

Ordained Servant

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Brewster Meeting House, Brewster, Massachusetts / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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✦ From the Editor

This is the eleventh annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant*, as we enter our twenty-sixth year of publication in 2017. A quarter century of publication is no small accomplishment in the present periodical market. But our little journal owes its existence to our Lord's gracious work in the hearts of those who serve in his church.

The cover picture is the Brewster Meeting House in Brewster, Massachusetts, now a Unitarian Universalist Church. This is a sad reminder of the decline of true Christianity in New England and a goad for our presbytery to continue to plant churches here. From its inception in the 1930s, Professor John Murray promoted planting churches in these spiritually abandoned towns. This is a happy reminder of our Lord's mission.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange, and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Wallace King 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, and 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 formatting in InDesign of this printed volume.



—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Thoughts

Editorials

Reflections on Twenty- five Years of *Ordained Servant*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
December 2016¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Ordained Servant was born in January 1992, twenty-five years ago next month. It was “Vol. 1, No. 1,” with an engraving of John Calvin on the cover. This set the tone for the next quarter of a century. It was published by Pleroma Press in Carson, North Dakota, a little over an hour away from Bismarck, where J. Gresham Machen went to be with his Lord. The publication was directed by three members of the Committee on Christian Education, Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, and Rev. Larry Wilson. An annual subscription was \$12 per year.

The editor, G. I. Williamson, announced that “*Ordained Servant* will be published from two to four times a year in the present format.” In fact, after publishing three issues in its first year, the journal was published quarterly for the next twelve years. The only year that saw only two issues was the final year of Mr. Williamson’s editorship, 2005. Here is the first table of contents:

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=586&issue_id=120.

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nances), by John Calvin

The Forms

Here is editor Williamson’s sagacious introduction:

Introducing *Ordained Servant* G. I. Williamson

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.... And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (NKJV Ephesians 4:7 and 11–12).

In September of 1989, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s Committee on Christian Education appointed a special subcommittee with the title and task of “Equipping Ordained Officers.” This issue of *Ordained Servant*, mandated by the entire committee in September of 1991, is the first tangible result of that appointment. The immediate aim is to provide materials to help in the training and effective functioning of the elders (both teaching and ruling) and the deacons of our church. But in a sense *Ordained Servant* is a means to a more important end. For, as the above quoted text clearly shows, God’s purpose in giving his church ordained servants does not end with their being well equipped. Quite the contrary, in fact, because their calling is to equip the saints for the work of ministry as believers. It is only when both of these become a reality in the church—only when there is “the effective working by which every part does its share”—that we can expect to see the kind of growth

that brings glory and honor to God.

The American church is enamored with methods—yes, and even gimmicks—that seem to promise numerical growth in the church. But let us put the question quite bluntly: what is the use of numerical increase when the church is not functioning “according to the effective working by which every part does its share” which, in turn, “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”? The answer is that you have an even greater monstrosity. We believe the biblical view of church growth is quality first, and then increase in numbers. On the American scene it is too often quantity first, and then (much later on, if at all) quality. And, to be honest, our own churches are not all that they ought to be either. Can any honest person evade this? To answer that question ask yourself another: is there all that much difference between the way our people live and the way their people (the members of the liberal church on the next street) live? Can we honestly say, without hesitation, that the elders of Orthodox Presbyterian congregations are faithfully exercising oversight of the flock according to biblical standards? At the very least, we should be willing to admit that we can—and must—do much better. It is this conviction that motivates the production of this journal.

We (the editor, and the editorial oversight committee) are aware of the difficulty of the task we are undertaking, but willing to do it because we sincerely believe the need is urgent. The exaggerated individualism of many, if not most, Americans today—even in the soundest Reformed churches—presents a difficult problem. How are we going to convey to the people of God a respect for authority, a respect that has so sadly diminished? How are we going to bring it about that, once again, membership vows will be awesome and sacred to our members? We will only see these deficiencies remedied if, first of all, the proficiency and diligence of the ordained servant

is uplifted. So in this journal it will be our intention to point the way to more effective leadership by elders and deacons.

We do not intend to make this journal a forum for the invention of new ideas. We have too many of these already. But neither will we baptize the status quo as automatically holy. Further, we do not intend to use this journal to promote a partisan viewpoint, such as the two- or three-office view as exclusively legitimate. Our task, as we perceive it, is much more important. We want to find the best material written—old or new—to help all who are, and all who aspire to be, ordained servants.

This periodical is yours—the Lord’s (present and future) ordained servants in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—and your comments and contributions are welcome. One of the features that we plan to include in future issues, therefore, is a Question and Answer page. Here is a little sample. We received a letter from a young pastor a few weeks ago, asking this question: “*Should a ‘hospital baptism’ by a Roman Catholic nurse—performed when she feared an infant was about to die—be accepted as valid?*” Our answer was as follows. “No, we do not think it should be. There is at least one instance in the Scriptures, of what could be called a private baptism (Acts 8:26–40). But it is important to note that, even in this instance, the one who administered this baptism was an office-bearer in the church, and the church in which he was an office-bearer was in genuine submission to the Word of God. It may have been just such biblical teaching that led the Westminster Assembly to insist that neither baptism or the Lord’s supper ‘may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained’ (Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 27, sec. 4). This reason, alone, would seem to us to disqualify the nurse’s act. Furthermore, for baptism of infants to be valid they must be children of parents that the church acknowledges, at the time, to be true believers. It is extremely doubtful, to say the least, that

this essential qualification was accounted for in the nurse's unilateral decision to act as she did."

Some questions will undoubtedly stump us. But when this happens we intend to seek the wisdom of others. We also welcome your wisdom. If you have an insight that you believe to be truly biblical, and helpful in strengthening other office-bearers in the church, please send it to us. We cannot promise to use everything that is sent, but we will give everything that is sent to us our serious consideration.

You are invited to send any questions that you may have—and/or any other material that you may wish to have considered for inclusion in *Ordained Servant*—to the editor, whose address is listed above.

"As Christ is the only head of the Church, it follows that its allegiance is to him, and that whenever those outside the Church undertake to regulate its affairs or to curtail its liberties, its members are bound to obey him rather than men. They are bound to resist by all legitimate means such usurpations and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free. They are under equal obligation to resist all undue assumption of authority by those within the Church, whether it be by the brotherhood, or by individual officers, or by Church councils or courts. The allegiance of the people terminates on Christ. They are to obey others only so far as obedience to them is obedience to him."

— Charles Hodge

Among the themes the first editor promoted, was a concern for the "exaggerated individualism" in American culture and the ways it weakens the Reformed church. Along with the specific goal of providing "materials to help in the training and effective functioning of" church officers, *Ordained Servant* seeks to explore the aspects of American culture that present a direct challenge to the health of the church and its leadership. As its second editor I have sought to examine further the

ways that American culture disciplines its citizens, especially as a technological society. I articulated this in my first editorial in 2006:

It is also my conviction that officers need to understand more deeply the battlefield on which we find ourselves engaged in a fierce conflict. So I hope to include thoughtful analyses of different aspects of our culture, so as to better minister within it and to it.²

In order to overcome the default nature of our fallen humanity, the renewal of our minds prescribed by Paul in Romans 12:2 requires a critical awareness of our environment. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Long before the Industrial Revolution, the idolatrous tendencies embedded in all fallen cultures have required Christians to test or discern our culture's temptations and blessings in order to navigate our environment wisely.

But because God has also given many blessings on common culture by his common grace, I have sought to develop an awareness of poetry and fiction as means of cultivating the general intellectual and spiritual lives of officers.

As to the particulars of training and nourishing church officers, I continue to be committed to what I first promised:

I will continue building on G. I.'s pastoral and confessional themes, as these form the core of our focus. As a church planter, I have grown to appreciate the importance of sound doctrine, worship with reverence and awe, passionate expository preaching, and the training of gifted elders who fulfill their pastoral callings. The latter is the key to implementing everything else.³

A bedrock commitment of *Ordained Servant* is

2 Gregory Edward Reynolds, "Galvanized Iron: A Tribute to G.I. Williamson for His Pioneering Work on *Ordained Servant*," *Ordained Servant* 15 (2006): 7; http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=4.

