” (41). Woiwode admits Berry comes close to pantheism in his seeing God everywhere present in nature, but Berry’s toil with the sin-cursed ground and his acknowledgment of a creator-creature distinction keeps him from worshipping nature.

Despite his heartfelt appreciation for Berry, the fact that Woiwode has two essays, “AmLit” and “Gardner’s Memorial in Real Time” on John Gardner is a tip-off that Gardner might be his literary twin. Gardner had lavished on Woiwode his highest praise in classifying Woiwode as a serious author who had written one of the great novels of the seventies, *Beyond the Bedroom Wall*. Woiwode in turn exalted Gardner as a writer who had an exact sense of time, Gardner’s *Mickelsson’s Ghosts* being the supreme example. When Gardner died in a motorcycle accident in 1981, Woiwode was asked to take Gardner’s place as the director of the creative writing program at the State University of New York-Binghamton, but his connection with Gardner was more than replacing his friend. Woiwode believes that Gardner, having been raised Presbyterian, possessed an awareness of the religious dimensions of writing and was not afraid to call out those he found fraudulent. The piercing directness of Gardner’s opinions, says Woiwode, “have the effect of a salutary, mind-clearing antidote” (56).

In “AmLit,” Woiwode affirms Gardner’s working premise that in the mid-1970’s American writers fell into five main groups. The five groups are: (1) religious liberals and liberal agnostics (often indistinguishable); (2) orthodox or troubled-orthodox Christians; (3) Christians who have lost their faith and cannot stand it; (4) diabolists; and (5) heretics. Woiwode takes great interest in Gardner’s listing within the first (religious liberals) and last camps (heretics). The liberals, both the good writers like Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, and the bad writers like E. L. Doctorow, share a common fault. They do not believe in art. They believe in using art to promote thought about important issues, and that is why, according to Gardner, this school

produces no great writers.

Woiwode takes even greater interest in Gardner's placing John Updike in the heretic category. Gardner writes, "Updike's message, again and again, is a twisted version of the message of his church, neo-orthodox Presbyterianism: Christ has saved me; nothing is wrong; so come to bed with me" (57–58). Gardner personally had little interest as an adult in orthodox Presbyterianism, but professionally he lacked patience with Updike's twisting of its historic Protestant message.

That Woiwode would be interested in Gardner's opinion of Updike is no surprise, given Woiwode's complex relationship with Updike, the multi-Pulitzer Prize-winning author. First, there is the personal connection, as the two men were united by the same editor at the *New Yorker* in the sixties and seventies, William Maxwell. Woiwode further admires Updike as the most gifted of stylists, a professional among professionals. But, there is a moral discomfort for Woiwode that comes in reading Updike, something that nags at him. In the longest essay in the book, "Updike's Sheltered Self," Woiwode gives expression to this mix of appreciation and frustration regarding Updike, even admitting that the phrase "yes, but" appears too often. However, to make sure that his reader doesn't miss the point, Woiwode adds, "as I reassess a contemporary whose work I admire above most others, the diligent auditor will note that nearly all the *buts* relate to the same point: Updike's professed Christianity measured against the content of his work" (86).

Woiwode traces Updike's open adherence to Christianity, in his literature, to *Olinger Stories*, a collection of short stories in which Updike exchanges the name "Olinger" for Shillington, his hometown near Reading, Pennsylvania. The significance is the sense of place that the local family name from Shillington lyrically conveys, "O linger!"<sup>2</sup> Two stories in particular, "Pigeon

2 Yes, I am related; my ancestors arrived from Germany and first settled around Reading in Berks County. Thankfully, in his foreword to *Olinger Stories*, Updike provided the standard response for a generation of Olingers when questioned how

Feathers" and "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car," are personal reflections upon homeplace and faith. *The Centaur* and *On the Farm* continue Updike's faith emphasis as he concretely traces the tearing of the fabric of American culture that comes from a loss of Christian consciousness found in previous generations.

The transition for Updike from the faith expressed in his early fiction to his ruffling feathers in unpleasant ways, says Woiwode, came in *Couples*, the book that landed Updike on the cover of *TIME* magazine. Woiwode guesses that this is Updike's evaluation of suburban Christianity in the late sixties. It's *awful*. He writes, "With *Couples*, the philosophy of *Playboy* moved into the hearts of heartland America. The people there became swingers along Hefner's lines, Piets and Foxys, numbed" (105).

But, Woiwode also sees *Couples* as the transitional point for Updike in surrendering to the liberalism that he disdained in his earlier works, most pointedly in "Pigeon Feathers" where the liberal Lutheran pastor is abhorred by the adolescent. He writes:

What *Couples* conveys is the paradox of neoorthodoxy, and perhaps this was Updike's burden of illumination: its "kind" character can lead to destruction. All Christian doctrine comes down to this: love your neighbor, period. Going to bed with her may stem from a love-limned motive but it's not great for her husband, one suspects—or for the children or both families, as the disruptions in *Couples* convey. (101)

Woiwode agrees with John Gardner that this change in Updike's fiction is no small thing, for writing has moral implications. It has an effect on how people act. *Couples* promotes wife-swapping, even if Updike found the coupling unsound. It is not until Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies* that he regains "the visceral engagement and poten-

properly to say the family name: "the name Olinger (pronounced with a long O, a hard g, and the emphasis on the first syllable)." John Updike, *Olinger Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), v.

tial reach, even grandeur of *The Centaur*, *Pigeon Feathers*, and *Of the Farm*, and portions of the *Rabbit* quartet” (106).

The Updike book, however, that captures Woiwode’s interest the most is *Self-Consciousness*, Updike’s semi-autobiographical book of essays. Two of the essays, “A Soft Spring Night in Shillington” and “Getting the Words Out,” says Woiwode, “are perhaps the best examples we have of what it was like to come of age in America in the last half of the last century” (108). Undoubtedly both essays strike a true chord with Woiwode because the former deals with place and the latter deals with words.

In “A Soft Spring Night in Shillington,” Updike finds himself as a middle-aged man walking the streets of his hometown while waiting for his lost luggage to arrive from the Lehigh Valley airport. As he walks, the rain gently falls from the sky, and it speaks to Updike of God’s grace. As if walking unnoticed beside Updike, so in tune is he with what Updike is writing, Woiwode observes, “On this night of grace, then, in Updike’s life, he walks down a street to his old neighborhood, to the house where he was born, the locus of his consciousness” (109).

Woiwode understands the story then as the key to Updike: Shillington is home, and home is where identity is cultivated.

This is the best American essay on the prerogatives of place and its relationship to identity that I know. And since the identity examined is of a prominent writer, a definition of the prerogative of place in its relationship to writing is established, and I don’t think a more eloquent examination of their relationship exists in twentieth-century American literature. (109)

“Getting the Words Out” is Updike’s explanation of how he writes. He recalls his youthful stammer and difficulty in saying what he wanted to say. Woiwode locates the stammer as the source of Updike’s precision with language, the never ending desire to get every word properly placed. Woiwode recalls Maxwell describing Updike as an Olympian

when it came to examining page proofs, so passionate was he in refining the language of his writing.

Woiwode concludes with an essay on William Shakespeare, or WS as Woiwode refers to him with a wink throughout. Woiwode builds the case that Shakespeare still stands at the summit of writers in English because he was an unparalleled wordsmith who wrote with a Christian sensibility that is transcendent. Woiwode writes:

In his native isolation and affinity for the actual, the original, the primitive, he is the best linguistic guide to the English language, and we step nearer to who he was by his words and their rhythms and the multitude of characters he fitted together as messengers of his many permutations. Through his characters, in a further way, he speaks to us as an *integrated bearer of ultimate Good News*. Above all, he placed the impress of Christ, whose outlines are love and mercy and reconciliation, into more universally appealing characters than any other writer in the history of the Western world. (175)

### Homeplace, Heaven or Hell

Woiwode combines his beliefs on literature, culture, and faith in the representative essay of the volume, “*Homeplace, Heaven or Hell? On the Order of Existence*.” In this essay, first delivered in 1983 as a lecture at the Conference on Christianity and Literature at Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa, Woiwode stresses once more the significance of place. He states, “The definition of home or homeplace, and the implication of the locale we call home, is the matter I’m after. Is that home a haven? Is it a miniature heaven, a *picture* of heaven? Or is it hell?” (27).

The writer who draws from his or her familiarity with a particular place might be scornfully labeled a regionalist today, but historically such a writer had been called a poet. The ability to describe a place in exacting detail, narrowing the focus within a given environment, creates a better opportunity for the reader to enter into that world.

But Woiwode also talks about the importance

of another world. He writes,

I don't serve myself or the academy per se, though I do teach, nor the place or populace of North Dakota. I serve God, through the person of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible. That should send a legion scurrying off in alarm or setting this aside in embarrassment—perhaps with the wish that I were a plain old regionalist and not a religionist.” (27) ©

**Danny E. Olinger** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

## Life's Complications and the Limits of Expertise

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

*The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*, by Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011, 356 pages, \$29.95.

Life in modern society is tough. In any given week, an average American may have to decide which is the best and prettiest paint for the exterior of his house, what are the best and most affordable tires to put on his car, whether to replace a deep filling with another filling or with a crown, whether to diversify the investments in his retirement portfolio, and which candidate from the Republican Party is the best to run against a Democratic incumbent in the upcoming presidential election. No single

American has sufficient knowledge to make all of these decisions simply on the basis of his own learning and reading. In addition to confronting these dilemmas, this person likely has a full-time job that occupies much of his time, and a wife and children that take up most of his spare time—not to mention incredibly difficult choices about bad influences on his son at school, whether his daughter should play field hockey, and consulting with his wife about his mother-in-law's declining health and the best arrangements for her well being. If he is a Christian with responsibilities at church, he may need to wade through files of applications for a pulpit search committee, or consult with architects and engineers about plans to expand the church's parking lot.

Complicating further this average American's decisions are the accompanying choices to be made over which advice to follow. For in addition to life's complicated questions are a bevy of advisors, available on the radio and television, folks such as Oprah, Rush Limbaugh, and Dave Ramsey—people who seem to have a lot of insight into life's difficulties. But which of these advisors to heed raises an additional layer of decisions. Life is tough.

The authors of *The Anointed*, Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson, both of whom are evangelical academics associated with Eastern Nazarene College (the former a historian, the latter a physicist), do not consider this average American believer's plight but do address a problem associated with it. It is the authority of experts and how Americans—in this case, evangelical Protestants—come to regard certain figures as reputable teachers and spokesmen on questions surrounding the history and character of the United States, the proximity of Christ's return, the creation of the universe, and even the formation of a Christian outlook on the world. Of course, these matters represent an entirely broader range of decisions than the myriad of choices facing the American Christian mentioned above. But choosing whether or not to employ the counsel of a television preacher or a radio talk show host is a similar process even if the consequences of the decision, both for the

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=315&issue\\_id=76](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=315&issue_id=76).



person deciding and the celebrity being followed, are of a different order. Had Stephens and Giberson considered life's complexity and the need for expert instruction they may not have presented evangelical Protestants in as unflattering a light as they do.

*The Anointed* defies ready classification. The publisher, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, does not include a topic on the dust jacket, thus leaving book shop clerks yet one more decision to make in a life of decisions. The Library of Congress subject classification included in the preliminary pages lists evangelicalism as the first, and "Intellect—Religious Aspects" as the second subject. These will help librarians when considering where to shelve this book. As helpful as these are, the Library of Congress's catalogers go on to include another six subjects, among them "Conservatism—Christian Aspects," and "Christianity and Culture—United States." The lists suggest the cataloguers were as uncertain of the book's genre as readers will be. One subject they refused—though it may be the most fitting one—is *exposé*. For the book reads like one by insiders, who decide to blow the whistle to outsiders about the dirty secrets of their group. Stephens and Giberson are not overly vicious in their description of the evangelical subculture, though an Ivy League university press is not the place to look for a muckraking account of minorities in the United States. At the same time, the authors do not make a concerted effort to explain away the oddities of evangelical beliefs and how far these Protestants depart from the boundaries of accepted knowledge.

The book includes four chapters on significant features of popular evangelical thought, with two additional sections on the tendency of evangelical Protestants to separate from the world and the mechanisms by which certain born-again preachers or leaders become "anointed" figures within these subcultures. The first four chapters cover the unique (and odd) beliefs that evangelicals have about the age of the earth (in contrast to the findings of natural scientists), the Christian origins of the United States (in contrast to the conclusions of academic historians), the nature of the Christian

family (as opposed to advice from professional social scientists), and the taste that evangelicals have for apocalyptic and prophetic portions of the Bible (as opposed to the interpretations of professional biblical scholars). Along the way, the authors devote lengthy sections to the careers of Ken Ham, the creator of Answers in Genesis, David Barton, a popular amateur historian who argues for the Christian roots of the United States, James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, and Hal Lindsey, author of the enormously popular *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Stephens and Giberson look beyond these four figures and show how evangelicals have an appetite for uniquely Christian ideas about creation, the United States, the family, and the return of Christ. In fact, the traction that these notions gain among evangelicals is responsible for a religious subculture, the authors argue, that is generally impervious to scholarship, expertise, and professional opinions in the wider society. This subculture is also the soil from which televangelists, such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Oral Roberts, gain followers and attract donations sufficient to found universities. Stephens and Giberson write:

The fundamentalist end of the evangelical spectrum contains a culture that does indeed seem unable to distinguish between meaningful scholarship and what Wolfe has called "gibberish." Ken Ham places a dinosaur looking over Eve's shoulder in the Garden of Eden exhibit at his museum. Tourists pay to look at it and leave the Creation Museum, believing that what they just saw is both scientific and biblical. Tim LaHaye inserts the emergence of a common European currency into the book of Revelation; David Barton converts Ben Franklin into a Bible-believing Christian; James Dobson claims that the institution of marriage has not changed in five thousand years. Absent a more vigorous intellectual mind, such ideas take root and flourish. And their spokespersons can function as authority figures. (243)



Conservative Reformed Protestants may find several points on which to agree with Stephens and Giberson even while questioning the authors' implicit recommendations for those who believe the Bible. Orthodox Presbyterians, for instance, may find regrettable the faulty logic, poor reasoning, and erroneous biblical interpretation that allow evangelical Protestants to read Genesis, the American founding, marriage and the family, and Revelation the way they do. But are evangelical Protestants any stranger than other religious subcultures in the United States? These Protestants are about the same size as their African-Americans counterparts, and yet one could not well imagine these white authors finding approval from editors of Harvard University Press to publish a book that exposed similar idiosyncrasies among African-American Protestant pastors and leaders. One reason that Stephens and Giberson may feel comfortable singling out evangelicals is the political repercussions of the born-again subculture. Indeed, many of the ideas treated in *The Anointed* influence the way the evangelical Protestants vote. But is this any less true for African-Americans? Were not Jeremiah Wright's widely circulated ideas about the differences between European and African mentalities not a factor in gaining some support for the current president of the United States, who was, by the way, a regular listener to Wright's sermons?