3 Ibid.

an Old School obligation to our confessional standards. In 2006, I set forth J. Gresham Machen as a model of ministry: “Machen is particularly useful because he lived in the same world we inhabit. He excelled in understanding the modern world and engaging it from a distinctly confessional perspective.”

I hope to continue with these basic planks in the platform of this journal. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome as they have formed a serious part of the development of *Ordained Servant* over the past quarter of a century. May the Lord bless us with continued faithfulness to his Word and his church. ©

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

The Bard for Preachers

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2016¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

It has been my habit over the last decade to memorize the Bard’s Sonnets, among other poems on my daily walks—no sense wasting time just exercising. In honor of the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s death I want to briefly analyze Sonnet 29 in order to demonstrate the benefit of the Sonnets for preachers.

The main strands of a Christian account of the world are woven throughout the fabric of all of

Shakespeare’s works. That is the thrust of Leland Ryken’s persuasive essay, “Why Shakespeare Matters,” in which he claims Shakespeare as an implicitly, rather than explicitly, Christian writer:

Over the course of my career as a literary scholar, Shakespeare’s works came to seem more and more Christian until I reached the point of not hesitating to claim him as a Christian writer. The rewards of reading his best works are the same as those of reading Donne, Herbert, and Milton: we view human experience from a Christian perspective. This is not to say that Shakespeare’s works are as overtly Christian as those of Milton, but sometimes a work in which Christian patterns are latent can be all the more powerful for that understated quality. There is a place for implicitly Christian literature as well as explicitly Christian literature.

Ryken sees Shakespeare’s implicit Christianity in numerous biblical “references and echoes,” a perspective on human experience consonant with Christianity, and the world Shakespeare creates is based on Christian premises such as the reality of God, the supernatural, and the existence of heaven and hell.

An earlier author, George Morrison, in *Christ in Shakespeare* (1928), agrees entirely with Ryken. His ten addresses to the Wellington Literary Club in Wellington Church, Glasgow, explore the following themes in “some of Shakespeare’s greater plays”: the reality of providence, the concern of God, the nature of man, the worth of women, the fact of temptation, the peril of delay, the power of choice, the passion of jealousy, the tragedy of egoism, and the sovereignty of love.²

The Bard’s exploration and articulation of the human is without parallel in English literature, and he was the first to do it with the range and genius he exhibited in his best works. This I think is the gist of the subtitle of the indomitable Harold

2 George H. Morrison, *Christ in Shakespeare: Ten Addresses on Moral and Spiritual Elements in Some of the Greater Plays* (London: James Clarke, 1928), 9.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=546&issue_id=114.

Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*.³ "The Shakespearean difference" is Bloom's summation of the Bard's greatness as a writer.

I designate three primary aspects of his power: cognitive originality, totally answerable style, and—the miracle—creation of utterly persuasive human personalities, here Hamlet and Lear are particular.... Shakespeare endows his people with the capacity to change, either through the will or with involuntary force.... To have thought his way into *their* [Hamlet and Falstaff] inwardness is Shakespeare's most startling originality.... The rich strangeness of Shakespeare gave us hundreds of personalities, each with his or her highly distinctive voice. So many separate selves seem scarcely possible as emanations from a single consciousness, itself a permanent enigma to us.⁴

Bloom, however, minimizes the influence of Christianity on Shakespeare, and, as Ryken notes, Bloom wrongly insists that "Shakespeare invented us (whoever we are)," echoing the anthropological and cultural relativism of modernity.⁵ Bloom declares that Shakespeare's "sensibility is secular, not religious."⁶ This is where Ryken's insight is so important to the preacher. As I have memorized a number of the Sonnets, the implicit Christian assumptions of Shakespeare have had an indefinable but real impact on my thinking and preaching. Bloom observes that Ludwig Wittgenstein "objected to the wide opinion that Shakespeare is lifelike, but then the great philosopher very fiercely insisted that Shakespeare was primarily 'a creator of language.'"⁷ But, it seems to me that the medium of language is inextricably connected with the meaning of the human so adroitly and masterfully

3 Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998).

4 Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 111–12.

5 Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 721–22, 725. Bloom declares, "For us, now, the Bible is the most difficult of books. Shakespeare is not" (p. 729).

6 *Ibid.*, 731.

7 Bloom, *The Best Poems*, 113.

communicated by Shakespeare. The universalism of Shakespeare's depiction of the human, which Bloom so values, can only be accounted for through the biblical revelation of human nature as it impinged on the literary consciousness of the Bard. For the preacher, words incarnate biblical truth. Hence the value of the Sonnets.

A Brief Look at Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's
eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless
cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends pos-
sessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's
gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth
brings
That then I scorn to change my state with
kings.

I offer here a natural, rather than a technical, reading of the poem. The latter may enhance one's understanding, but this poem is one of the Bard's clearer offerings and an excellent way to enter the rarified world of his genius.

One of the dangers in interpreting poetry is to attempt to read the biography of the author into his poems. We confront this danger in the first line of Sonnet 29. "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." What disgrace, we may ask? It is difficult to identify it in Shakespeare's life. And we need not be concerned to since the poet's imagination ranges far beyond himself. He is an astute observer of humanity and reader of other observers who have gone before him. Here we see the poet

as Job or David, whose fortunes and reputations fell to a great depth at once.

Shakespeare's world is both visible and invisible, "And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries." The poet has no ground upon which to stand before God and thus feels utterly abandoned, like the Psalmist, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" (Ps. 22:1).

Every pilgrim from Abraham to Paul can identify with being in an "outcast state." And with the emotion that often accompanies that state, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1); "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Ps. 6:6). This emotion flirts with complete despair, "After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth" (Job 3:1), as we see in line 4 of Sonnet 29, which completes the first quatrain, stating the problem, "And look upon myself and curse my fate."

The second quatrain explores the poet's reason for discontent, rooted as it is in envy of those around him. He seems to have no future, "Wishing me like to one more rich in hope." Those who do have hope are surrounded with good friends, "Featured like him, like him with friends possessed." They have wonderful skills and a great range of sensibilities like the polymath, "Desiring this man's art and that man's scope," which the poet wishes for himself. All of what he lacks and envies in others makes it impossible for him to be content with what he has and once appreciated, "With what I most enjoy contented least." What a litany of complaints. What insight into the temptations and sins of the outcast or pilgrim in this fallen world.

The final quatrain signals a turn of fortune reminding us of the Psalmist's turn, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (Ps. 42:11). Shakespeare looks up and beyond to a transcendent solution. He comes close to completely hating himself but remembers a wonderful resource

beyond himself, that raises him above his outcast state and discontent, reminding us of similar sentiments in the Psalms like "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5 KJV).

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

We do not know the "thee" toward whom the poet turns his thoughts, but whoever it is the memory of his or her love enables the despairing poet to turn a corner.

Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's
gate;

Again Shakespeare envisions a heavenly reality in the image of the lark's early morning singing. There is hope beyond this world where the earthly drags us down but heaven's gate becomes the object of the outcast's gaze. The lark must rise from his nest on the ground to greet the dawn with song. The idea of Christian worship is prominent here as Shakespeare uses the image of Anglican church "hymns." How far this is from the secularism of Bloom's blind assertion about the place of religion in Shakespeare. The once brass heaven now offers an entrance.

The concluding couplet brings powerful and moving resolution to the sonnet.

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth
brings
That then I scorn to change my state with
kings.

Here love reminds us of George Morrison's final address in the book mentioned above, "On the Sovereignty of Love." When James (2:8-13) speaks of the sum of the law as the love of neighbor, he assumes that the love of God is the original love of which all human love is the imitation. So in this couplet the origin of "sweet love" is ambiguous, perhaps purposely, so we can insert God's love in Christ. And "sweet love" reminds us, as perhaps Shakespeare intended of Psalm 34:8, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man

who takes refuge in him!” Sonnet 30 has a similar ending. After rehearsing the regrets of old age, the poet concludes,

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor’d and sorrows end.

What a friend we have in Jesus.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as 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. 4:16–18)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28–30)

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven....
(Matt. 6:20)

It is no accident that what is implicit in Shakespeare suggests revealed truth for the reader alert to the biblical atmosphere in which the Bard was nurtured as a writer of the spoken word. We speakers of the Word of God do well to drink from this rich fountain. ☺

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✦ Servant Truth

Beloved Sons in Whom He Is Well-Pleased

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by David B. Garner

Those given the eyes of saving faith find boundless reasons to celebrate the gospel. Clear vision of the Savior evokes songs of praise. That the Righteous Judge of the universe forgives sinners, that Almighty God makes peace with his enemies, and that the dead in sin become alive in Christ—these gospel truths blow away all human notions of grace, mercy, authority and power. Gospel grace confounds even as it transforms.

Unfathomable as they are, these rich treasures do not deplete the gospel. Redemptive grace moves from the cosmic courtroom to the welcoming presence of the Almighty, from the heavenly tribunal to the household of God. To the redeemed, God is not only a forgiving Judge; he is the loving heavenly Father. The Covenant of Grace is a covenant of sonship, so that the sons of Abraham by faith are the sons of God (Gal. 3:25–29). Filial language saturates the biblical exposition of gospel grace because redeemed sinners *are* the children of the loving Father. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1a).

For the apostle Paul, this familial essence of the gospel is best expressed by the term *adoption*.

The theological weight and scope of this term are striking—enough for J. I. Packer to gloat, “Adoption through propitiation.... I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that.”² Not all share Packer’s appreciation for this filial grace. The blessing of adoption belongs to *all* the redeemed; its teaching, however, has a checkered past. In comparison with other redemptive themes, adoption has seen disparate attention.

Adoption and (as?) Justification

The Westminster Confession (chapter 12) presents its earliest confessional expression. In its confessional wake, the Puritans eloquently capitalized on adoption’s pastoral treasures.³ These Westminsterian and Puritan strands owe their debt to Calvin, whose own articulation of the gospel has been rightly dubbed, “the gospel of adoption”⁴ because “the adoption of believers is the heart of John Calvin’s understanding of salvation.”⁵ And though Calvin’s theology largely set the course for the Reformed, his permeating appreciation for the gospel’s familial lifeblood failed to carry the day.

Several have postulated reasons for adoption’s perpetual shelving.⁶ Here I simply note that key influencers’ praiseworthy allegiance to justification triggered a teetering toward a forensic monopoly, and in countering Roman Catholic error, has inadvertently overshadowed the familial cast of the gospel. As essential as the Reformation’s meticulous articulation of justification was, polemics won the day and the familial faded behind the forensic.

One key catalyst to adoption’s diminution will suffice to illustrate. Embracing the bold affirmation of biblical soteriology as expressed afresh in

2 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 214.

3 See Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008).

4 Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 89.

5 Howard Griffith, “‘The First Title of the Spirit’: Adoption in Calvin’s Soteriology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 73 (2001): 135.

6 See, e.g., Tim J. R. Trumper, *When History Teaches Us Nothing: The Recent Reformed Sonship Debate in Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 1–32.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=540&issue_id=113.

the Reformation, Francis Turretin commendably makes much of justification. Countering the medieval conflation of justification with sanctification, and standing on the shoulders of his Reformation forerunners, he vigorously expounded justification by faith alone. Debts cancelled and forgiven, the redeemed are declared righteous in the Righteous One: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23–24). Justification is forensic, declared righteousness, and as such must be protected from any semi-Pelagian intrusion.

When he turns to adoption, we encounter sharp disappointment. Turretin squeezes adoption into a forensic straightjacket. Adoption, to Turretin, is “the other part of justification.”⁷ He insists, “Adoption is included in justification itself as a part which, with the remission of sins, constitutes the whole of this benefit.”⁸ Discernibly contrary to Calvin, and ostensibly departing from the Westminster Confession of Faith, Turretin stuffed adoption into justification, and led hordes of others to do the same.⁹ In this concept fusion, the distinct meaning of adoption falls to the theological sidelines, if not off the field altogether.

If adoption is justification, adoption’s distinctively celebrated splendor lacks any “justification.” Among other problems, it becomes impossible to entertain Puritan celebration of adoption’s personal and pastoral value. After all, a not-guilty verdict of an Almighty Judge does not make the criminal a son. Adoption is no more justification than justification is sanctification, and history attests to the theological distress associated with this latter confusion. Though less frequently discerned, the conflation of adoption and justification correspondingly distorts.

7 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:666. There is no question that adoption entails a forensic element. But its biblical use and theological function extend beyond the forensic domain.

8 *Ibid.*, 2:668.

9 See, e.g., Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 645.

The Biblical Profile: Adoption¹⁰

“Adoption” (Greek, *huiothesia*) appears only five times (Eph. 1:5, Gal. 4:5, Rom. 8:15, 8:23, and 9:4), yet it carries considerable clout in Paul’s theology. Its infrequency is incongruous with its import. A brief survey of these passages and of adoption’s role in each belies any doubt.

With eyes illumined to the heavenly realms, in Ephesians 1 Paul falls to his knees, overwhelmed by the revelation of divine grace. He writes what he receives and prays what he writes, while the heavenly backdrop to redemption pilots his apostolic pen. By way of covenant (*pactum salutis*) the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determined to secure a redeemed family from among fallen sinners: “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:4–6).

Behind the sweetness of its application and antecedent to its accomplishment, adoption springs from the counsel of God. Enraptured by his heavenly vision, Paul ponders this pre-temporal starting point of redemption: the paternal love of God for his elect. No abstraction, this love takes an explicitly familial form even as it does a redemptive one:

God has chosen us and has predestined us to adoption ‘to himself’ (*eis auton*). This ties in with love as the basis for his predestinating act and reinforces the idea that he views his people as his own glorious inheritance (Eph. 1:18). The final purpose of election then is relational,¹¹

so that God is Father of his redeemed family.

On the stage of history, the elect enter the

10 For a much fuller probing of the filial grace of adoption in its biblical and systematic expression, see David B. Garner, *Sons-in-the-Son: The Theology of Adoption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, forthcoming [October 2016]).

11 Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Evangelical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 10:82–83.

family of God when they receive the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15). But this Spirit's outpouring depends upon the incarnate and covenantal obedience of the Son of God, whose attainment at his resurrection delivers covenant promise. And as expressed in the opening verses of Ephesians 1, theologically antecedent to the Son's essential work is the loving purpose of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, adoption began in heaven before it came to earth. Put in Southern idiom, God's love for his sons and daughters is “older than dirt.”

Out of his loving purpose, God sent his own Son to earth to secure his family. Clearly expressed in this Ephesian doxology, the Son's role takes center stage in Galatians 4:4–5, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” In keeping with its pre-dirt primacy, Paul gives adoption far-reaching redemptive contours. Building on his Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant argumentation in Galatians 3, he explains in Galatians 4 the gritty and gracious logic of the incarnation. God became man—the Son of God became the Son of Mary, so that he might make the sons of fallen Adam the sons of God. Adoption entails all that the gospel delivers. The gospel in this Son is *adoption*.

As in Ephesians and Galatians, in Romans 8–9 Paul situates adoption in cosmic, covenantal categories. Romans 8 encompasses creation to redemption to consummation, and puts the resurrection and revelation of these adopted sons at the heart of God's entire program (Rom. 8:22–23):

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Israel's corporate adoption (Exod. 4:22–23) serves as the Old Covenant type to its New Covenant counterpart. This typological adoption (Rom. 9:4) facilitates Paul's organic filial paradigm,

in which adoption attains eschatological realization in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 9:5). Israel's true Son Christ Jesus came to secure for the elect the typified and promised final adoption. Anticipated by Old Covenant adoption, the outpouring of the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15) affirms Jesus's redemptively efficacious, eschatological victory as Son.

United to this Son of God by faith then, the sons of God receive Christ as resurrected Son, who pours out his Spirit of adoption upon them.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:15–17)

The sons' Spirit-wrought cry to the Father depends upon Christ's eschatological triumph—both for the *now* in suffering and for the *not yet* of glory.