The way the authors single-out evangelicals as a bizarre subculture is arguably the greatest weakness of the book. But so is the authors' failure to acknowledge the real difficulties that bedevil the harmonization of Scripture and the findings of science. Equally lamentable is Stephens and Giberson's failure to explore the real limitations of scientific or scholarly experts. They present their case as if evangelicals are foolish for not accepting what learned experts teach and report. To be sure, if evangelicals believe that the Bible teaches truth in such a way as to make science unnecessary, then Stephens and Giberson have a point. Even so, as evangelicals themselves, the authors might have made some effort to explain why the Bible is authoritative at least on some of the contested

claims of scientists. And as experts themselves, Stephens and Giberson might have conceded the weakness of scientific expertise. After all, at the very same time that they were writing this book, economic experts were giving advice to politicians, investment brokers, and bankers that turned out to do far more damage to the United States than any Creation Museum possibly could. ☺

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

## Biblical Theology

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by **Wayne K. Forkner**

*A New Testament Biblical Theology*, by G. K. Beale. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011, xxiv + 1047 pages, \$54.99.

*A New Testament Biblical Theology* (NTBT) is a product of much study and teaching on the New Testament by Dr. G. K. Beale. Begun in 1989, it is a wealth of biblical reflection. Within its pages are twenty-eight chapters distributed among ten parts. This review will attempt to provide an overview, highlighting its strengths and some weaknesses. All of these are offered to help the reader gain a better understanding of biblical theology and to encourage informed discussion of important issues in our denomination.

### Structure and Overview

Chapter 1 discusses and defines New Testa-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=323&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=323&issue_id=77).

ment (NT) biblical theology, especially as it is used in this book. The approach to biblical theology is in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos and Richard Gaffin, regarding the Bible’s “storyline” as the unifying concept. The book holds that, in order to understand New Testament theology, we need to understand the canonical story line from creation to consummation from which the major theological ideas flow.

The story line is defined in the first six chapters, comprising Part 1. In chapters 1 and 2 the Old Testament (OT) story line is defined:

The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his eschatological [all underlines in original text] new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory. (116)

A key to understanding this story line is the study of the phrase “latter days” found in the Old Testament. Chapter 4 looks at the eschatological themes found in Jewish writings focusing on the phrase “latter days,” and chapter 5 discusses the New Testament’s use of this eschatological theme of the “latter days.” It is pointed out that the New Testament presents eschatology in a two-stage process. This two-stage process is commonly known as the already and not yet aspect of eschatology. Chapter 6 looks at the methodological questions that pertain to proposing a central story line for biblical theology. The section ends with the proposed New Testament story line:

Jesus’s life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfillment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God’s glory. (182)

In addition to defining the story line, Part 1 discloses ten eschatological expectations unfulfilled in the Old Testament that will later be addressed in the bulk of the book. These expectations are parsed for explanatory purposes, but are here presented in paragraph form:

- (1) A final unsurpassed and incomparable period of tribulation for God’s people by an end-time opponent who deceives and persecutes, in the face of which they will need wisdom not to compromise; afterward they are (2) delivered, (3) resurrected, and their kingdom reestablished; (4) at this future time, God will rule on earth (5) through a coming Davidic king who will defeat all opposition and reign in peace in a new creation over both (6) the nations and (7) restored Israel, (8) with whom God will make a new covenant, and (9) upon whom God will bestow the Spirit, and (10) among whom the temple will be rebuilt. (115)

The bulk of the book (Parts 2–9) shows how the above expectations commence in the coming of Jesus Christ and are consummated in his second coming, thus applying the already-not yet story line to the eschatological expectation. In each of these parts, the themes are regarded in light of the relevant OT text, various Jewish writings (contemporary to the NT), and in the NT (usually in canonical order).

The concluding chapters look at new creational realities discussed in the book and show first how they relate to the OT saints and then discuss the continuity and discontinuity of the two-stage fulfillment. In the final chapter, the author presents the material’s application—showing how these truths bring glory to God and how the new creation’s transformative power should affect our Christian living and preaching.

## Strengths

This work argues persuasively for the already-not yet redemptive historical understanding of redemption and the establishment of the kingdom

which Christ inaugurates. The strongest part of this book is the way it exegetically interacts between the New and Old Testaments, showing how all of Scripture speaks of Christ and his work. Beale shows himself to be a master exegete and theologian. It is in the vast application of biblical theology to the exegesis of New Testament texts that the reader will spend many enjoyable hours.

## Weaknesses

My primary criticism of this book is the Old Testament story line as developed in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 begins by looking at the commission given to Adam. Positively, this chapter does a good job of showing that Adam needed to be obedient to receive escalated eschatological blessings, thus exegetically defending the covenant of works.

The Adamic commission as found in Genesis 1:28 is summarized as follows:

The commission of Gen. 1:26–28 involves the following elements, especially as summarized in 1:28: (1) “God Blessed them”; (2) “be fruitful and multiply”; (3) “fill the earth”; (4) “subdue” the “earth”; (5) “rule over ... all the earth.” (30)

This commission included God’s specific command of Genesis 2:16–17 not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (33). Adam failed to obtain the eschatological blessings by being disobedient to this commission.

Now, in developing an Old Testament story line, Adam is portrayed as a prototype, followed by other Adam-like figures, culminating in the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

As we will see below, after Adam’s failure to fulfill God’s mandate, God raised up other Adam-like figures to whom his kingly and priestly commission was passed on. We will find that some changes in the commission occurred as a result of sin entering into the world. Adam’s descendants, like him, however, fail. Failure would continue until there arose a “last Adam” who finally fulfilled the commission on behalf of humanity. (46)

This passing on of Adam’s commission to a number of Adam-like figures seems to flatten the biblical theological story of the Old Testament and blur the distinctives of the covenants. As stated in Romans 5:14, there were just two Adams, the first and the last (eschatological). The first Adam is a type of Christ. The entrance of sin made it impossible for any of Adam’s descendants by ordinary generation to be given the Adamic commission. I would argue that the execution of the Adamic commission waited until the second, eschatological Adam arrived.

According to Beale, the basic covenantal structure of the OT is that, after Adam’s sin, God gave the promise of the redeemer who would come in judgment (Gen. 3:15). Then God gave the covenant of common grace to Noah. In the Abrahamic covenant we see explicitly the covenant of grace ratified (Gen. 15). Even in the Mosaic covenant where we see a republication of the covenant of works, (with explicit commands) it is given within and for the furtherance of the postlapsarian covenant of grace.

Not only does this explanation flatten the covenantal structure of the OT, it assumes a repetition of the Adamic commission that is not found in the text. Noah and his sons are blessed and told to be fruitful and multiply, the same command given in Genesis 1:22, “And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’” There is, however, no command to rule or subdue. Further, there is no mention of any failure on Noah’s part to act on God’s commands. Instead, after Noah exits the ark, God maintains the common grace covenant.

Beale does see a change in the repetition of the Adamic commission to the following Adam figures. First there is an expansion of the commission. “After Adam’s sin, the commission would be expanded to include renewed humanity’s reign over unregenerate human forces arrayed against it” (53). This is nowhere evident in the patriarchal period. There is a sense in which Israel as a nation defeated its enemies, but this was not a worldwide reign as was to be Adam’s. Its reign was limited to

the land of promise.

Within that reigning there was to be a witnessing aspect. “Abraham’s descendants were to be a renewed humanity. They were to bear God’s image and ‘fill the earth’ with children who also bore that image, being beacons of light to others living in spiritual darkness” (53). However, Abraham and his descendants were never told to “fill the earth,” weakening the view that the Adamic Commission was in any way passed on. There is one more difference Beale explains:

Another difference in the repetition of the Gen. 1 commission is that whereas 1:28 and Gen. 9:1, 6–7 are expressed only as commands, the restatements beginning with the patriarchs are now stated formally as a promise. Even in these reiterations, however, parts of the commission usually are retained and are explicitly reiterated in an inextricable way to the restated promise. That the aspect of the commission is retained is apparent from the imperatives introducing the commission in Gen. 12:1–3: “Go forth from your country.... You shall be a blessing.” Likewise, the Gen. 35:11–12 promise includes the statement with imperatives: “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply.” The implication is that humanity cannot carry out this commission on its own, but God will enable humanity in some way to perform it, which he promises to do. (54)

There are two problems with this. First, in the Genesis 12 passage, we have the promise of God to Abraham, not a commission. While it is true that God calls Abraham to leave his country and go to the land he will show him, this is not a command as those given in the covenant of works. Second, in order to show continuity to the Adamic commission, there are two underlined phrases in the above quote. However, the first “You shall be a blessing,” is not a statement made about Adam. Genesis 1 says that God blessed Adam but does not give the promise that Adam would be a blessing. The second, “be fruitful and multiply,” does have the sense of command similar to that of Genesis.

However, this imperative given to Jacob follows the promise that God would multiply Jacob’s descendants (Gen. 28:13–14), and follows a multitude of similar promises to the patriarchs. The time of the patriarchs was replete with promises from God. As Meredith Kline writes:

But the title of the present work [*Kingdom Prologue*] assumes a later stance at the Abrahamic Covenant, and the kingdom as promised in that covenant was not established even in its preliminary, prototypal form until the mediatorial mission of Moses inaugurating the old covenant, as narrated in Exodus.<sup>2</sup>

To speak of the Adamic commission as being handed down to a number of Adam-like figures who fail does not do justice to the covenantal structure. Abraham is not presented as failing, for he was called not to do something Adam failed to do, but he was called to faith. In the Abrahamic covenant you have the promise of the “seed” who will bring in the blessings of the covenant (Gal 3:16), and it is he who will do what Adam failed to do.

Though some elements of ruling and subduing are evident in the Mosaic period, and there is republication of the covenant of works, Israel is not given the Adamic commission. The similarities between Adam commission and Israel’s commission are that they are both types of Christ (the eschatological Adam, the true Israel). Christ is the diamond from which all the OT types find their commonality.

Since both Adam and Israel are a type of Christ, and the bulk of this book unpacks the work of Christ typified in the Old Testament, the error of the Old Testament storyline does not adversely affect the bulk of this book.

## Justification

Chapter 15 examines the doctrine of justification: “This chapter will discuss the redemptive-his-

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2 Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 1.

torical story of salvation primarily through the lens of the ‘already and not yet’ notion of justification” (469). Here we see an interaction between what is known as the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*. What is the relationship between the two? How do we apply the already and not yet concept of the history of salvation accomplished to the individual? Now it must be said that Beale holds to the biblical view of justification. Applying the “lens of the ‘already and not yet’” to justification, however, does not bring it into focus, but confuses it.

The chapter begins by giving the definition of justification found in Chapter 11 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and defends the imputation of Christ’s active obedience. Then it attempts to apply the already and not yet scheme to the doctrine. It correctly ties justification to the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and its forensic nature. There is an allusion to Christ’s resurrection as his “vindication.” “Jesus’s own resurrection was an end-time event that ‘vindicated’ or ‘justified’ him from the wrong verdict pronounced on him by the world’s courts” (493). First Timothy 3:16 is furnished as proof of this vindication. In this section it is also said that the unity of believers with Christ brings them the vindication of his resurrection. “All those who believe in Christ are identified with his resurrection that vindicated him to be completely righteous, and this identification vindicates and declares them to be completely righteous.” Here “vindicate” seems to be synonymous with “justify.” For Beale this vindication of believers in Christ is their inaugurated vindication.

The next section of the chapter goes on to speak of the not yet justification that happens at the final resurrection. Three aspects of this not yet justification all seem to be public demonstrations/announcement of their justification, just as Jesus’s resurrection was a public demonstration of his justification. This is not what we typically mean by our doctrine of justification. Justification is what God declares before his judgment seat.

Here is the confessional language as found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

33. What is justification?

Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Here we see that justification is an “act” of God’s free grace.

32. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which, in this life, do either accompany or flow from them.

We partake of justification in this life.

38. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

At the resurrection we are “openly acknowledge and acquitted in the day of judgment.” Notice that what will happen at the resurrection is not justification. In discussing this question, G. I. Williamson writes: “But all who have been justified, adopted, and sanctified in Christ will be openly acknowledged and acquitted by him. That is, the Lord himself will declare that they are his, and that they are accepted in his sight, because they have found their righteousness in him alone.”<sup>3</sup>

Final resurrection from the dead is a benefit given to all believers. It is their being “openly acknowledged and declared.”