Already the sons of God by faith, final filial transformation awaits the resurrection of the body: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). Adoption, as with all saving grace, is already but not yet. Already in possession of the Spirit of the resurrected Son of God—the Spirit of adoption, the sons of God will realize their adoption in full at their own filial transformation, resurrection. Full conformity to the image of the resurrected Son of God (Rom. 8:29) marks the final attainment of adoptive grace.¹²

Adoption thus draws upon Trinitarian counsel, is revealed in Old Covenant typological form, and serves as a comprehensive expression for the gospel in its realized and unrealized forms. With such expansive theological pedigree, all of its expressions

¹² Adoption possesses forensic and renovative characteristics. How this is so without confusing or conflating justification and sanctification receives full attention in Garner, *Sons-in-the-Son*.

expectedly center upon Christ as Son, as adoption is “in and for [God’s] only Son Jesus Christ” (WCF 12). In keeping with the intra-Trinitarian covenant, Christ delivers the redemptive blessings as the Son of God, so that the familial purposes of God for his people attain fully and finally:

As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:25–26)

Adoption of Christ: The Beloved Son

A survey of Old Testament history confirms that no son of Adam (or of Abraham!) ever qualified to redeem Israel. Generations of sons came and went, with no son comprehensively excellent, each of them stained by covenant disobedience, and each of them therefore wholly disqualified to represent and secure the holy family of God. This multi-generational filial disappointment produced an intensifying eschatological restlessness. How long, O Lord, before you redeem your people? Another feature of Old Testament revelation surfaces clearly over these generations: redemption required *divine* intervention—provision of a prophet, priest, and king, a *Son* like no other. Only God could deliver his people from the stranglehold of sin. Only God could meet his own covenant demands.

Anselm argued in *Cur Deus Homo* that atonement for sin required both man and God: man *ought* to make the needed satisfaction as the debtor, but only God *could* make the needed satisfaction; thus, it was necessary “for a God-Man to make it.”¹³ Yet the hypostatic union, while necessary, was not sufficient. Redemption required incarnation *and* filial obedience unto death. Accordingly, as sent by the Father, the eternal Son took on flesh *and* took to obedience. Enfleshed as the son of Mary and entrenched in his covenant

¹³ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, Library of Christian Classics 10, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 151.

calling, Jesus came to do the will of his heavenly Father (Heb. 10:7). Forever the Son of God, born of woman and having learned obedience under the law (Luke 2:52; Heb. 5:8), he became Son in a new way. By flawless filial faithfulness to the end, he became that Beloved One in whom the Father was well pleased (Eph. 1:6; cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

In fact, according to Romans 1:4, Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” Though Paul never uses the term adoption (*huiiothesia*) directly concerning Jesus Christ, this declaration concerning Christ’s transforming and vindicating resurrection should be understood no other way. The Almighty Father in heaven looks upon the perfect covenant performance of his perfected Son (Phil. 2:5–11; cf. Heb. 2:10; 5:9), and upon his resurrection from the dead, *declares* him the excellent Son. Having delivered the eschatological promises in full, this Son *par excellence* is now Son in a new and redemptively effectual way:

Verse 4 [of Romans 1] teaches that at the resurrection Christ began a new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God, who was born, lived, and died *κατὰ σάρκα* [“according to the flesh”], has been raised *κατὰ πνεῦμα* [“according to the Spirit”] and so, in his messianic identity (of the seed of David), has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.¹⁴

This new resurrection sonship attainment, as Richard Gaffin and others have argued, *is* Christ’s own adoption.

After Jesus’s baptismal affirmation, the Father’s statement out of the cloud at the Mount of Transfiguration anticipates, even certifies, this forthcoming resurrection declaration. As Luke offers his account prior to the travelogue (Luke 9:51–19:27), during which time Jesus takes his final steps towards Jerusalem to complete his filial/messianic mission, the consummative and cosmic concerns come positively into focus. The Son of

¹⁴ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 111.

God has neared the finish line of his covenantal responsibilities, and this mountaintop attestation by the Father combined with the foretaste of radiant glory, profiles the eschatological and redemptive import of his imminent death and resurrection. In this final phase of his “indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16), the heights of heaven will meet the bowels of earth, and the kingdom of the justifying and sanctifying Son will gain its fixed redemptive footing.¹⁵

Drawing the Law and Prophets to their eschatological fruition by the telling presence of great Moses and great Elijah, with palpable proleptic force, the Father affirmed the Son and called hearers to “listen to him!” (Luke 9:35b). What the Father affirmed on the mountain informs what Paul means by Christ’s adoption/resurrection in Romans 1:4. Transformed in his resurrection, Jesus *becomes* Son of God in power by the Holy Spirit, and in this cosmic and eschatologically consummate way, enters filial glory for the sake of redeeming the elect (Rom. 8:18–30).¹⁶ Necessary for this Son of Mary was his own matured and excellent sonship, whereby he could properly become the Son of God in power. Eternally Beloved, he indeed became the covenantally excellent Beloved Son. At that hinge moment in history in which Christ was raised from the dead, the Father selected his only begotten Son as his adopted Son.

Some might find the adoption of Jesus odd, even distressing. How can it be that the Son of God is adopted? Yet the question itself betrays a misunderstanding of the covenantal context of Christ’s work. Surely he was the eternal and incarnate Son, but by virtue of his filial obedience and filial suffering he qualifies to become the covenant Son, the adopted One, the great filial Mediator. The affirmation of Christ’s adoption is no denial of

his hypostatic union and no return to some Arian-friendly heresy (i.e., adoptionism), which claims Christ became Son *first* at his baptism or his resurrection. On the contrary, it was because he was the eternal and incarnate Son that he became the adopted Son who successfully accomplished the covenantal demands. His sonly success in temptation (Heb. 5:7–10) and decisive sonly acceptance as marked by his resurrection (Rom. 1:4) produce the indispensable redemptive purposes. So essential are these filial attainments that without the adoption of the Redeemer, there is no adoption of the redeemed.

Adoption in Christ: The Beloved Sons

The pleasure of the Father in his Son then lies squarely in the Son’s personal obedience *for its redemptive, adoptive efficacy*. The redemptive power associated with the Son as life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) graciously yet mightily overwhelms. For the elect, Adam’s fallen sonship gives way to the Last Adam’s resurrected sonship. For the redeemed, those united to the risen and appointed Son, filial grace becomes their full possession. The power of Christ’s resurrection life bestows the full bounty of his new filial status upon those united to him by faith. The Father is pleased, his predestined family is secured, and by the resurrected Son’s adoptive glory, the gracious familial purpose of the Father prevails (Eph. 1:3–10). In the qualified Son, the *in Christ* familial dynasty is established forever, and in his sons, the Father’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The redeemed sons are resurrected sons in the resurrected Son; they are adopted sons in the adopted Son.

Moreover, because of the necessary tie between Christology and soteriology, to deny Christ’s adoption necessarily proscribes the believer’s adoption. The soteriological rides on the Christological—where Christ has not gone, neither can the one united to him go. Instead the filial attainment at the resurrection means something for believers precisely because it meant something personally, cosmically, eschatologically, and redemptively for Christ Jesus. There is therefore

15 This paragraph is a slight rewording of a section from chapter 7 in Garner, *Sons-in-the-Son*.

16 Robert A. Peterson, *Adopted by God: From Wayward Sinners to Cherished Children* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 59–63, distinguishes four historical declarations of Jesus’s adoption: (1) his baptism (Matt. 3:17), (2) his transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–13), (3) his resurrection (Acts 13:27–30), and (4) his ascension (Heb. 1:3–5).

no stray blessing occasioned by saving grace, no conferral of redemptive blessing not attained by the Personal Source of redemption himself. The vital and intimate union between the sons and the Son remains unyieldingly robust: “Nothing can be more personal than the intimate relation which the Christ (particularly the Risen Christ) sustains to the believer.”¹⁷ Believers are adopted only *in and through* Jesus Christ.

To be sure, the apostle affirms inviolable distinctions between the sons and the Son: Christ is Firstborn, Firstfruits, the one Mediator between God and man, and the Last Adam; but the sons united to him enjoy full participation in *all* that he has attained as the eschatological Son. The driving union-with-Christ paradigm of his soteriology celebrates the stunning privileges of a gracious, Spirit-wrought concatenation of the redeemed with the Redeemer, of the sons with the Son.

So what then is the scope of this adoption for believers? In his book on the Holy Spirit, Sinclair Ferguson remarks, “In Christ the forensic and the transformative are one (Rom. 6:7). More, justification, sanctification, and glorification are one; declaratory, transformatory and consummatory coalesce in this resurrection.”¹⁸ The manner in which the apostle Paul aligns resurrection and adoption requires that we affirm this coalescence with Christ’s newly attained sonship as well. In other words, at this cosmic moment in the history of redemption, Jesus secures all the redemptive benefits as resurrected *Son*. In his covenantal attainment as adopted/resurrected Son, the forensic and transformative are one. Christ’s adoption marks his comprehensive covenantal and filial success *and* marks the point at which he becomes life-giving Spirit. By the grace of Christ Jesus, the life-giving Spirit of adoption, “believers are ... put in the same position as Christ, who is the firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29).”¹⁹ He pours

out the Spirit of adoption precisely because he is the adopted Son. He gives to the elect by grace what he has achieved by right.

Adoption then functions as no synonym for an *aspect* of union like justification, but offers rather a complex metaphor entailing his divinely declared *and* transformed identity at his resurrection. Truly, “justification, sanctification and glorification are one” in his resurrected sonship; the “declaratory, transformatory and consummatory coalesce” in his adoption. Coordinately and derivatively, these facts are as true of the sons as they are of their Elder Brother. Affirming the forensic in justification and the renewal in regeneration and sanctification for the believer, A. A. Hodge asserts, “Adoption includes both. As set forth in Scripture, it embraces in one complex view the newly-regenerated creature in the new relations into which he is introduced by justification.”²⁰ Though he neither expands nor expounds, Hodge here resonates with Calvin, who resonates with the apostle Paul. As adopted Son, Christ distributes himself and his benefits to all the elect, making them sons in full possession of all that he is and has.

Adoption thus provides the covenantal and filial context for Christ’s once-for-all redemptive work as the Beloved Son of God. The efficacy of his filial attainment draws those united to him into the full blessing of filial grace—in its forensic and transformative dimensions. As adopted sons in Christ, we become the *beloved sons in whom the Father is well pleased*.

Soli Patri Gloria. Soli Filio Gloria. Soli Spiritui Gloria. ©

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17 Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930), 166.

18 Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 250.

19 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans.

John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:227. Though Bavinck argues differently concerning the sonship of Christ and the adoption of believers, this statement from him functions better when understanding the *shared* adoption of the redeemed sons in the Redeemer Son.

20 Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 192.

Servant Church

Six Anti-Church Evangelical Trends

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by Shane Lems

Church attendance in the United States has always waxed and waned. It is not accurate to say that church attendance in America was excellent around the turn of the nineteenth century and has declined ever since. Instead, there have been various tendencies in attendance: sometimes attendance trended upwards, sometimes it trended downwards.

R. Kent Hughes, pastor, author, and professor, wrote a helpful list of anti-church Evangelical trends back in 2003. These developments, he said, show that many who call themselves Christians have a very low view of the church and of church membership. Hughes's discussion of this topic is very insightful; below I'll summarize, explain, and expand on his insights since they are still relevant today.

1. The Hitchhiker Mentality

A hitchhiker is a person who wants a free ride for a limited amount of time. He doesn't take ownership of the car, maintain it, or help with its repairs; he simply wants a ride and will bail if anything goes wrong or if he's finished riding. This is how many people think of the church and church membership:

You go to the meetings and serve on the boards and committees, you grapple with the issues and do the work of the church and pay the bills—and I'll come along for the ride. But if things do not suit me, I'll criticize and complain and probably bail out. My thumb is always out for a better ride.²

Many Christians today have the mindset of just coasting in a church for a time and then leaving when they feel like it. They don't get involved in the life of the church; they don't donate their time and energy; they never ask what they can do to help; and they don't invest their lives in the church. They are irresponsible and immature in this aspect of their lives, and have little concept of duty or service.

2. Consumer Christians

Consumer Christians are

ecclesiastical shoppers [that] attend one church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for its youth program, and go to a third church's small group. Their motto is to ask, "What's in it for me?"

The consumer mentality "encouraged those who have been influenced by it to think naturally in terms of receiving rather than contributing."³

These are the kind of people who want to take from the church but never give. Church for these types of people is a commodity that exists to offer them something they want or need.

This view—a consumer view of the church—is a characteristic of the entitlement mindset of our culture. Everyone—especially younger Americans—believes they are entitled to certain rights and benefits, as if they are royalty to be served. The customer is king! This view has crept into the church: "If the church doesn't serve or

2 R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 128.

3 Ibid., 129.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=588&issue_id=120.

suit me, I'm out. If my needs are not met, I'll go somewhere else." Church shopping, consumerism, and entitlement all go together to be part of this anti-church Evangelical trend. To be sure, there are churches that make this trend worse by using consumer-centered church growth methods.

3. Spectator Christians

Spectator Christianity feeds on the delusion that virtue can come through viewing, much like the football fan who imagines that he ingests strength and daring while watching his favorite pro team. Spectator sports and spectator Christianity produce the same things—fans who cheer the players on while they themselves are in desperate need of engagement and meaning.⁴

These are the people who like sitting lazily in the bleachers, but do not want to get in the game. The bleacher seat is good enough for them, thinking (implicitly or explicitly) that the Christian faith can be “caught” by watching from the stands and not committing oneself to stepping on the field. In other words, these are the people who are content with watching others follow Christ, but never really doing it themselves. They watch others to feel good about life or themselves, but not to learn how to die to self and live for Christ.

4. Drive-Through Christians

The fast-food drive-through means you can get (unhealthy) food in no time and with no effort. Since we're in a hurry, we just want to quickly eat something that tastes good and then get on with our urgent business. The result of this kind of lifestyle is not good: it leaves unhealthy and typically overweight people who are stressed out because they have such busy lives.

Something similar happens when a person views the church like a fast-food restaurant: People with this view

get their “church fix” out of the way by at-

⁴ Ibid.

tending a weeknight church service or the early service on Sunday morning so that the family can save the bulk of Sunday for the all-important soccer game or recreational trip. Of course there is an unhappy price extracted over time in the habits and the arteries of a flabby soul—a family that is unfit for the battles of life and has no conception of being Christian soldiers in the great spiritual battle.⁵

5. Relationless Christians

Despite the Bible's emphasis on Christians regularly assembling to worship and fellowship, today some people say “the best church is the one that knows you least and demands the least.”⁶ This goes hand in hand with the trends already mentioned. People want to hitchhike through church life—making small talk with the driver but never really getting to know him personally. To many people, the soccer game or vacation are more important than the people at church, so why bother to start relationships within the church?

This becomes evident when people balk at the idea of membership. Few people appreciate church membership today because it goes against their selfish desire to be on their own, it means they are accountable to others, and it means they need to share their lives and help others when needed. For most people, it's much more fulfilling to go to a movie Friday night than help the needy church family move into an apartment down town.

6. Churchless Worshippers

This trend is also common, since many people today think that they can worship God alone, on their own, when it is most convenient and beneficial to them. Why wake up early on Sunday and go to a place where there are strange people when I can just sleep in and worship God while I watch the football game alone? Although this line of thought is completely unbiblical, it is quite common today. Hughes put it this way:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

The current myth is that a life of worship is possible, even better, apart from the church. As one person blithely expressed it, “For ‘church’ I go to the mall to my favorite coffee place and spend my morning with the Lord. That is how I worship.” This is an updated suburban and yuppie version of how to spend Sunday, changed from its rustic forebearer [namely, Emily Dickinson, who said 100 years ago], “*Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—I keep it staying at Home.*”⁷

Hughes is correct about these trends; I’ve seen them myself since I became a pastor some years ago. The ethos of American culture (consumerism, individualism, narcissism, dislike of authority, lust for entertainment and fun, busyness, and so forth) directly contradicts the ethos of the biblical view of the church. They are quite at odds.

It’s helpful to think about the above trends for these reasons: 1) so we ourselves don’t get caught up in them, 2) so we can understand the mindset of those who are caught up in them, 3) so we can patiently dialogue, discuss, teach, rebuke, and preach to those struggling with these trends, 4) so we can help keep the church from catering to these trends, and 5) so we can better preach the gospel that frees people from all these “isms” (narcissism, consumerism, individualism, etc.). Since this is the cultural air that we all breathe, every one of us needs to be reminded constantly of the biblical view of the church, and of the loving, patient Savior who is her head, husband, and redeemer. ©

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7 Ibid., 130.