The confusion of this proposed not yet justification is also seen in the following paragraph:

On the other hand, there is a sense in which this vindication is not completed, especially in

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3 G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: For Study Classes* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003), 79.



that the world does not recognize God's vindication of his people. Just as happened to Jesus, the ungodly world has judged the saints' faith and obedience to God to be in the wrong, which has been expressed through persecution of God's people. As was the case with Christ, so with his followers: their final resurrection will vindicate the truth of their faith and confirm that their obedience was a necessary outgrowth of this faith. That is, although they have been declared righteous in God's sight when they believed, the world continued to declare them guilty. Their physical resurrection will be the undeniable proof of the validity of their faith which had already declared them righteous in their past life. (498)

First, notice that this paragraph says that this vindication is a vindication before the world. Justification is what happens before God's judgment seat, not the world. Second, it says that the sense in which a believer's vindication is not yet complete is "especially in that the world does not recognize God's vindication of his people." Jesus's vindication is not yet complete in this sense as well. Yes, Jesus's resurrection is an undeniable proof of who he is and what he has accomplished, but the unbelieving world continues in their sinful denial. Jesus's resurrection is also the undeniable proof of the justification of believers. Third, notice that this paragraph speaks of believer's resurrection as being undeniable proof of "the validity of their faith."

The confusion of speaking of a not yet justification of believers is compounded by the theological discussion in the church today, which in some ways mirrors the discussion of our forefathers. As the church defends the doctrine of justification before proponents of the New Perspective, it should seek to be as clear as were the Reformed fathers in defending it before the Roman Catholics.

In closing I would like to say that the deep mining of so many biblical texts made the reading of this book a devotional refreshment, giving much to savor and examine. I look forward to continuing my study of this massive work, and recommend that it be read and re-read by any who wish a fuller

understanding of God and his revealed will for his people. ©

**Wayne K. Forkner** is pastor of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, California.

## Faith in Politics

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by **Richard M. Gamble**

*Left, Right & Christ: Evangelical Faith in Politics*, by Lisa Sharon Harper and D. C. Innes. Boise, ID: Russell Media, 2011, 263 pages, \$22.99.

Coauthors Lisa Sharon Harper and David C. Innes stand on opposite ends of American evangelicalism's political spectrum, but they find enough common ground to debate the implications of Christian faith for current public policy. Their apt subtitle is "evangelical faith in politics," a promise to the reader that this book will not weigh in on the long historic struggle between church and state but rather address the more general problem of Christian action in the public square. Read ironically, the subtitle can also raise the unintended doubt about just how much faith evangelicals attempt to put into politics. Regardless, the book offers a lively rhetorical joust between two modern evangelicals, one from the more Democratic, social-justice, welfare-state side of the family and one from the more Republican, libertarian, minimal-state branch. In pairs of short chapters ranging from health care to abortion to foreign policy, the two authors advocate competing visions

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=322&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=322&issue_id=77).



for an applied Christianity. In doing so, they follow the trajectory that evangelicals have followed since long before the social gospel of a century ago and that they travel along to this day.

Despite real differences in theology and political ideology, Harper and Innes at the outset acknowledge their family resemblances. They are right to do so. We ought to take this starting point seriously because it provides the key to the book's ultimate significance and why Reformed pastors and elders might want to think twice about heeding the advice of either author. They begin their analysis from a set of shared assumptions that reflect evangelicalism's trademark mix of Christian faith and practical politics. Both authors identify themselves as "values voters." Both believe that the gospel has "implications for politics." Both emphasize Christianity's transformational, even revolutionary, divine mandate. In doing so, both adopt evangelicalism's long-standing habit of gliding effortlessly from the church (and Israel) to the modern nation-state, all the while downplaying or ignoring the role of the institutional church in the right ordering of faith and politics for the believer. And both interpret the American founding in a way that serves more to justify current policy proposals (whether liberal or libertarian) than to account for what was actually going on in the lives and thought of British colonists two and a half centuries ago.

Of critical concern for the readers of *Ordained Servant* ought to be the authors' tendency to generalize the Bible's specific instructions to Israel and the church into prescriptions for society at large. Harper and Innes routinely handle verses in isolation from the context of Israel and the church and outside the framework of redemptive history. Harper's way of doing this will be familiar to anyone who has read her mentors Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, and Jim Wallis and knows their proclivity for invoking the ancient prophets to indict modern consumer society. She moves seamlessly, for instance, from Moses's commands in Leviticus regarding the alien to America's need for an open immigration policy, and from the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount to enacting "God's ways"

in American law and achieving "shalom." But over on the right, Innes distills public policy from Scripture in much the same way, connecting his own set of verses to his own preferred policies. And because his self-described "conservative" agenda will likely appeal to many in Reformed churches, his handling of key New Testament passages calls for careful attention.

Innes returns often to Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–15. Both of these passages provide fundamental apostolic instruction to the persecuted church. Both passages command faithful believers to pay taxes and to submit to earthly rulers, even (or especially) "evil and unbelieving" ones, as Luther and Calvin emphasized in their commentaries. Christians obey those in authority for the sake of conscience and to silence those who would speak evil against the church. In the context of these directives, Paul and Peter mention as "givens" the tasks God has ordained for earthly government, among them, to punish evildoers and to reward the good. From these indirect and subordinate points about earthly magistrates, Innes extracts God's mandate for good government. But the question at stake in Romans 13 is not whether government is doing what God calls it to do (that's assumed), but rather whether Christians are glorifying God by humbly submitting to their rulers. Likewise, removing three verses from 1 Peter (in the midst of what is a profoundly non-transformational chapter) and turning them into political principles renders the larger teaching of the epistle invisible. Peter wrote to encourage an exiled people, scattered in Asia Minor, who suffered for the faith. The epistle as a whole urges those under political and spiritual oppression to endure their hardship. Peter's words cannot be construed as contributing any justification for a modern American version of minimal government, free-market economics, a strong national defense, and conservative social policy. To do so distorts and misdirects a precious reassurance given to a sojourning church.

Innes's handling of 1 Peter 2 also raises another recurring problem. He obscures the vital distinction between the church and the world by

using the pronouns “us” and “we” and “our” in ways that are correct when applied to the body of Christ but absolutely erroneous when it comes to the American polity or any earthly power. A case in point is his political interpretation of verse 15. “After specifying what government is to do,” he claims, “Peter states, ‘This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.’” But then in the next sentence Innes turns this apostolic command into a civics lesson: “God’s will is that you, the private citizen[,] whether on your own or with others, do good.” Somehow the Christian has become the citizen and the command to the church has become a principle of public welfare. Further down on the same page (62), Innes takes the specific instruction of Paul to Timothy that the church pray for earthly rulers (so “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life”) and turns it into merely good advice for the polity: “God’s purpose for civil government is that it provide an umbrella of protection for person and property that frees people to go about their business undisturbed.” At a stroke, the precise “we” of Scripture mysteriously becomes the “people” of libertarian public policy. Regrettably, Innes’s political theology relies on this dubious method of exegesis from cover to cover.

Harper and Innes also display a troubling disregard for the institutional church, preferring to talk instead about “faith.” Faith is less precise and easier to apply than theology, and this may be the advantage in making an argument for Christian political engagement. To take one example, the early chapter in which the authors establish their “common ground” tells the story of creation, fall, and redemption without once mentioning Israel or the church (speaking only of the kingdom of God). This is an unfortunate omission because a proper political theology can emerge only from a proper ecclesiology. The church is central to the Christian life through the ministry of Word and sacrament. There is no way to sort out the right relationship between faith and politics without first acknowledging the church’s unique and exalted role in the history of redemption. And it shares that calling with no other institution. The church, not

America, is God’s holy nation, chosen people, and treasured possession (1 Pet. 2). With this distinction firmly in hand, it would be impossible to misapply apostolic teaching outside the bounds of the church and to turn true kingdom ethics into social ethics. The Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism, moreover, describe the intimate relationship between the triune God and the church in words that could never apply to the nation-state. The visible church is “under God’s special care and government” and “protected and preserved in all ages” (LC 63). The church is “the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (WCF 25.1). It is “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God” (WCF 25.2). Only with the church in its fullness and glory fixed in our view can we hope to think rightly about how to enter into the political sphere with a due sense of proportion, modest expectations, and the transience of earthy accomplishments, and armed with the means to combat any confusion between God’s purposes for the church and the nation.

Politics is an important but temporary and ordinary thing. Like economics and war, and the arts and sciences, politics belongs to the common life that Christians share with Mormons, Muslims, Jews, and atheists. American Christians are at liberty to vote their values, run for public office, campaign for the party of their choice, subscribe to policy journals, serve in the military, and lobby for or against legislation. But they do so, if they choose to do so at all, as citizens of a particular nation at a particular moment in time and under historically conditioned circumstances and institutions. Paul and Peter offered first-century Christians scattered in the Roman Empire no advice on how to do this. The apostles did not address themselves to the government. They had no Word from God for it. By trying to stretch the Bible to apply to all of life, Harper and Innes end up inadvertently showing how little practical advice God’s Word really gives about politics, economics, and foreign policy. Instead, the Bible teaches pastors, elders, deacons, husbands, wives, children, masters, and servants their duties and privileges within God’s house-

hold. It calls an exilic, suffering people to conduct themselves in a way that honors Christ and his gospel. On that pilgrimage Christians might live under a government that accords them safety, the rule of law, prosperity, and freedom of worship, and maybe even the opportunity to participate in politics. But they may not be so blessed. And if not, their faith endures. ©

**Richard M. Gamble**, *an elder at Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is Anna Margaret Ross Alexander Professor of History and Political Science at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.*

## The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Part I

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by **Dennis E. Johnson**

*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Volume 1: *The Biblical Period*, 1998, 383 pages, \$37.00. Volume 2: *The Patristic Age*, 1998, 481 pages, \$45.00. Volume 3: *The Medieval Church*, 1999, 646 pages, \$55.00.

Hughes Oliphant Old's magisterial seven-volume series provides an illuminating, humbling, provocative, and sometimes surprising exercise in time-travel. It takes readers through almost three and a half millennia of the proclamation of God's Word

in the worship of God's people. Our tour guide may well be the premier living historian of worship in the Reformed tradition. He pastored Presbyterian (USA) churches in Pennsylvania and Indiana, completed doctoral studies on the patristic roots of Reformed worship at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland, and was a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, New Jersey. Recently, he has been appointed as John H. Leith Professor of Reformed Theology and Worship and Dean of the Institute for Reformed Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary. He has published on prayer in worship, baptism, and a widely-used introduction to the elements of worship.<sup>2</sup>

Both reading and reviewing *Reading and Preaching* pose daunting challenges. Excluding bibliographies and indices, the text of the seven volumes totals 4,125 pages. They are not best absorbed by quick skimming or speed reading. Trying to survey such a massive enterprise in a review of reasonable length is like introducing someone to the Pacific Ocean by offering a thimbleful of salt water—or, on the other hand, by pointing to the blue expanse between Asia and California on a satellite photo of the Earth. The editor of *Ordained Servant* has kindly let me write two reviews (volumes 1–3 now, volumes 4–7 to come). Still, my task is intimidating. I shall try to combine the two strategies just mentioned: to offer satellite-altitude observations about the features of the whole “ocean,” along with thimbleful tastes of the flavors to be found in *Reading and Preaching*. I assume that the pastors, elders, and other *Ordained Servant* readers approach book reviews with the question in mind, “Should I invest precious dollars and even more precious hours in this volume or set?” (If you were to pay full retail price—does anyone still pay this?—the set would set you back \$337. Having read only 34% so far, I cannot begin to estimate the investment in hours to absorb what this set has to offer.) I am persuaded, nonetheless, that the costs in funds and time are well worth the investment.

<sup>2</sup> *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* (Westminster John Knox, 1985; expanded and revised edition, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=319&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=319&issue_id=77).

First, a few words about the perspectives of our guide, as they emerge from the first thousand pages or so. Although Dr. Old's ministry has been predominantly in mainline Presbyterian and ecumenical circles, his extensive and deep conversation with past generations of preachers has led him to conservative sensitivities and confessional convictions. It is not surprising, therefore, that recently he has been affiliated with Erskine Seminary, the theological school of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, a NAPARC member denomination. His biblical, Reformed convictions and sense of historical perspective come to expression in his discerning assessment and critique of contemporary church practice and priorities, whether in mainline, evangelical, charismatic, confessional, or other ecclesiastical traditions. Our guide repeatedly notes how the church in earlier times offers correctives to the deficiencies of today's churches. Concerning the preaching of Jan Hus (ca. 1372–1415), for example, Old writes:

His call for church reform foreshadowed the Protestant Reformation by a whole century. His demand for integrity in the Church has ecumenical implications. "Mainline" Protestantism here in America would do well to listen carefully to his warnings, for many of his criticisms apply as much to us. (3.468)<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere Dr. Old speaks from his identity as a Christian who treasures his heritage from the Calvinistic Reformers as he registers respectful but forthright critiques of those who have gone before (for example, Origen's and others' allegorism, or the gospel-devoid moralism of much medieval preaching). Walking with Dr. Old through thousands of years enables readers to experience the value of staying in respectful conversation with the past. As C. S. Lewis observed in his oft-cited preface to a translation of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation of the Word*, writers of other eras had their blind spots, as we today have ours. But their errors

are not likely to be those to which we and our contemporaries are prone. Lewis advised that the "only palliative" to the self-reinforcing blindness of our own era is "to keep the clear sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books." Their authors "will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Old leads us into an engagement with the company of preachers who pioneered the way before us, approaching them with thoughtful humility that is simultaneously empathetic and appropriately critical.