✦ Servant Realms

Ministers Laboring “Out of Bounds”: Spreading the Reformed Faith and Growing the OPC

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by **Allen G. Tomlinson**

This is a plea for our small but energetic denomination not to neglect a great opportunity to spread God’s truth, while at the same time possibly adding congregations to our number. How? By encouraging and aiding our pastors who are searching for pulpit ministries to consider ministering “out of bounds” (“out of ecclesiastical boundaries”). In the last decade the Presbytery of New York and New England has added three, long-established, independent congregational churches to their ranks, as OPC ministers labored “out of bounds” as pastors of these congregations. As the pastors of these flocks, these men were able to preach the gospel and teach the Reformed Faith, including (eventually) the biblical doctrine of connectionism. The result is, in our presbytery of twenty-seven congregations (including mission works), an 11 percent growth in the number of our churches. All of this with no financial outlay on the part of presbytery, since these congregations paid our pastors full salary and benefits, being long-established congregations. This did not

leave any of our own pulpits vacant, as we have more ordained men than we do open pulpits. This was accomplished without using OPC financial resources, by loaning out only three of our “human resources,” which we could afford. Surely this is a good use of our ministers.

Our Book of Church Order, particularly in The Form of Government, chapter 28, lays down the rules for OPC ministers laboring in congregations outside our denomination:

Chapter XXVIII **Ministers Laboring outside the Church**

1. A minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may under certain circumstances and conditions labor in churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A candidate for ordination who seeks or intends to labor in such a church may under certain circumstances and conditions be ordained by a presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Such labor may be distinctly missionary in its nature and purpose in that it may provide the minister with the opportunity of ministering the gospel to unbelievers and of promoting the cause which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church represents. Such labor may, in certain cases, be that of a pastor or of a teacher, presenting the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the opportunity of providing other churches with a ministry which otherwise they might not enjoy.

2. Although it is impossible to delineate all the practical circumstances and conditions under which it may be proper for a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to engage in such labor, the following general principles based upon the standards of the Church must be adhered to in all cases:

- a. Ministers cannot undertake to labor in other churches if such labor requires the performance of functions inconsistent with their ordination vows or with the other provisions of the standards of the Church. They cannot undertake such

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=533&issue_id=112.

work if the relationship requires that they preach anything contrary to the system of truth taught in the Holy Scriptures or requires that they refrain from preaching the whole counsel of God. Such work cannot be undertaken if the relationship requires them to conduct worship that is not in accord with the standards of the Church. Ministers cannot participate in the government of such churches if such government is contrary to the principles of presbyterian government set forth in these standards. And such discipline as the relationship may require them to administer must be in accord with the principles of discipline set forth in these standards.

b. Ministers who perform such labor shall remain under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the churches concerned shall be advised of this fact.

c. Though the churches in which such ministers labor are in no respect under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the presbyteries and the general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church shall always exercise oversight of the work being performed by such ministers, and shall take due care that the work being performed is consistent with the standards of the Church.

d. Ministers may act as pastors of such churches provided none of the foregoing conditions is violated in the assumption of such a responsibility.

e. Presbyteries cannot install ministers as pastors of churches other than those of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

f. If ministers are installed as pastors under other auspices, the installation must not be such as in any way prejudices the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over them. Such pastoral

installation cannot take place if the installation formula prescribed by the church concerned prejudices this jurisdiction.

g. The ultimate objective of all such labor cannot be anything less than the establishment of such churches as churches of Presbyterian and Reformed testimony, provided that the churches concerned are not already such. To make the objective less than this would be inconsistent with the profession and vows made in ordination.

3. The principles of Sections 1 and 2 shall also apply to the relationship of ministers to nonecclesiastical religious organizations.

4. Such ministers shall report at least once each year to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction they are. This report shall concern their ministerial activities, and shall include especial reference to the relationship of these activities to the interest and welfare of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This chapter will act as the outline for this article, to guide our thoughts as far as the usefulness and good stewardship involved in encouraging ordained men or licentiates without an OPC charge to search for opportunities to preach the gospel in congregations outside of our denomination.

I. When and Where?

What occasions justify loaning out an OPC pastor to a congregation that is not a member church in the OPC?

1. In a situation that is clearly “missionary in its nature.” Sometimes a congregation has so little understanding of biblical truth that it might call a gospel preacher as pastor, even when the majority of the congregation does not understand the gospel. This happened here at First Church of Merrimack, New Hampshire, where I have been privileged to minister for over twenty-seven years, the last eighteen of those years as an OPC minister under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of New

York and New England.

I did not come to Merrimack, nor have I continued to minister here, in a ministry that would fall under this category of “missionary in nature.” However, back in 1967, a minister in the PCA was called to become pastor here, a seasoned minister named Bruce Gordon. Bruce’s presbytery approved the call, and for thirteen very difficult years he maintained his Reformed ministerial integrity while preaching the gospel to a congregation that at first was far from evangelical. By the end of those thirteen years, the church was well on its way to being identified as a “Reformed” church. A large portion of the flock held to Calvinism (salvation by God’s eternal decree and sovereign grace) and many had some growing idea of covenant theology (versus Dispensationalism and the rationalistic liberalism they had been taught in the first half of the twentieth century).

Such work is very difficult, requires an incredible amount of patience, and sometimes ends in what appears to be, from a mere earthly point of view, failure. However, the Great Commission is furthered as the gospel goes forth to another group of sinners in need of salvation, whether they are converted or not. We have been good stewards of our gospel resources, even if they appear to bear little fruit.

2. In more established, already evangelical congregations, OPC ministers can provide a strong gospel and Reformed ministry to a congregation that is desiring to grow in their understanding and practice of God’s Word. Even if the congregation remains independent and never unites with the OPC, during the time of the OPC pastor’s ministry there, the Reformed Faith is spread, sinners are converted, believers are built up, and the congregation is a major step closer to being conformed to the New Testament pattern.

This is what has happened during my twenty-seven plus years at Merrimack. Building on Bruce Gordon’s labors, I have continued to preach Christ as the point of the entire Bible, and God in his mercy has converted sinners and built up the saints. Even if First Church had not voted to seek union with the OPC, the labors here would not

be wasted. Through my being an OPC minister, our congregation was able to share in the support of presbytery mission works, OPC world missions, and a growing fellowship with fellow Reformed ministers, elders, and members in our area. Since the congregation did vote to seek union with the OPC, our presbytery and denomination gained a new congregation, already long-established and self-supporting, to join with us in taking the gospel forth and in building one another up in the Reformed Faith.

This “out of bounds” labor, for the purpose of edifying an already established evangelical church in the Reformed Faith, can also be very difficult and frustrating. Patience is the number one quality required. The work cannot be rushed, including working with those who need to come to a genuine gospel faith, and with those believers who must be led to see the important doctrines of God’s Word that comprise the Reformed Faith. Many may resist, at least for a time. Those who can only labor under ideal situations, with every “T” crossed and every “i” dotted just so, should not send out their resumes. Those who are impatient when fellow sinners need to be taught the same truths, over and over again for a period of years, before they seem to be able to understand and embrace those truths as their own, either need to learn patience or find some other avenue in which to serve Christ. Of course, I would argue such impatience will not work if one wants to do the work of a Reformer or a missionary/evangelist. Our Reformers had to be patient men, more patient than I have ever been! What is more, perhaps all gospel ministry, if done biblically, requires such patience, inside or outside the OPC. Such patience can result in very rich fruit for God’s kingdom of grace, as we “do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:1, 16) or “grow weary of doing good” (Gal. 6:9).

II. “Out of Bounds,” but Not without Boundaries

An OPC minister must never take upon himself a labor that will require him to function contrary to his ordination vows or to work against

the standards of our church.