In telling the story of the way that the church's pastors and theologians have handled the Word in worship, Old's perspective is catholic—that is, he is positively inclusive and universal in several respects. Obviously, the series aims to be chronologically catholic. It spans roughly three and a half millennia from the ministry of Moses at the exodus to the first decade of the twenty-first century. The treatment is theologically and ecumenically catholic, giving attention to preaching among the Orthodox communions, the Church of Rome, and the various Protestant traditions, both in their confessional expressions and in modernist departures from the church's historic faith revealed in God's Word and articulated in ancient creeds. As much as possible, Old's catholicity strives to be geographical and ethnic as well. Not surprisingly, available resources and the author's ecclesiastical setting converge to produce a certain focus on the Western church, on Protestantism, and on the European and American scenes. This less-than-global focus is especially evident in volumes 5 (roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and 6 (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), though the former has chapters on Romanian and Russian Orthodoxy. Yet volume 7 (late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries) reopens the lens to a wider angle, profiling preaching taking place today in

3 In this review citations from *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures* are identified simply by volume and page. Thus "3.468" is volume 3, page 468.

4 C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," in *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. and ed. A. R. C. S. M. V. (1944; rev. ed. London: A. R. Mowbray, 1953), 5.

the churches of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere.

The series title speaks of the *reading*, as well as the preaching, of the Scriptures in worship. Preaching has pride of place in Dr. Old's discussion, but his scope exceeds a history of homiletic practice or theory. In the present time, when the reading of significant and sizable portions of Scripture is in decline in much of the Western church, Old illustrates how our contemporary "lite" exposure to the Word in worship falls short of the liturgical priorities and practices of the church in earlier times, and in other places. Old describes and evaluates various approaches that have been employed in the organization of preaching series and selection of biblical texts for individual sermons, ranging from catechetical (topical) sermons, to festal sermons linked to an ecclesiastical calendar, to sermons preached specifically for evangelistic and prophetic purposes, to the practice of expositing and applying texts successively through whole books of the Bible (*lectio continua*, "continuous reading," in contrast to *lectio selecta*, reading and preaching texts chosen for their relevance to specific doctrines or liturgical days or seasons). He finds evidence of *lectio continua* biblical exposition as far back as the practice of the pre-Christian Jewish synagogue, then in the ministries of such fathers as Origen (1.342–45) and John Chrysostom (1.173–89), in that of Bonaventure in the medieval period (3.363–64), and in the pulpit ministry of the major Protestant Reformers and their successors (4.19–27, 46–47, 92–121, etc.). *Lectio continua* was also an organizing principle that guided the composition of some of the lectionaries—annual or seasonal schedules of scriptural texts to be read in worship on particular dates—that have survived from the early centuries of the church's history. Fragments of patristic and medieval lectionaries evidence a thoughtful selection of passages from the Law, the Prophets, the Epistles, and Gospels that are correlated with each other thematically as well as aligned with the liturgical calendar of seasons and feasts, while others direct preachers toward a progressive exposition of biblical books. Dr. Old discusses fifth-century lectionaries used in

Jerusalem (2.135–66) and by the Syriac-speaking church (2.277–95), lectionaries developed in Gaul from the fifth to seventh centuries (3.81–95), and lectionaries used in the great centers of Christianity, Byzantium (3.67–72) and Rome (3.143–84). Whichever rationale was followed to determine which Scriptures were to be read weekly (and sometimes daily) in worship, the point to be taken away from this aspect of Old's narrative is that reading and hearing Scripture—substantial portions of Scripture—are intrinsic to the corporate worship and spiritual vitality of the church. Dr. Old's survey of the Syriac lectionaries closes with an observation with implications for today's church: "One cannot help but be impressed by the fact that so much of the Bible is included. The enthusiasm of the Syriac-speaking church for the public reading of Scripture is evident" (2.295). Likewise, regarding the Byzantine lectionary, our guide comments: "There is an obvious delight here in the reading of Scripture. That the same passage might be read a second or third time in the course of a week seems to bother no one" (3.72). In our planning of the church's worship, are we providing to God's people a rich and balanced diet of hearing the Word of God read aloud?

Dr. Old directs our attention to the church's corporate *worship* as the context for the reading and preaching of Scripture. Elsewhere he presented the argument of Calvin and his heirs that the Scriptures, in which God reveals his will for his people, have supreme authority to direct our worship practices; and he traced the trajectory of biblically-warranted liturgical elements throughout church history.<sup>5</sup> In this series, the focus is on the announcement of God's Word given in Scripture, through reading and exposition, as definitive of the sacred meeting of the Lord with his redeemed and worshipful people. Beginning with the Book of Exodus, Old comments: "According to the oldest traditions, the reading of Scripture goes back as far as the worshiping assembly of Israel at the foot of

<sup>5</sup> Old, *Worship*. See also Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).



Mount Sinai.... Moses reads the book of the covenant before the assembly of the people as an act of solemn worship” (1.22, 24). This biblical perspective on preaching, sounded in the opening pages of volume 1, reappears throughout. Preaching is more than conveying truth, persuading others, and motivating them to repentance and obedience—though it must not be less than these. Both the preacher and his hearers must be aware that they stand in the presence of the living God, humbled by his holiness and searching omniscience but also heartened by his grace in Christ to anticipate his Spirit’s refreshing and renewing power at work in his Word preached.

The focus on preaching in the venue of the church’s worship, however, does not mean that preachers can merely presuppose their hearers’ acceptance of the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection. In view of recent debates in our circles over the legitimacy of preaching in worship that not only edifies saints but also calls unbelievers to repentance and faith in Christ, Old brings a horizon-expanding perspective by citing the practice of preachers who served in the midst of pagan (pre-Christendom) cultures, which have growing similarities to the post-Christendom environment that confronts the contemporary church. One of the few surviving sermons from the early second century is the so-called Second Epistle of Clement, which is actually a sermon preached to the church at Corinth, expounding a prophetic text (Isa. 54:1), a Gospel text (Matt. 9:13), and other Scriptures (1.278). The sermon “is preached to a Christian congregation and yet it is also a witness to non-Christians.” Its evangelistic approach is not based on a theology of decisional regeneration or baptismal regeneration, but “on justification by faith, on the confidence that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” So the sermon calls all its hearers, whether professing faith or not, to repentance leading to salvation (1.283). In a similar vein, Old hears in John Chrysostom’s sermons on Genesis, preached two and a half centuries later when the Roman Empire was, nominally, friendlier to Christian faith, “a very definite evangelistic thrust.” John preached the ty-

pological connections between the patriarchs and Christ to equip his parishioners to offer persuasive arguments “in friendly exchange with the Jews,” in dependence on God’s Spirit to open blind eyes and convince hearts (2.179).

While commending the example of preachers who have prioritized evangelizing the unconverted along with building believers, Dr. Old is not unaware of the risks of trying to speak Christ’s gospel in terms that are intelligible to the unpersuaded. He comments,

Origen made it possible for the Church to speak the language of that [third-century Alexandrian] culture.... He was the first in a long line of Christian preachers who would make a bridge between the Christian faith and the prevailing culture of the day. After Origen would come a Gregory the Great, a Bossuet, a Schleiermacher, an Adolf von Harnack, and a Harry Emerson Fosdick, each of whom in one way or another built a bridge between the Christian faith and a very different culture. (1.307)

Some names in this cavalcade of church-to-culture bridge-builders could well lead us to suspect that efforts to speak God’s truth to the world as well as to the church too easily introduces distortions of that precious, saving truth. Old himself admits: “Each made certain compromises, some acceptable, some regrettable” (1.307). We may differ about where the line falls between “acceptable” and “regrettable” compromises. Yet, despite the risks, preachers must speak gospel truth clearly, without compromising its content. This duty is enjoined by such biblical precedents as Paul’s speeches in Dispersion synagogues and the Areopagus (admittedly, not venues of Christian worship) and the way that his epistles—to *Christian congregations*—engage Greco-Roman philosophical concepts and cultural institutions, summoning readers to self-examination, repentance, and faith in Christ. Old reminds us that gospel preachers, ranging from the matchless Chrysostom to the lesser known Maximus of Turin, preached evangelistically in worship, “inviting non-Christians to



receive catechetical instruction and baptism” in their sermons (2.342–4).

The mention of Chrysostom above invites comment on Old’s evaluation of the interpretive handling of Scripture by the preachers whom he surveys in these first three volumes. Chrysostom, “the greatest preacher the Church ever produced” (2.170), was a master of the typological hermeneutic that the School of Antioch derived from Jesus’s and the apostles’ redemptive-historical, Christocentric understanding of the Old Testament. Our guide unabashedly affirms,

It was Jesus himself, as summed up in the story of the Emmaus road, who opened to his disciples the Scriptures (Luke 24:32). It was Jesus who established the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures, and it was from Jesus that the apostles learned this interpretation ... presenting Christ as the fulfillment of the Scriptures. (1.251)

Old finds sound applications of the New Testament’s typological interpretation of the Old Testament not only in Chrysostom, but also in Second Clement (1.284); in Melito of Sardis (1.285); and even in an Alexandrian preacher such as Hesychius of Jerusalem (2.131).

The biblical instinct to read the Old Testament Scriptures in relation to Christ also came to expression in allegorical excesses that Old cannot commend. Although capable of sober contextual exegesis, Origen also made strained connections between Old Testament texts and Christ through etymologies, numerology, and symbolism unrelated to Scripture’s historical contexts (1.317–18). Origen’s inventiveness occasions our guide’s insightful discussion of the similarities and differences between allegory and typology in the proclamation of the whole Bible’s Christocentric message (1.333–41). Though briefer than other treatments of biblical typology (as contrasted to allegorism),<sup>6</sup>

6 Edmund P. Clowney, “Preaching Christ from All the Scripture,” in Samuel T. Logan, Jr., ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1986), 163–91; Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*

this discussion early in the series makes distinctions that are helpful to bear in mind as one travels through succeeding centuries of Christian preaching—as, for example, when he finds even in the great Augustine, at times, “the wildest excesses of allegorical interpretation” (2.359–60).

Related to the importance of a sound approach to proclaiming the Bible’s Christ-centered focus is Old’s concern that preachers must proclaim *the gospel*, the great redemptive achievements of the incarnate Christ in his death and resurrection. As the gospel spread across the ancient and medieval world, drawing people into God’s light out of pagan darkness, generations of preachers faced the challenge of instilling holiness of life in newly converted congregants. Although Dr. Old empathizes with their pastoral concern, he cannot excuse sermons so heavily weighted toward moral duty that they were virtually devoid of the gospel of grace. Gregory of Nyssa’s sermons on the Beatitudes, for example, so stressed human self-discipline that God’s “mercy” to the merciful was reduced to a justly-earned, and thus graceless, reward (2.89–91). Likewise, toward the close of the medieval period, in the nominalist pietism of Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), Christ’s passion became a summons to “enter into the sufferings of Christ, that one might thereby achieve salvation” (3.510). Old concludes soberly, “This sermon is not a proclamation of what Christ has done to free us from our sin, but an exhortation to do the best we can to earn our own salvation. That might make quite a bit of sense to the secular humanist of our day” (3.511).

On the other hand, though Old finds the great Augustine’s allegorical inventiveness unpersuasive, he also appreciates that the church father’s “simple, straightforward” Easter sermons show that “the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ was central to the preaching of Augustine,

(Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 11–44; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 69–109, Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 94–108.

and in preaching it, as we have seen, he preached faith” (2.381). Likewise, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas’s preaching on the atonement (indebted to Anselm’s soteriology) and on Christ’s resurrection exposed the gravity of our spiritual need and displayed the centrality of Jesus’s redemptive achievement (3.417–30). Preachers are most faithful to their calling (and, I would add, most effective in aiding true sanctification of affections, motives, and actions) when they imitate Paul’s resolve to “know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), delivering to their hearers “as of first importance” the central truths “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

So much more should be said about these first three volumes of *Reading and Preaching*. I have not even mentioned Gregory Nazianzen, “the Christian Demosthenes” (2.61–82); or Ambrose, whose preaching was so formative for Augustine (2.300–25); or Augustine’s invaluable homiletical handbook, *On Christian Teaching* (2.386–97); or the preaching of missionaries who brought the faith into Europe (3.73–141); or the homiletic distinctives of the medieval monastic orders, the Benedictines (3.185–252), the Cistercians (3.253–92), the Franciscans (3.341–86), and the Dominicans (3.387–440). I have bypassed questions and objections that I jotted here and there on page margins. (Yet, though I recognize the selectivity demanded of the author of so comprehensive an enterprise and the presumption of suggesting that anything significant has been omitted, nevertheless I will humbly register mild disappointment that the discussion of preaching in the New Testament itself [1.111–250] did not include the “word of exhortation” to the Hebrews [Heb. 13:22], the only sermon preached to a new covenant church to be found in the canon.)

At least, I hope that this sampling of Old’s awe-inspiring survey of almost three millennia of Word ministry, from Moses to the eve of the Reformation, helps readers glimpse the contours of this vast ocean and invites them to let the “clean sea breeze

of the ages” refresh their approach to the high and holy calling of reading and preaching God’s Word in the assembly of his people. ☉

**Dennis E. Johnson** is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America serving as a professor of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, and associate pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Escondido, California.

## Bonhoeffer: Whose Hero?

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* by Eric Mataxas. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010, xvi + 591 pages, \$29.99.

Considered from the perspective of pure reading enjoyment this book is a gem. From *Christianity Today* to *Publishers Weekly* and the *Wall Street Journal*, the book gets the highest accolades. Written with page-turning agility, it should reign for some time as the definitive biography of this twentieth-century hero. But with liberals, like Alan Wolfe in *The New Republic* (review January 13, 2011), and evangelicals, like Collin Hansen, wanting to claim Dietrich Bonhoeffer as their own, we should be cautious of how we assess such a hero.

Raised in a seriously sophisticated home and culture, Bonhoeffer (1906–45) had extraordinary

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=320&issue\\_id=77](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=320&issue_id=77).

advantages of both intellect and piety. His father, Karl, was the son of Stanislaus Kalkreuth, an accomplished painter. Karl was a brilliant, notable physician, becoming the chair of psychiatry and neurology in Berlin in 1912 (13). His mother, Paula, was born of nobility. Her mother, Countess Clara von Hase, took piano lessons from Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann (6). Both parents were highly disciplined, requiring intelligent conversation at the family table. But this strictness was well seasoned with lots of informal sports and regular trips to family cottages in the mountains. Karl had a great sense of humor and tempered his intolerance of narrow-mindedness, dishonesty, and clichés with fairness and kindness (15).

Dietrich and his twin sister, Sabine, were blessed with two governesses, Käthe and Maria van Horn, both schooled in the pietist theologian Count Zinzendorf's community at Herrnhut (11–12). Bonhoeffer's mother oversaw the religious training of her children, but they were not church goers, preferring home piety to the formalism of the state Lutheran church of Germany (12, 19). His father was not a Christian but never interfered with his wife's instruction of their children (14). Mataxas describes German Christianity in the early twentieth century:

The worlds of folklore and religion were so mingled in early twentieth century German culture that even families that didn't go to church were often deeply Christian.... German culture was inescapably Christian. This was the result of the legacy of Martin Luther, the Catholic monk who invented Protestantism. (19)

Mataxas never reflects on the possibility that the nominalism fostered by a state-sponsored church, albeit confessional, combined with home grown pietism, was not a formidable enough opponent to withstand the intense nationalism of the Nazi juggernaut that forced it to compromise its confessional heritage and embrace National Socialism.

Mataxas does a splendid job of weaving Bonhoeffer's story into world, and especially European

and American, history. The Bonhoeffers were reserved in their enthusiasm for World War I. Dietrich's two older brothers, Karl-Friederich and Walter, were called up as the war progressed in 1917 (25). Walter was killed in early 1918 (26). Years later after the loss of two more sons to Nazism, Karl remarked, "We are sad, but also proud" (26). Such a heroic attitude was a family trait. Dietrich was never far from personal loss and national tragedy. The Treaty of Versailles would help cultivate the soil of an intense German nationalism that would bring out the worst in some and best in others. The intellectual and artistic genius of a nation would be in ruins before the eyes of one of Germany's noblest sons. Mataxas begins chronicling the rise of Adolf Hitler as early as 1923 (44).

Rare indeed was the theologian, in Bonhoeffer's milieu, that would affirm Christian orthodoxy. Liberalism had been a staple of German academic theology since well back into the nineteenth century. At the age of fourteen in 1920, he announced to his family that he intended to be a theologian (37). At age fifteen, he attended his first evangelistic meetings in Berlin, conducted by General Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army. In 1923, Bonhoeffer studied at Tübingen and then the following year at Berlin University (42).

At this point he began to ponder a lifelong question, What is the church? (53–57). During his first trip to Rome he found himself deeply impressed with Catholicism. He had been raised to eschew parochialism, and so the catholicity of the church would lead him to become part of the ecumenical movement. While some of his ecumenical ties would not impress us, the basic thrust of Bonhoeffer's catholic—with a small "c"—sensibilities helped him see the church as a divine institution that was never to be defined by any national identity (53). Bonhoeffer was also impressed by the classical antiquity of the Roman church (54). Historic continuity was vital to maintaining the church's witness in the midst of various cultures. Sadly, the Lutheran church of his day was so compromised that he could not find that continuity there and even wondered if the Reformation had been necessary (55). But Bonhoeffer had no

intention of converting. The illegal seminaries that Bonhoeffer created “incorporated the best of both Protestant and Catholic traditions” (61).

As a student in Berlin, Bonhoeffer had much contact with Adolf von Harnack, who was a neighbor and family friend. But, while he esteemed him as a scholar, he did not agree at all with his theological liberalism (59). Among the theological heavy-weights of Berlin University at the time were Karl Holl, Reinhold Seeberg, and Adolf Deissmann (60). But no one was to have such an influence on Bonhoeffer as the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth of Göttingen.

For refusing to swear allegiance to Hitler, Barth would be kicked out of Germany in 1934, and would become the principal author of the Barmen Declaration, in which the Confessing Church trumpeted its rejection of the Nazi’s attempt to bring their philosophy into the German church. (61)

Bonhoeffer’s professor John Baillie reckoned Bonhoeffer “the most convinced disciple of Dr. Barth that had appeared among us up to that time, and withal as stout an opponent of liberalism as had ever come my way.” (106)

In 1931, Bonhoeffer first met Barth and visited him frequently thereafter (119–21).

During the 1930s, the Nazi party not only took political power, but began subtly to co-opt the Lutheran state church for its own severely nationalistic purposes. This is an intricate and cautionary tale at many levels. But it was Bonhoeffer’s conception of the uniqueness of the church and its gospel message that enabled him to navigate the treacherous waters of Hitler’s Germany. It was here that Barth’s emphasis on the transcendence of God as “eternally other” helped Bonhoeffer (155), even though the dangers of Barth’s theology are well-known — or ought to be — among us.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1946); *Christianity and Barthianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed

At the end of 1927, Bonhoeffer successfully defended his doctoral dissertation in Berlin University. Shortly after this, in 1928, he took his first pastorate in the German congregation in Barcelona, Spain. He threw himself into the work, believing that communicating his theology in the congregation was “as important as the theology itself” (85). A year later in 1929, he returned to Berlin for post-doctoral studies (87).

At this point Mataxas briefly explores the question of Luther and the Jews (91–94). He shows how the Nazis used the worst of Luther’s thoughts about the Jews, which occurred later in his life, to deceive the German people. Early in his ministry, Luther had been quite charitable toward the Jews. Mataxas seems to lay much of Luther’s later bitterness toward the Jews at the feet of his various illnesses.

In the summer of 1929 Bonhoeffer passed his second theological exam, qualifying him to be a university lecturer. Shortly after this, in 1930, he sailed for America to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City (96). He found the cosmopolitan culture to be vibrant in contrast with the fatigued German Weimar culture (99). The seminary, on the other hand, proved less than satisfying. He complained:

There is no theology here.... They talk a blue steak without the slightest substantive foundation and with no evidence of any criteria. The students — on the average twenty-five to thirty years old — are completely clueless with respect to what dogmatics is really about. They are unfamiliar with even the most basic questions. They become intoxicated with liberal and humanistic phrases, laugh at the fundamentalists, and yet basically are not even up to their level. (101)

In line with the family tradition, instilled by his father, Bonhoeffer had no patience with the cant of the liberal elite he encountered at Union and Riverside Church. His correspondence reveals

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Publishing Company, 1962).

a certain heartache over the theological shallowness of the students he studied with. In the churches he lamented the absence of the proclamation of the gospel and biblical preaching. “The sermon has been reduced to parenthetical church remarks about newspaper events” (106).

By contrast Bonhoeffer found the worship in the black churches of Harlem to be encouraging. Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church became a favorite. Mataxas notes, “Powell combined the fire of a revivalist preacher with great intellect and social vision” (108). It is curious, though, that despite the strength of Bonhoeffer’s critique of American liberalism, he does not critique the intellectually powerful liberal theologians under which he was trained with the same kind of trenchant interaction offered by J. Gresham Machen in books like *Christianity and Liberalism*. It would seem that the liberalism of the German theological schools accounts for much of the weakness of the Lutheran church of Bonhoeffer’s day. Perhaps he was too intellectually proud at this point in his life to see this.

It is curious that, while mentioning the fundamentalist controversy that Bonhoeffer encountered during his stay at Union in New York (101–3),<sup>3</sup> Mataxas never mentions professor J. Gresham Machen, who was not only prominent in the controversy, but followed a tack oddly similar, at least in broad outline, to Bonhoeffer’s own course. Like Machen, Bonhoeffer took a brave stand against the corruption of the Lutheran church; he started his own seminaries (Zingst and Finkenvalde); and was instrumental in seeking to start a faithful church (The Confessing Church).

The year 1931 found Bonhoeffer back in Berlin. Shortly after his return, he experienced a profound deepening of his seriousness as a Christian. “I had seen a great deal of the Church, and talked and preached about it—but I had not yet become a Christian” (123). He had prayed little,

<sup>3</sup> Mataxas makes a minor historical mistake when he identifies Fosdick as the pastor of New York’s First Presbyterian Church (102). He was in fact a Baptist who was stated supply for that church in 1922.

but now the Sermon on the Mount convinced him that a true servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church. He “became a regular churchgoer for the first time in his life and took Communion as often as possible.”

After describing the dramatic change of attitude in Bonhoeffer during the early 1930s, Mataxas queries, “Had he been ‘born again?’” (124). But, why do we American evangelicals wish to co-opt Bonhoeffer for our cause? Professor Carl Trueman raised this question in a recent blog, “Bonhoeffer and Anonymous Evangelicals.”<sup>4</sup> As in the case of William Wilberforce, many evangelicals are enthralled by Christian involvement in the cultural moment, as if such overt, especially public, political, acts are the most dependable signs of authenticity. Early on Mataxas states a theme that lies at the heart of his motivation to write a biography of Bonhoeffer. “Bonhoeffer was no mere academic. For him ideas and beliefs were nothing if they did not relate to the world of reality outside one’s mind” (53). Significant people make a difference in the world. Fair enough, there is great value in what Mataxas presents. Mataxas insists, “Bonhoeffer’s words reveal that he was never what we might today term a *culture warrior*, nor could he easily be labeled *conservative* or *liberal*” (95). But one still senses something of the cultural transformationist in Mataxas’s interest in Bonhoeffer.

As Hitler came to power and began to infiltrate German culture with his diabolical, utopian agenda, Bonhoeffer began more and more to articulate the contrast between the Nazi claim that Hitler could save Germany and the Bible’s claim that “salvation comes only from Jesus Christ” (128). The Third Reich began when Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. The Führer Principle posited independent and absolute authority in the “leader” of the German people. Bonhoeffer contrasted this with the old biblical idea of leadership in which the leader sought to serve others and knew the limits of his

<sup>4</sup> Carl Trueman, “Bonhoeffer and Anonymous Evangelicals,” *Reformation 21* (January 18, 2011), <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2011/01/bonhoeffer-and-anonymous-evang.php>.



authority under God (138–45).

From this point on, Bonhoeffer's struggles with the Nazi's and the church are epic. His London pastorate and his brief return to Union in New York could not tempt him to abandon his country in its hour of need. Hitler proved a very sly adversary as he sought to win Christians to his vision for the nation. His propaganda was powerful in its determination to convince the churches of the compatibility of Christianity with the aims of the Third Reich (165–75). Secretly, in the beginning, Hitler and the Nazis despised Christianity as a religion of the weak, inhibiting the will to power of the Nietzschean superman (168). Many church leaders, known as the German Christians, were convinced and even willing to adopt the Aryan Paragraph, which would exclude all but the "pure race" from the church. Many more in the middle were afraid to oppose what they knew to be wrong. A minority had the foresight and courage to openly condemn the vicious anti-Semitic racism and tyranny of the Nazis. This would give rise to Bonhoeffer's leadership in the formation of the Confessing Church in May 1934 (222). The famous Barmen Confession, mainly composed by Karl Barth, distinguished historical Lutheran theology from the corrupt theology of the Nazi-favoring German Christians (222–26).

The various intrigues and heroic deeds that followed, as Hitler eventually led Germany into World War II, resulted in Bonhoeffer's untimely execution, just two weeks before the war's end. I will not recount this part of the story in the interest of space and my unwillingness to ruin the story for the reader. But several important lessons stand out.

Reared in the most rigorous academic milieu of family, culture, and university, and a man of stellar brilliance, Bonhoeffer nonetheless believed that preaching the Word was the most important activity of his life as a minister (he was ordained November 15, 1931, in Berlin). Teaching his students at the illegal seminary in Finkenvalde, he declared:

We must be able to speak about our faith so that hands will be stretched out toward us fast-

er than we can fill them.... Do not try to make the Bible relevant. Its relevance is axiomatic.... Do not defend God's Word, but testify to it.... Trust to the Word. It is a ship loaded to the very limits of its capacity. (272)

During a brief visit to New York in 1939 he went to Riverside Church to hear liberal Harry Emerson Fosdick. In his diary he wrote, "Quite unbearable."

The whole thing was a respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration. This sort of idolatrous religion stirs up the flesh which is accustomed to being kept in check by the Word of God. (333)

Bonhoeffer would go on to be delighted by the fundamentalist preacher Dr. McComb, pastor of Broadway Presbyterian Church (334).

Equal to his enthusiasm for preaching, which had begun in the early 1930s, was an emphasis on prayer. His last book published in his lifetime was *The Prayerbook of the Bible* (1940), a scholarly exposition of the Psalms as prayers. He believed that we can pray only in Christ and we pray with him when we pray the Psalms (386). This took great courage as well, since the book was quite unpopular with the Nazis. No wonder. At every point the Psalms challenge all attempts to perfect humanity without the Lord and Christ the true king, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us'" (Ps. 2:1–3).

Bonhoeffer was willing to lay down his life for his Jewish neighbors, even though they were not Christians. One does not need to be a transformationist to act in love on behalf of one's neighbor. His kindness won some of the most hardened prison guards to admire and even love him. Mataxas paints a rich portrait of Bonhoeffer as a man, covering his noble character, wide cultural interests, his strict self-discipline, and even his romantic life. His embrace of creation was based on



his belief that Christ's incarnation was a renewal of the created order (468–69), "God's humanism, redeemed in Christ." His engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer was never consummated due to his execution.

Wherever one comes out on the question of the justice of Bonhoeffer's involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler, one must admire his principled reasoning. He was, after all, involved with what many Reformers referred to as "lesser magistrates," albeit the majority were in high positions of the military. But Bonhoeffer did not come to decide on his involvement without great wrestling in thought and prayer. In the end he felt that the Bible did not speak directly to this issue, leaving him to exercise wisdom in dependence on the Lord.