For example, he should never accept a call that will require him to preach other doctrine than the biblical doctrine as summed up in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. His concern must always be the entire Scriptures as God's infallible Word and accordingly the need to preach "the whole counsel of God." This does not mean that he is required to begin his preaching in a given congregation with the most difficult parts of our system of biblical doctrine, e.g., the decrees of God. With any group of people being introduced to the serious biblical truth emphasized in the historic Reformed Faith, we should begin at the beginning and, adding doctrine to doctrine, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, bring the flock to ever increasing degrees of doctrinal and practical maturity.

The best place to begin for many congregations is with the doctrine of the Bible or divine revelation. Then moving on to the Fall and the greatness of our sin, we can begin to teach God's eternal solution. The key is to move slowly, so as to give people the time needed to spiritually and intellectually assimilate what is often for them a radically new way of understanding the biblical text. However, at no time should the minister of the gospel back off from preaching the gospel itself or teaching any portion of God's Word that he deems needful at that time.

Neither should an OPC minister agree to direct worship that is not in accordance with (regulated by) the Scriptures, worship that would contradict the standards of our church. Our Directory of Worship is very clear that there are practices that are untrue to the worship of the New Testament church, and also that there are areas where there is some acceptable variance. For example, our Directory for Worship allows for a congregation to have a choir, even if that is not the normal thing for the average OPC congregation. In taking a charge out of bounds, the minister must be very clear that he cannot participate in, plan, or lead unbiblical worship.

This means he must be very careful before he accepts such a call to investigate what the out of

bounds congregation expects of a pastor, how it worships before calling him, and whether or not they are willing to make any necessary adjustments for him to accept the call and continue to fulfill his ordination vows. If he is not given something of a "free hand," it may not be a situation that is within the denominational boundaries for an out of bounds ministry.

The same is true when it comes to polity and discipline. The OPC minister, who is considering a call to a non-OPC congregation, should sit down with the leadership especially and find out how the church functions as far as rule and discipline. If the practice is so unbiblical as to be impossible for the minister to cooperate, even for a temporary period, he needs to explain this. He should be very irenic in his approach, explain that what they are doing is not biblical, and let them know that if they still want him to come, he would need to teach them a better way from God's Word.

At this point there must be a boundary to the boundaries. I assume that those who put together and voted for Chapter 28 of the Form of Government must have had this in view, for otherwise the allowance of out of bounds situations would be mere theory without the possibility of being practiced. The statement "if such government is contrary to the principles of presbyterian government as set forth in these standards" (FG 28.2.a) cannot mean that in every aspect of the out-of-bounds congregation there is no difference in polity between it and the OPC. There are slight differences even with our sister denominations with whom we have the closest ecclesiastical bonds. Congregational and independent churches are those that especially would be open to calling an OPC minister. If we demand a full acceptance of biblical connectionism, by definition, an OPC ministry could never be approved for such churches. I have always assumed that the idea behind this expression must be that the out-of-bounds calling body, though perhaps not appreciating—yet—the place of elders and of connectionism, can still be served as long as the form of church government at the out-of-bounds congregation does not demand that the OPC minister violate his adherence to

biblical, Presbyterian polity, even if that government stops short of all that we would desire.

For example, when I came to First Church back in 1988, it had deacons who functioned partly as biblical ruling elders and partly as biblical deacons, and a Prudential Committee that took care of some duties that I knew the deacons ought to be doing. I was able to work with the session (of deacons), so that together we proposed (after I had been here five years) an internal change that resulted in ruling elders working with the pastors as the session, the elimination of the Prudential Committee, and a more biblically defined board of deacons. Then after another twenty-one years (I said it took patience, right?) the congregation was ready to vote to become Presbyterian. This work more often than not requires making changes *one baby step at a time*. Again, patience and perseverance can result in lasting fruit, to God's glory and to the good of Christ's Church.

III. Accountability

OPC ministers remain under the jurisdiction of the OPC, in particular, of their presbytery. This *must* be understood and agreed to by the calling body. The out-of-bounds congregation itself, obviously, is not under that jurisdiction. It is important that both the presbytery and the minister keep this in mind at all times. However, the church must understand that the presbytery has a right to oversee its own ministers' gospel labors, even when a minister is ministering out of bounds. He is to operate within the boundaries of our accepted standards, functioning only in a biblical fashion in all of his work, and his presbytery is to ensure that this is the case. This accountability includes an annual report to the presbytery, which should reaffirm his adherence to his ordination vows and review of how this labor is not only for the good of the church at large, but in line with the interest of the OPC in particular.

If an out-of-bounds congregation cannot agree to the OPC minister remaining accountable to his denomination and presbytery, and to his ordination vows and biblical convictions, he must not accept

such a call, nor should the presbytery approve such a call, if my reading of Chapter 28 is correct.

IV. The Big Purpose

Our Form of Government affirms that the "ultimate objective" of such a situation "cannot be anything less than the establishment of such churches as churches of Presbyterian and Reformed testimony" (FG 28.2.g). Otherwise, the minister's profession and vows as an OPC minister would be violated.

Does this mean that if the session or congregation affirms at any point they absolutely will not become Presbyterian that the minister must leave? Some OPC men interpret Form of Government 28.2.g in this way. Others have told me they would not see it necessary for him to leave as long as no restriction is made on what he teaches, in other words, as long as he can continue to teach on all subjects biblically, including polity. I know that at certain points throughout my history at First Church, certain members have told me that our church could never change, but the session never made that affirmation to me nor forbade me to teach on the subject. They never forbade me to teach on any biblical text or to teach in line with any part of the Confession of Faith. As a matter of fact, the church bylaws in effect when I came affirmed that a man could minister here only if he subscribed to the form of doctrine taught in the WCF. The bylaws did not limit this to just some of the WCF, but to the entire document.

It seems to me that the answer to this question would depend on the situation. In some places, it might appear at a given time that there is a totally closed mind and heart to our doctrine. So, even though there is no direct prohibition of teaching that doctrine, the minister should probably begin to seek another place of ministry. In other places, even though there is not an immediate acceptance of the full biblical teaching, as long as the minister is not restricted in his teaching and preaching of the truth, he might want to continue, praying and laboring to see people's minds and hearts transformed by God's Word.

Conclusion

How does a minister, looking for a place to serve, find out about independent or congregational churches needing a pastor? When I was a young man, I found out about First Church through the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, of which I was a member at that time. However, if I had been OPC back in 1988, I only could have found out about an open pulpit in an independent congregation by word of mouth. Today with the Internet this is much easier. Many independent churches will post their need with one or more of the websites available for this need.

What advice would I offer to an OPC licentiate or minister who is desirous of considering an out-of-bounds opportunity?

1. Be very careful in the interviewing process to make sure you discuss *all* differences with the session and congregation of such a church. Be certain that you express very clearly, up front, the restrictions that you have placed yourself under as an OPC minister. Do not proceed until you have talked through these differences and unless they agree with your need to maintain your ordination vows. Isn't it better to not "get married" than to "get married and then divorced," as the normal rule? Do not enter into a relationship that is doomed from the start.

2. Remember that things will be different in an independent church, as far as certain practices and many of the generally held opinions in the congregation and/or session. This is why an OPC minister would take this route in the first place, to help biblically educate and strengthen a congregation that is open to learning God's Word but its faith and practice fall short at this time. Make sure you can live with the differences, at least in the short term, until the congregation becomes more open to your teaching.

3. Do not forget that *patience* is the key. Do not rush anything. Take your time. Especially take time to lay a solid foundation in teaching before you advocate change in practice. As a very young minister in Iowa, I preached a three-week series on a subject, and then sought to have the congrega-

tion take what was for them a fairly radical step. Talk about failure! It did not "fly" at all; it never got off the ground. I asked an experienced minister in that denomination where I went wrong, and he told me that three sermons were nowhere near enough teaching nor enough time for the congregation to reflect and make the teaching their own. Maybe three years! This should not be a problem for the minister of the gospel; we are in this for the "long haul" anyway.

4. Faith is essential. Trust the Holy Spirit to use his Word and the other biblical ordinances to convert and transform and to change minds and hearts. Preach and minister, trusting in the Holy Spirit to accomplish his will, whether that results in this congregation becoming OPC or not. Our chief desire is eternal fruit that glorifies God.