Finally, Bonhoeffer's courage in the face of death was not natural but came rather from his regular spiritual discipline while he was in prison, especially, he said, in the reading of Psalms and Revelation, and in singing the hymns of Paul Gerhardt (463). As he faced certain death in the prison at Flossenbürg, he reflected:

Death is not wild and terrible if only we can be still and hold fast to God's Word.... Death is hell and night and cold, if it is not transformed by our faith. But that is just what is so marvelous, that we can transform death. (531)

The camp doctor described the last minutes of Bonhoeffer's life:

I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God. (532)

I am convinced that Bonhoeffer's sacrifice was motivated by his grasp of the message of the New Testament. His intelligence and bravery make him

a true hero, but this does not mean we should try to make him something he wasn't—an evangelical. This is not to say he was not a Christian—just not an American evangelical. There is much we can learn from Bonhoeffer's writings and life. But this should not mean that we are uncritical about his Barthianism or other unique aspects of his theology. This said, I highly recommend this book as a classic piece of edifying entertainment. The scope and intrigue proffered by the subtitle "Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy," is delivered in full. It is like a great international spy thriller, only having a profound impact on the reader. ©

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

## Union with Christ

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by **John V. Fesko**

*Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology*, by Robert Letham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011, 164 pages, \$17.99, paper.

*Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*, by J. Todd Billings. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011, 180 pages, \$19.99, paper.

Union with Christ is one of the current hot topics across the academy, in exegetical, theological, and historical studies. Hence, it should not surprise readers to find new books on this subject. Two

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=326&issue\\_id=78](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=326&issue_id=78);  
[http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=335&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=335&issue_id=79).

recent entries are those offered by Robert Letham, senior lecturer in systematic and historical theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology, and J. Todd Billings, associate professor of Reformed theology at Western Theological Seminary. Both books treat the doctrine of union with Christ but from slightly different perspectives. Letham offers a systematic survey of union, while Billings builds off of his earlier work on Calvin's doctrine of union and addresses both doctrine and issues related to the ministry of the church.<sup>2</sup> Letham's book has six chapters that treat union and creation, the incarnation, Pentecost, representation, transformation, and the resurrection. Billings's book originally began as a series of lectures and goes beyond introductory matters; he covers union as it relates to adoption, a better understanding of total depravity, communion with God, the gospel and justice, and a critique of incarnational models of ministry. Both books are worthwhile reads but for different reasons.

### Positive Qualities

Letham's book offers several positive qualities that commend his work. Readers are given helpful analyses of a number of historical sources, including authors and ideas from the patristic, early modern, and contemporary periods. Such research opens vistas upon the doctrine of union that present day readers might not otherwise explore. And contrary to current trends in the North American Reformed context, Letham rightly holds the compatibility of union with Christ and the *ordo salutis*; he argues that these two ideas are bound together in the Westminster Standards (88–90). And one of the refreshing aspects of Letham's approach is that he encourages readers to construct the doctrine of union upon the whole canon of Scripture, not simply the writings of Paul, as has been the trend among some theologians (91). Letham also offers a helpful contribution that will likely benefit present discussions and debates about union with Christ.

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2 Cf. J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

He begins his book, not with the application of redemption, but with creation, and more specifically the incarnation of Christ. He rightly acknowledges that the basis of the believer's union with Christ lies in the incarnation (21).

Billings offers some unique contributions that make his book worthy of study. His treatment of adoption as a key element of union is stimulating; adoption is one of the more underappreciated doctrines because historically a number of Reformed theologians have considered it as part of justification rather than placing it among the other relative benefits of union with Christ. Billings's emphasis upon praxis is also a welcome contribution as most discussions about union focus upon the ontology of the "what and when" of the alpha-point of union and the relationship between justification and sanctification. As important as these subjects are, and they are vital, ruminating upon union as the basis of the believer's communion with the triune Lord through the means of grace is a much appreciated and needed reminder of the fount of the Christian life (63–94). Billings also offers a potent alternative to the "religious left wing's" call to social action and the "religious right's" view that justice for the poor and marginalized of society is merely an optional add-on for the Christian life (95–96). Since the double benefit of union is both justification and sanctification, it means all Christians should seek to manifest good works to all, not as personal achievement but as the fruit of their union with Christ (107–8). Markedly, Billings does not argue for "social justice," an ill-defined political idea where certain classes of individuals, such as the poor, are singled out as the special recipients of the church's activity. Rather, he contends that justice must be defined Christologically and pursued in union with Christ (115). In other words, as the church preaches, teaches, and administers the sacraments, it always does so with an eye to bringing the cup of cold water to anyone it encounters, not just the poor.

### Areas for Further Reflection

Letham's book provides several areas for

further consideration. The first deals with his overreliance upon Calvin to set the trajectory for his discussion about union. True, Letham does engage with other theologians and sources such as Polanus, Goodwin, the Westminster Standards, Bavinck, Stedman, and Zanchi, but these figures and documents feature somewhat incidentally compared with the amount of space Calvin receives. Several notable works fail to appear that would add greater depth, texture, and different nuances, such as Zanchi's work on union with Christ, which was a separately published doctrinal locus extracted from his Ephesians commentary.<sup>3</sup> Zanchi also wrote a personal confession of faith that was intended to replace the Second Helvetic Confession where he discusses soteriology all under the rubric of union with Christ.<sup>4</sup> Also absent is Edward Polhill's work, *Christus in Corde: or, the Mystical Union between Christ and Believers* (1680). Equally noteworthy is the nonappearance of Herman Witsius's *Irenical Animadversions* (1696) wherein he entered the infamous so-called Antinomian controversy that occurred in England and addressed a number of issues directly related to union, justification, and sanctification.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of interaction with principal primary sources is evident at two other places where Letham offers comments based upon the suspect claims of secondary literature. For example, Letham asserts that for Lutherans union with Christ follows as the effect of justification, a common mantra among certain writers but easily disproved by reference to Lutheran theologians such as Luther and Melanchthon. In his 1535 commen-

tary on Galatians, Luther makes regular appeal to union and argues that Christ is present in faith; in other words, union with Christ and faith are concomitant realities—union does not follow as the effect of justification.<sup>6</sup> The same may be said of Melanchthon in two of his refutations against Andreas Osiander, documents that heretofore have not been referenced by those who claim a great divide between Lutheran and Reformed versions of union.<sup>7</sup> Secondary literature such as Olli-Pekka Vainio's *Justification and Participation in Christ* has noted that there are at least a dozen different iterations of the so-called "Lutheran" doctrine of justification, and as such, abundant variations as justification relates to union.<sup>8</sup> Just as there is no monolithic doctrine of union among the Reformed, the same can be said of Lutheran theology. Claims of significant difference between the Reformed and Lutheran doctrines of union should be supported from specific primary source evidence.

Based upon secondary literature alone Letham also claims that under the Princetonians, such as Charles Hodge, union with Christ "suffered eclipse" (122). Yet from Hodge's own testimony taken from an address entitled "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ," he states: "There is no doctrine of the Bible, more clearly, frequently, or variously taught than this."<sup>9</sup> In a sermon on the unity of the church, Hodge, like his Reformed predecessors, outlines the two

6 E.g., Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, in *Luther's Works*, vols. 26–27, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26.57, 129, 132–33, 167–68, 352.

7 Philip Melanchthon, "Iudicium de Osiandro 1552, no. 5017" (*Corpus Reformatorum* 7.893–97); idem, "Confutation of Osiander (Sept 1555)," in *Documents from the History of Lutheranism 1517–1750*, ed. Eric Lund (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 208 (*Corpus Reformatorum* 8.582); cf. Lowell C. Green, *How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 230–31.

8 Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula Concord (1580)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1.

9 Charles Hodge, "The Unity of the Church Based on Personal Union with Christ," in *History, Essays, Orations and Other Documents of the Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Alliance*, ed. Philip Schaff and Irenaeus Prime (New York: Harper, 1874), sect. II, 139–44.

3 Girolamo Zanchi, *An Excellent and Learned Treatise of the Spiritual Marriage between Christ and the Church* (Cambridge: 1592); idem, *Commentarius in Epistolam Sancti Pauli Ad Ephesos*, 2 vols., ed. A. H. Hartog, *Bibliotheca Reformata*, vol. 5 (Amsterdam: 1888).

4 Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione Christiana Fides—Confession of Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

5 Herman Witsius, *Animadversiones Irenicae* (Utrecht, 1696); idem, *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians*, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow: W. Lang, 1807).

benefits of union, justification and sanctification. But Hodge goes beyond this basic affirmation and, much like Letham, writes of communion, security, and glorification as the effects of union with Christ.<sup>10</sup> In his Romans commentary, Hodge affirms that union with Christ is the only source of the believer's holiness.<sup>11</sup> And a cursory reading of Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, and notably his commentary on Ephesians (esp. 5:25–32), effortlessly reveals union did not suffer eclipse in Hodge's theology.<sup>12</sup> In fact, like Letham, Hodge contends that the believer's union with Christ rests upon the incarnation of Christ: "Besides, so far as the mere assumption of human nature is concerned, it is a bond of union between Christ and the whole human race; whereas the apostle is here speaking of a union with Christ peculiar to his people."<sup>13</sup> So, if union suffered eclipse, someone forgot to tell Hodge about it.

A second area of consideration appears in the lack of any discussion of the *pactum salutis*. Seldom, if at all, have present debates considered this doctrine in relation to union, but in the seventeenth century union and the *pactum* featured quite commonly. Despite Letham's criticisms of the doctrine, as a matter of historiography, any treatment that attempts to discuss the history of the Reformed doctrine of union should interact with the different ways that theologians have expressed the doctrine.<sup>14</sup> In this particular case, Reformed theologians such as Turretin, Witsius, Owen, Gillespie, Rutherford, and others employ the *pactum* as the context in which the incarnation and Christ's union with believers is decreed and

unfolded.<sup>15</sup>

A third area lies in the disproportionate amount of space Letham spends trying to convince readers of the compatibility between union with Christ and the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification or theosis. He employs some twenty-four pages (91–115) to show the compatibility between union and deification seeking to cross-fertilize the two traditions as a way to advance the discussion in Western theology (91). Letham correctly notes that not all forms of deification entail the ontological mixture of the essence of the believer with the godhead (99). Yes, there are similarities between union with Christ and deification, but to highlight similarities without noting the differences is unhelpful. For example, Letham rightly refers to the double grace of justification and sanctification as constituent elements of a Reformed doctrine of union. But on the other hand, he fails to mention that Eastern Orthodoxy has no doctrine of justification. This is something that Eastern Orthodox theologians have themselves admitted: "Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline

10 Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1879), 306–7.

11 Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Robert Carter, 1880), 139.

12 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2.581, 3.104, 127, 227; idem, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter, 1860), 289–354, esp., e.g., 289, 308, 315, 316.

13 Hodge, *Ephesians*, 339–40.

14 Cf. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 235–36.

15 See, e.g., John Owen, "Preface" to Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or a Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: 1677), n.p.; idem, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh and London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–53), 12.500–07; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–97), XII.ii.5, 7, 13; Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, 2 vols., trans. William Crookshank (1822; Escondido, CA: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), II.ii.1–16; Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1655; New Lenox: Puritan Publications, 2005), §§ 34–37 (pp. 413–74); Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ, as the Foundation to the Covenant of Grace* (London: 1677). For an explicit confessional expressions of the *pactum salutis*, see Martin I. Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 103–23, canon 4. Another instance exists in the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order: The Confession of Faith of the Congregational-Independents (1658)* (London: Evangelical Press, 1971), 8.1; cf. similar statements in the Canons of Dordt (1618–19), "The First Main Point of Doctrine concerning Divine Predestination," art. 7, in Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, ed., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.572. Cf. Richard A. Muller, "Towards the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65.

doctrine of justification expressed in Romans and Galatians.”<sup>16</sup> What a theologian or tradition affirms about salvation is equally as important as what it denies. Any attempt to prove the compatibility of theosis and union must take this substantial difference into account.

In this case, there seems to be a fundamental incompatibility between theosis and union given the absence of the doctrine of justification in common Eastern Orthodox formulations. Remonstrants, Socinians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics all affirmed union with Christ, and more broadly the same can be said about union with God for Judaism, Islam, and Greek philosophers such as Plato.<sup>17</sup> Recall Paul’s famous quotation of Epimenedes (ca. 600 BC) at Mars Hill: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)—note the “in him” language, reflective of the idea of union with God. Whatever similarities there might be among variants of union with Christ or participation in the divine nature in Christian and pagan theologies, they all melt away beneath the withering heat of the biblical necessity of a forensic doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through the imputed active and passive obedience of Christ. Everyone affirms union with God, but the devil, and the truth, is all in the details.

A fourth consideration is that Letham avoids current debates about union with Christ almost entirely. This will undoubtedly disappoint some readers as many are looking for clarity and assistance wading through challenging issues. On the one hand, an author certainly has the right to bypass debate (82). On the other hand, it is therefore best to leave all reference to the debate out of the book. But at one point Letham levels the accusation that one author affirms that believers only have “participation in the energies of Christ” (127); he elsewhere characterizes such a view as only being united to the work of Christ rather than his person

16 John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 160.

17 Bernard McGinn and Moshe Idel, eds., *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Edinburgh: Continuum, 1996).

(cf. 92). To level such a claim without significant exposition and argumentation only elicits more questions and does not prove beneficial.

In Billings’s work, there is one area for further reflection regarding the doctrine of adoption. In a number of places Billings refers to adoption as a metaphor (18, 19, 21, 27n28). There are certainly a host of metaphors used throughout the Scriptures to convey ideas related to the salvation of sinners. Jesus, for example, calls himself a “door” by which people must enter in order to be saved as well as a “shepherd” and his people “sheep” (John 10:9, 11). In his teaching, Christ compares himself to a vine and believers as branches (John 15:1–6), and Paul likens union with Christ to donning the “armor” of God (Eph. 6:11–18). Each of these ideas legitimately falls into the category of metaphor, where a figure of speech is applied to something else in a non-literal fashion.<sup>18</sup> Jesus is not literally a door, we are not literally sheep, and to be in union with Christ does not mean we put on Kevlar body armor. But is adoption merely a metaphor? Billings writes: “The God of the Bible has no ‘natural’ or ‘begotten’ children apart from Jesus the Son; all the rest of us need to be adopted” (16). This is a true and accurate statement, but he then goes on to characterize adoption as a metaphor, which if strictly applied means that believers are not literally God’s sons and daughters.

In one sense Billings employs a common assumption; characterizing various aspects of the order of salvation as metaphors is a recent widespread phenomenon. To wit, Billings cites Trevor Burke’s work, which is entitled *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (18n6).<sup>19</sup> Numerous exegetes and theologians now refer to justification as a metaphor as well.<sup>20</sup> By

18 F. B. Huey, Jr., and Bruce Corley, *A Student’s Dictionary for Biblical and Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 124, q.v. *metaphor*.

19 Trevor Burke’s work, which is entitled *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

20 Kevin Vanhoozer, “Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation: The State of the Union with Christ in St. Paul and Protestant Soteriology,” in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God*:



way of contrast, historic Reformed theology refers to justification as an “act” of God.<sup>21</sup> Part of the contemporary motivation behind calling justification a figure of speech is that the Bible has many different metaphors for salvation and no one image fully expresses the breadth and depth of our redemption. Hence, while one may choose to highlight the forensic metaphor of justification, others may choose instead to employ other metaphors, such as adoption, or union with Christ. We are told that the abundance of metaphors affords greater doctrinal flexibility and facilitates ecumenism because, though Protestants focus upon justification and Roman Catholics transformation, each affirms the same redemptive reality but from different perspectives. What once bitterly divided the Reformation from Rome can be bridged by the proper recognition of the interchangeability of these different metaphors.

To be clear, Billings does not employ the idea of “doctrine as metaphor” anywhere in his book to soften or undermine any aspect of the order of salvation. However, it does appear that he employs the concept uncritically. If adoption is a metaphor, then argumentation to convince readers of the propriety and desirability of such an idea would be helpful, though admittedly such a concern lies beyond the scope of Billings’s work. But in my judgment, adoption is not a metaphor but rather one facet of the rich redemption we have in Christ. We share in Christ’s identity as God’s only begotten Son through union with him; which is a conclusion, I believe, that Billings promotes in his book (e.g. 16–17, 31). If Jesus is metaphorically God’s “son,” then, yes, we are metaphorically God’s

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A *Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 254–55; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Response: Traditional Reformed View,” in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 124; idem, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 122; Wolhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 213; N. T. Wright, *Romans*, NIB, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 491; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 231.

21 Westminster Larger Catechism, qq. 70–71; Shorter Catechism, q. 33; cf. WCF 11.

“children.” But if Jesus is God’s Son (cf. Ps. 2:7a), then we truly are God’s adopted children, an adoption we receive through union with the only begotten Son. The Shorter Catechism defines adoption in this manner: “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of, the sons of God” (question 34). Such an expression, I believe, more accurately expresses and defines the nature of adoption; which is a conclusion, I suspect, that Billings would wholeheartedly embrace.

## Conclusion

For anyone interested in the doctrine of union with Christ, both books should be read as they investigate different features of union and do so in an engaging and thought-provoking way. These books will undoubtedly stir healthy discussions and whet appetites for further investigation into this wonderful doctrine. However, one thing I hope to see in future discussions is a broader engagement of union beyond the confines of Calvin’s *Institutes*. As helpful as Calvin is, he is but one star in a galaxy of Reformed luminaries that beam light upon our path. Happily, in the historic Reformed tradition no one luminary serves as a lodestar, but rather each star within broader constellations offers assistance in our collective understanding of our one guiding light, Christ revealed in Scripture. To this end, Billings’s call for theological retrieval offers great promise. With such a strategy, the Reformed church can benefit from the wealth of its tradition and learn from many others who have written beautifully and arguably more deftly and skillfully than Calvin. In the words of G. K. Chesterton: “Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who happen to be walking about.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Reformed church can greatly benefit from a theological “democracy,” an appeal to the people

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22 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (1959; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 48.



(that is, a host of theologians), in its study of union with Christ rather than the artificial imposition of the “monarchy” of Calvin, something our tradition has historically eschewed. ☉

**John V. Fesko** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as professor of systematic and historical theology and academic dean at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.

## Correction

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### Robert Letham

In his review of my book, *Union with Christ*, in the October edition, John Fesko, among a number of points, raises one issue that is particularly germane to the theme of the book.

He indicates that I spend twenty-four pages seeking to establish the compatibility of union with Christ with “the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification or theosis.” This is partly the case. The most common view of theosis in the East stems from Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), deriving from earlier formulations of Maximus the Confessor (580–662). My focus is on the Alexandrians, Athanasius (295–373) and Cyril (378–444), who had a distinctively different approach—largely sidelined—treating the process as transformation by the Spirit, liberation from sin and death, adoption as sons, renewal by participating in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and entry into the eternal kingdom in the likeness of Christ. Recent scholarly discussion has centered on how far Calvin appropriated this tradition, bearing in mind that both Augustine and Aquinas resonated with it. In that context, Fesko, in legitimately distinguishing the Reformed from the East, cites one Eastern secondary source to the effect that the East has no doctrine of justification and then goes on to say that “what a tradition affirms ... is equally important as what it denies.” This, he argues, sets the two positions at loggerheads.

It is true that the East has neglected the foren-

sic dimension of salvation, seen particularly in its defective view of sin. Notwithstanding, in Fesko’s citation, John Meyendorff writes, “Byzantine theology did not produce *any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification*” (my italics). This lack is explicable on a number of grounds. Insofar as the East has doctrinal foundations, they are the seven ecumenical Councils, not lengthy confessions as in the West; it is not centered on logic but on a living dynamic relation to God focused especially in the liturgy. Due to historical isolation, and the depredations of Islam, the justification controversies of the Reformation passed the East by. Hence, as Meyendorff states, there was no significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine in the East. “No significant elaboration” is not the same as denial. There are many statements in the *Philokalia* that are not only compatible with justification by faith but positively demand it. Aspects of the piety of the Heyschasts come to mind too. Elsewhere I have cited Chrysostom, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Mark the Ascetic, and Nicholas Cabasilas as prime examples. Thomas Oden has produced a range of support from others. As Theodore Stylianopoulos indicates:

The “justification theology” focusing on the issue of faith and works is no less traditional simply because a Protestant declares it “biblical.” Nor is the “theosis theology” focusing on union with Christ in the Spirit unbiblical simply because an Orthodox declares it “traditional.” An exegetical approach may well find that both the “participatory” and “forensic” views of salvation are part of the larger biblical witness, and that deeper appreciation of both may be achieved precisely by seeing them in positive comparative light.<sup>23</sup> ☉

**Robert Letham**, a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, teaches systematic and historical theology at Wales Evangelical School of Theology in Bridgend, Wales.

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23 T. G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective: Volume One: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997), 209–10.

# Keeping Up with the Times: Evangelicals and the New Media, Part I

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Understanding Evangelical Media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication*, edited by Quentin J. Schultze and Robert H. Woods Jr. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008, 345 pages, \$22.00, paper.

*The New Media Frontier: Blogging, Vlogging, and Podcasting for Christ*, edited by John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 254 pages, \$16.99, paper.

*Prophetically Incorrect: A Christian Introduction to Media Criticism*, by Robert H. Woods Jr. and Paul D. Patton. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010, xlii + 182, \$19.99, paper.

Recently I had someone compliment me for an innovation I made on a certain web site. He said, “Thanks for keeping up with the times.” A well-intended thanks displays an important assumption common in our day. I became familiar with this cultural undercurrent as I was coming out of the counterculture in the early seventies as a new Christian. The sentiment ran something like this: “If we don’t offer contemporary music, we’ll lose the young people.” This is progress—keeping up with the times. Lacking the pedagogical instinct that the young people might need to learn something or change, people embrace the idea that the latest is the best—critical reflection is anathema. So, before I committed myself to a real haircut, I directed a Christian coffee house for a large Baptist

church in New Hampshire. The entrance beads at the doorway, the psychedelic posters, and the black lights were all supposed to draw the hippies in. The oppressive presence of the media that formed the way of life I had repented of moved me to buy my first three piece suit—only kidding. Well, not quite, because this experience awakened me in a simple way to the relationship between medium and message or form and content.

When I began my doctoral research on the relationship between electronic media, the church, and preaching in 1990, the discipline known as media ecology was not on the evangelical radar. There were few evangelical writers, much less Reformed, who were thinking along those lines. Joel Nederhood wrote “The Back to God Hour: Mission Television Report” for the Christian Reformed Church Synod Report (1977).<sup>2</sup> This is an extremely thoughtful reflection on the use of television for Christian broadcasting. He was one of the few who, early on, understood the nature and influence of the visual media, especially television and its effect on Christian ministry. Then Douglas Groothuis’s *The Soul in Cyberspace* (1997)<sup>3</sup> was the only full length book in which the McLuhan-Postman or media ecology perspective was really applied to critique not only the content but the grammar and environment of cyberspace. Os Guinness has been aware of McLuhan’s critical perspective since the early 1970s when I studied with him at L’Abri Fellowship.<sup>4</sup> In 1989, Ken Myers was another lone voice alerting the church to the dangers of uncritically absorbing the forms of popular culture.<sup>5</sup> More recently Arthur W. Hunt III, “Neil Postman and the Evangelicals,” has identified evangelicals who have perceptively applied media ecology to their respective disciplines, in his

2 Joel Nederhood, “The Back to God Hour: Mission Television Report,” Christian Reformed Church Synod Report. Report 1:A, Supplement, 1977.

3 Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

4 Os Guinness, *Fat Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

5 Ken Myers, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989).

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=327&issue\\_id=78](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=327&issue_id=78).

2006 article in the journal of the Media Ecology Association.<sup>6</sup>

My purpose in this review article is to survey five books that provide windows into the range of thinking among evangelicals about the new media. As a scholar in the discipline of media ecology and a Reformed pastor, I approach modern culture generally applying the antithesis of Van Tilian apologetics to the activities of common culture, especially through the biblical paradigm of idolatry.<sup>7</sup>

The first three books under review exhibit a failure to think outside the box of the media environment itself. Oddly, *Understanding Evangelical Media* apes the classic McLuhan text *Understanding Media*, without exhibiting many of its profoundest insights. The book does serve as a window into the thinking of evangelicals about media, with little substantive thinking about media themselves. In their introduction to the volume, editors Quentin Schultze and Robert Woods hold out the false hope that this will not be the case, “communication ‘mediates’ our views of reality” (19). They never follow through on this theme, but rather concentrate on the uses and content of media. There are interesting articles on the use of various media, its content and production—everything from music to movies, theatre to theme parks—but not on understanding media, which is the entire idea behind the McLuhan title. In the conclusion, Schultze does sound a critical warning, “Rarely do evangelicals take stock of the role of media in their personal, family, community, and church lives” (285). But even here the focus is not on the nature of media and their effects, but rather on the time spent with media and how that impacts our relationships.

Like *Understanding Evangelical Media*, *The New Media Frontier* displays some media naiveté from the outset, but is more focused and well

constructed. The editors inform us, “New media are nothing more than means of communication, which we’ve been doing for a very long time. All that is new is the form and availability of communication” (13). Minimizing the form reminds me of the idea that each medium is *just* a different “delivery system.” A few paragraphs later a bit more insight is provided, “It is far too easy to embrace the intended benefits of a new technology without noticing the unintended consequences” (14). Indeed, but the problem is that the liabilities are not understood by understanding the medium itself. That said, the book truly offers “some direction for how Christians can use the new media with discernment and grace” (16). The book is not lacking in media ecology. With many wise cautions, the book focuses on the use of three types of media: blogging, vlogging (video), and podcasting. The topics covered include theology, academics, ethics, politics, journalism, pastoral ministry, youth ministry, evangelism, and apologetics. For example, after enumerating several benefits of blogging, Tod Bolsinger in “Blog as Microwave Community” (113–23) ends with a direct application of McLuhan, “The *medium* of ‘virtual’ inevitably becomes the *message* of ‘community,’” adding the sage observation, “Building community through new media requires more commitment to community than to new media” (122). This and other chapters display a Reformed influence. The Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism are quoted in two chapters (68, 100).

Along the way there is evidence of serious media ecology. Matthew Lee Anderson’s chapter “Three Cautions among the Cheers” (55–68) explores the dangers of an uncritical embrace of the new media. He goes on to quote Douglas Groot-huis (59) and Quentin Schultze (62) in observing the lack of depth in online communication, as well the absence of personal presence. David Wayne’s “Theological Blogging” shows great sensitivity to the importance of the visible church as the community in which genuine theological development takes place, putting the value of blogging in perspective (97–112). He quotes McLuhan in warning us that “the medium of blogging not only transmits

6 Arthur W. Hunt III, “Neil Postman and the Evangelicals,” *Explorations in Media Ecology* 5:1 (2006): 61–72.

7 See Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), chapter 1: “No Other Gods: Idolatry in the Bible,” and chapter 2: “The Apologetics of Fire: Idolatry as a Critical Paradigm,” 1–61.

a message, it has the potential to shape the message” (107). Jason Baker in “Virtual Classrooms, Real Learning” (177–89) even unpacks McLuhan’s famous tetrad—revealing media patterns—and applies it to online learning in a very thoughtful way. All told, this book is worth reading as another window into evangelical thinking on the new media.

Equally thoughtful, but more problematic is *Prophetically Incorrect*. The neo-Kuyperian cultural transformationist agenda is front and center in this “Christian Introduction to Media Criticism.” Here, too, is a useful window into a different part of American Christianity. Not as eclectic as the first two books, mainly because there are only two authors who are clearly united in their perspective. The introduction clearly reveals the agenda (xxi–xlii). The organizing concept of the approach is “to analyze media content, as well as media institutions and technologies” (xxxiv). And then this,

We simply cannot escape the words of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus about love, justice, peace, and righteousness. Both called for individual *and* cultural transformation. (xxxv)

Tipping their hat to the Augustinian adage that “all truth is God’s truth” (xi), the authors determine to refer to non-Christian media as “mainstream media” (xxxvii).

We are told—warned?—that our “prophetic” cue will come from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Walter Brueggemann (xxxix). Chapters 3–6 are “taken from Heschel’s monumental two-volume work, *The Prophets*” (xxxix). It is an important hermeneutical mistake to apply the words of the prophets to Israel under the Mosaic covenant to modern culture. This sets the stage for exploring our “dance with popular media” (xl). Chapter 2 suggests that “Bono, lead singer of rock band U2, has a prophetic voice” (xli).

Woods and Patton divide Christians into two groups with distinct types of responses to media. “Proclaimers” reject the ungodly media environment with a moralistic critique (8–9). “Transformers,” on the other hand, “redeem not just individuals but cultural institutions, including the media.

Since all truth is God’s truth, Christians should search for faith-affirming interpretations among all types of popular media content” (9).

The footnotes reveal an interesting paradox. An extended footnote (135n24) acknowledges the proper sources of the academic discipline of “media ecology,” such as the writings of Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innes, and Walter Ong. The authors refer to the Media Ecology Association, of which I have been a member since 1997 at the recommendation of Neil Postman. The footnote then refers to a section in the introduction that makes an excellent and very important point, sounding almost like Postman. The third of six points describing faithful media stewardship is:

Both popular media content and media technologies matter. Media content is an easy target for Christians, and for good reason. Concerns about the coarsening of cultural life through excessive displays of sex and violence are legitimate. But the technologies that deliver the content are also made by human beings, and as such reflect human values, desires, and aspirations. Each communication technology has its own unique DNA, or characteristic predispositions that shape human communication.<sup>24</sup> (xxxvi)

But the footnote adds the comment, “It [media ecology] is sometimes referred to as technological determinism.” It is nothing of the sort. 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 was a bedrock conviction of McLuhan, who insisted, “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to contemplate what is happening.”<sup>8</sup>

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8 Marshall McLuhan, “McLuhan Probes,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, ed. 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, 1967), 25.

Finally, the authors make another good point: that it is dangerous to think of technology as neutral. In the footnote to this point (11n49) the list (in the earlier footnote) of media ecology luminaries is extended to include Jacques Ellul, Eric Havelock, Lewis Mumford, Daniel Boorstin, and more contemporary media scholars, such as, Joshua Meyrowitz, Thomas de Zengotita, and Nicholas Carr. So how is this marshaled in the service of transformationism? And is there a difference between the media ecology approach to culture and the transformationist school? Certainly with McLuhan there was no idea of transformation. His favorite metaphor for dealing with the electronic environment was marine navigation based on the actions taken by the fishermen in Edgar Allan Poe's "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841), to survive the ocean vortex.<sup>9</sup>

Christians, like the patriarchs, are in pilgrim mode. This is why there is no agenda to transform culture in the new covenant. The fundamental mistake of Woods and Patton is to model their cultural criticism on the prophets of the Mosaic covenant.

If you are only going to read one of the three books reviewed here, *The New Media Frontier* would be my choice. In part 2 next month, pilgrim navigators will find two books more suited to their perspective. ☺

**Gregory E. Reynolds** serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

## Is This “a Holy Experience” or a Common One?

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by **Andy Wilson**

*One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, by Ann Voskamp. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011, 240 pages, \$16.99.

Recently, during a period in which my wife underwent surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation for cancer, several friends recommended that we take a look at the writings of Ann Voskamp, author of the popular blog “A Holy Experience” and the *New York Times* bestselling book *One Thousand Gifts*. I only had to read the first two pages of her book to understand why her writings connect with people who are suffering. The book begins with Voskamp recounting the tragic death of her little sister when Voskamp herself was only a little girl. In the pages that follow, she writes about the effect that this and other tragedies had upon her faith, and she explains how she eventually opened herself up to God’s grace. The “dare” in the book’s subtitle refers to a challenge she issued to herself, prompted by a friend’s suggestion, to deal with her discontentment by making a list of a thousand things for which she is thankful. As she begins to write this “gratitude journal,” she discovers that *eucharisteo* (Greek for “I give thanks”) is the “holy grail” (34) to finding fullness and joy in life. In her own words, she came to see that “I would never experience the fullness of my salvation until I expressed the fullness of my thanks every day, and *eucharisteo* is elemental to living the saved life” (40).

Voskamp’s emphasis upon being thankful is

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<sup>9</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1951), 43, 45.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=334&issue\\_id=79](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=334&issue_id=79).



something of which we all need to be reminded. Gratitude is indeed at the heart of the Christian life. That being said, I have concerns about how she makes gratitude into a means by which she can enrich her experience of salvation. She sees *eucharisteo* (does she use the Greek because it sounds more mysterious?) as a mystical ladder by which she can ascend to a more profound experience of God's grace. Gratitude is treated as the magic key that unlocks each moment so she can see God's presence in it and live more fully. For example, she ponders a soap bubble in her kitchen sink and writes:

This is where God is.... It's not the gifts that fulfill, but the holiness of the space. The God in it. Far curvature of the bubble eddies, violet sliding down. This is supreme gift, time, God Himself framed in moment.... Thanks makes now a sanctuary. (69, 70)

Another concern has to do with the way Voskamp discusses God's agency in relation to our suffering. She refers to the trials and tragedies that befall her and her loved ones as "this moment's bread" (80), gifts that are to be received with thanksgiving. Of course, Scripture does tell us that "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). But Voskamp tends to blur the distinction between God's direct and indirect government of what takes place in this world. She talks about the evils that befall us as good gifts from God that only *feel* bad to us (95). At some points, it even sounds as though she is denying the reality of evil. She writes:

The God of the Mount of Transfiguration cannot cease His work of transfiguring moments—making all that is dark, evil, empty into that which is all light, grace, *full*.... Is there *anything* in this world that is truly ugly? That is curse? (99)

Well, yes, there is. Affirming God's providential control over all that takes place in the world does not require that we say that nothing truly bad ever happens. Christians believe that evil has a real existence because we affirm both divine sover-

eignty and creaturely responsibility. In the words of Louis Berkhof:

Second causes are real, and not to be regarded simply as the operative power of God. It is only on condition that second causes are real, that we can properly speak of a concurrence or co-operation of the First Cause with secondary causes. This should be stressed over against the pantheistic idea that God is the only agent working in the world.<sup>2</sup>

While God causes all things to work together for the ultimate good for those who belong to Christ, it is not accurate to say that "*All is grace*" (100). As we see so clearly in the story of Joseph and his brothers, God is not the author of evil, but he is able to use it to bring about his good purposes for his children (see Gen. 45:48; 50:20).

Voskamp's confusion in this area sometimes causes her to interpret her experiences and the Scriptures in some rather odd ways. In one section, she describes a fight between two of her children at the breakfast table (it involved toast being thrown into someone's face) and concludes that the real problem is her inability to see the situation as a gift from God (125). In another section, she writes that

*eucharisteo* is how Jesus, at the Last Supper, showed us to transfigure all things—take the pain that is given, give thanks for it, and transform it into a joy that fulfills all emptiness. I have glimpsed it: *This, the hard* eucharisteo. The *hard* discipline to lean into the ugly and whisper thanks to transfigure it into beauty. (100)

Really? The Lord's Supper teaches us to transfigure ugliness into beauty? Where is that imperative in the New Testament accounts of the institution of this sacrament? The only imperative that I see is the one that instructs us to do this in remembrance of the unique redemptive work that Christ accomplished on the cross. The Lord's

2 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 172.



Supper is about proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. It is not a picture of how we can use thanksgiving to transform our trials into things of beauty.

I suspect that one of the things that appeals to many of Voskamp's readers is her unconventional writing style. While *One Thousand Gifts* is prose, it often reads like poetry. Her husband is the Farmer; her children are the Tall-Girl, Little-One, Tall-Son, Boy-Man, Small-Son, and Hope-Girl. Her writing is impressionistic, employing a descriptive style that evokes subjective and sensory impressions in the minds of her readers. She comes across as authentic and open, qualities that twenty-first-century Americans hold in high regard. That being said, some readers might find it a little pretentious when the act of making a pizza is described with a sentence like this:

I roll out the dough, sprinkle the ring cheese on round pizza thin. I feel how the sun lies down warm across hands and how thanks soaks through the pores. I think how God-glory in a cheese ring might seem trifling. (58)

That's just it. It does seem trifling. And this is not just a matter of Voskamp having a deep appreciation for good pizza (who doesn't?). This is how she writes about everything, because she is looking for God in everything. The problem, however, is that while God is indeed omnipresent, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that he uses the material world as the vehicle through which he delivers saving knowledge of himself. As Michael Horton points out, "The question is not where God is present (by itself relatively uninteresting when we are talking about an omnipresent deity), but where God is present *for* us, in peace and safety rather than condemnation and destruction."<sup>3</sup> It is the gospel, not nature, that is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Voskamp sees writing, along with photography (one of her other pursuits), as among "the most

sacred acts conceivable" (61). But is this true? Are writing and photography really *sacred* pursuits? The Bible certainly calls us to glorify God in our vocations and avocations, but this does not mean that all of life is sacred. The fall of man resulted in a separation of the cultic and cultural aspects of life into the distinct categories of the sacred and the common (or profane). Meredith Kline explains:

Though man's total life and labor, his cultural and his cultic functioning, are religious, the distinction between the cultural and cultic dimensions, present from the beginning, did provide a formal groundwork for the sacred-profane distinction that afterwards emerged in the fractured postlapsarian world. With the exception of one or two notable situations, God's servants find themselves after the Fall in a common grace situation where their cultural functions are not holy but profane. Nevertheless, they recognize that even these profane functions are to be carried out under God's mandate as service to him for his glory and thus are thoroughly religious.<sup>4</sup>

I realize that Voskamp would disagree with this, holding instead to the view expressed in the quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that stands at the head of one of her chapters: "Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see" (122). But does this really square with the teaching of Scripture? The apostle Paul said that "we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). He also wrote, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). Jesus said that his "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). And the book of Revelation tells us that it will not be until Christ's second coming that this declaration will be made: "The kingdom of the world has become

<sup>3</sup> Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know, 2008), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 67.

the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev. 11:15). There is a distinction between Christ’s kingdom and this present world, between the holy and the common. Of course, as Christians we are called to perform both our religious duties and our common functions for the sake of God’s glory. But the category of the sacred should be reserved for the church’s worship and ministry, because these are the things through which God delivers saving grace and sets his people apart as holy.

Undoubtedly, the most shocking part of *One Thousand Gifts* is the chapter in which Voskamp describes her relationship with God by employing sexual language, telling her readers of her discovery (on a trip to Paris, of course) of “how to make love to God” (201). Now, it is true that Ephesians 5 teaches that marriage is a typological picture of Christ’s relationship with his church. It is also true that some interpreters have taken the sensuous poetry of the Song of Solomon as an allegory of Christ’s love for the church. But Voskamp’s search for intimacy with God owes more to medieval mysticism than it does the Bible. Hers is a quest for a vision of what Martin Luther described as *Deus nudus* (God naked), God as he is in his own nature and majesty. This stands in sharp contrast to the Scriptural teaching that God “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16) and that we are to be content with the fact that “the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deut. 29:29). The mystical quest for God is doomed because, as Herman Bavinck explains:

The distance between the Creator and the creature is much too great for human beings to perceive God directly. The finite is not capable of containing the infinite . . . all revelation is mediate. No creature can see or understand God as he is and as he speaks in himself.<sup>5</sup>

Voskamp’s mysticism is very evident in her approach to the material world, which she sees “as

the means to communion with God” (16). One example of this is seen in her description of gazing up at a harvest moon one night: “Has His love lured me out here to really save me? I sit up in the wheat stubble, drawn. That He would care to save. Moon face glows. We are head to head. I am bare; He is bare. All Eye sees me” (115). This goes well beyond the biblical declaration that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). For Voskamp, the common experiences of daily life are the key to enjoying communion with God. As a result, her version of eucharistic piety looks more like an attempt to ascend to God through her experiences than a grateful embrace of the good news that “‘the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)” (Rom. 10:8). To her credit, she never goes to the extreme of pursuing an entirely churchless approach to the Christian life, but by making her subjective experience of God the main thing, she follows the path of pietism and its dissatisfaction with the outward, ordinary, and objective means of grace.

The basic problem with Voskamp’s book is the fact that her “holy experience” is not really holy but common. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the things that belong to the common sphere. I’m certainly not saying that we shouldn’t be thankful for them. I’m a big fan of the common, whether we are talking about pizza or a full moon or a beautiful city. The common sphere provides mankind with innumerable subjects for creative exploration and countless reasons to give thanks. But Voskamp approaches the material world, and all that she experiences in it, as the means to communion with God rather than the context in which that communion is enjoyed. This is a point of significant confusion. The common sphere does a great job at being common, but it is seriously miscast when it is forced into the role of the holy. ☉

**Andy Wilson** is the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Laconia, New Hampshire.

<sup>5</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 309–10.

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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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