OPC ministers laboring out of bounds can help other churches come to a deeper appreciation and practice of biblical truth, to God's glory. They might also be used to add Reformed congregations to our number. If you are an OPC minister or licentiate and cannot find an OPC pulpit from which to proclaim God's Word, have you considered looking for an independent pulpit open to hearing the Reformed truth? ©

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The Biblical Case for Ecumenicity

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by John A. Bouwers

I crossed a national border and a couple of state lines to get here.² That's nothing when you consider that John Calvin said he would cross ten seas for the sake of unity. He wrote Archbishop Cranmer in April 1552 with a particular concern for the Church of England. He was discouraged by the devastation the church experienced in its disunity. Calvin was known as the apostle of ecumenicity.

My assignment is to speak on the biblical mandate for ecumenicity.

We start with the conviction that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one.

My presentation is based largely on John 17. I will also reference Article 27 of the Belgic Confession and what our fathers have taught with regard to the "one holy catholic church." I refer you also to a very helpful document on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church website, "Biblical Principles for the Unity of the Church."³

We come from a context of churches that relate to each other in the bonds of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), where together we express a commitment to the pursuit of organic unity among likeminded churches.

In the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), we conduct our ecumenical efforts *with a view to complete church unity*. Admittedly, this is not something that is easily attained, but it is the goal. My challenge is to encourage

you from the Scriptures as to why that should be the case. We can become cynical, but we should not. We ought to live by faith: "I *believe* one holy catholic ... church." This confession needs to be brought to expression.

Jesus Christ makes plain in John 17 that this is his heart's desire. Ephesians 4:3 states that we are "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It's a unity we are to keep; to manifest; to work out; to bring to expression.

Some suggest we should be content with unity as a spiritual *essence* and not be so concerned about the *expression* of unity. That is a false dilemma. Yes, ultimately we must be rooted in what is given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the work of the Spirit. But out of that reality we are to be busy.

In our own broken experience we know it is relatively easy to break unity. Sometimes it is necessary, when truth is at stake. It's a more difficult challenge to bring about unity. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation to the world. We need to show that reconciliation to the world.

The church is one.

1. The Declaration of Unity as Reality

Belgic Confession, Article 27 says:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.⁴

Over against the accusations that they had destroyed the unity of the church, the Reformers declared, "We believe ... one holy catholic and apostolic church." They believed, based on the Scriptures, that God has one work in the earth.

The Lord has a covenant, and the language of Leviticus 26:12 is repeated throughout Scripture: "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." He binds himself to one

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=572&issue_id=118.

2 This article is based on a lecture given at the United Reformed Churches in North America Classis Eastern US, Semper Reformanda Conference on October 14, 2014.

3 Accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.opc.org/relations/unity.html>.

4 *Psalter Hymnal: Doctrinal Standards and Liturgy of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 82.

people and dwells with them. In the New Testament, Ephesians 2:14 explains, the walls of partition have come down. God has one people. If the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles can come down, certainly the wall of partition between Reformed and Presbyterian is not insurmountable.

There is one body. Ephesians 4:3 states, “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1–16 is a call to manifest that unity and bring it to expression.

The consummation is seen in Revelation 21:3 where the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God as a bride prepared for her husband, and again the Lord says, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

The church is one. It is a declaration of faith.

The Reformers understood that Reformation was required because of the deformation of the church. There had been a sham kind of organizational unity in the place of a commitment to the truth and to the gospel. In the face of this, the Belgic Confession describes the one holy catholic church as “a holy congregation of true believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit” (Article 27). Unity is found in Christ. The Reformers were accused of rending church unity: “Where the Pope is, there is the church,” their accusers said. But the Reformers responded, “Where Christ is, there is the church.”

Perhaps you’re in a foreign place, and you run into other believers. They are also “expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” There is a unity you enjoy together. The church is one.

Jesus says in John 17, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.... I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours” (vv. 1, 2, 9).

The blessed reality of unity roots in what God

has *given* from all eternity. It roots in election; in God’s sovereign grace; it is fundamentally a gift of God. Unity is not, first and foremost, organizational. That was the Roman Catholic error. We need to stand on the right foundation. It needs to be unity in Christ, a work of God’s Spirit. That’s the unity for which Christ prayed, a gift of God, and a reality.

At the very least we understand that it is an eschatological reality. Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Unity is a reality. And as we look forward to that unity, we need to work it out today. But, in doing so, we must beware of the danger of unity as idolatry.

2. The Danger of Unity as Idolatry

The Heidelberg Catechism says idolatry is having or inventing anything that one places trust in apart from or alongside of the one true God (Q.#95). Unity is an idol if it becomes more important than God; if, for the sake of unity, we deny parts of our confession.

When unity becomes an idol, as it did in the days leading to the Reformation, it becomes a weapon with which to pummel those who seek to call the church to faithfulness. “The church is one; you can’t rend the fabric of the church.” Yet the Bible was not opened, and the Lord Jesus Christ was scarcely preached. Hope was not found in the gospel of God’s sovereign grace, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Those who proclaimed these truths were viewed as troublemakers in Israel. When unity becomes idolatry, it takes on a role more significant than the truth of the Word of God.

A careful look at John 17 reveals what Jesus is praying for:

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.... For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have

received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (vv. 6, 8, 17)

Any desire for unity that would make the Word secondary is a sham. That is the liberal ecumenical movement.

Another form of unity as idolatry demands “everything gets done the way I do it.” But unity is not uniformity, and it is important to understand the difference.

In Colossians 3:11 we read: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” There is diversity, but it is not a threat to unity. Diversity contributes to the blessing of unity. An overemphasis on uniformity can hinder true unity. Diversity ought to contribute to our sense of privilege and blessing. We have things to learn from each other.

Uniformity hinders unity when we emphasize our distinctive, defining moments as churches, a moment in history, an emphasis, a way of preaching. Distinctives are elevated to the point of confessional status: “We might have the same Confession, we might agree in everything we confess from the Word of God. But we preach differently, so we’ll never be united.” This form of idolatry hinders unity.

3. The Demand for Unity as Responsibility

Finally, if we declare unity as reality, the implication is that we need to engage the demand for unity as a responsibility. Jesus prayed for it.

Some suggest that Jesus wasn’t praying in John 17 for the organizational unity of the church; that, instead, Jesus prayed for his return to the glory of the Father and that his people would experience that reality with him. That’s true enough in the ultimate sense. But we can’t deny that what Jesus prays for has implications for practical unity today.

In Scripture there is an expectation that the church be governed in a certain way. “Appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). We see that in Acts 14, as well as in the Pastoral

Epistles. Acts 15 suggests a connectionalism in the life of the church—the need to consult with one another. Having consulted with one another at the Jerusalem Council, what was decided there was communicated to the churches as, “They delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). The expectation is that churches hold one another accountable, live according to this standard, and continue to interact with each other. Therefore, when Jesus prays for unity to come to visible expression, this kind of connectionalism is an *application* of what Jesus prays.

We are taught to work for what we pray for. *Ora et labora*. Jesus prays and works, says John 17:21, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Jesus works for what he prays for. Shouldn’t we do the same?

People say, “Time spent on ecumenicity takes time away from the work of evangelism.” According to Jesus, that’s a false dilemma. For the sake of our witness to the world, we need to strive for oneness. We are ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:20), yet we can’t get along with each other? We need to examine ourselves, and give better expression to what we have in Christ.

In Ephesians 4:32, Paul says to forgive one another as you have been forgiven in Christ. “Ah, but we’re spiritually one,” we say piously. Yet our actions say something different. “I’m not talking to those people. We haven’t talked to them since the 1930s or the 1940s.”

Jesus says, “that they may all be one ... *that the world may believe*” (John 17:21, emphasis added). It is not either/or: the mission of the church and our call to ecumenicity work together. The world must see that we are serious about the gospel of reconciliation.

R. B. Kuiper wrote:

There are Christian denominations which are so similar in their interpretation of the Word of God [and I would interject that they hold

faithfully to the same confessions, historical differences and emphases aside] that they can without compromising their convictions merge with one another. It may be said that organizational unification is their solemn duty.⁵

Not to do so, to be complacent or unconcerned, would be sin. It's our solemn duty.

Since our inception as United Reformed Churches, we have engaged extensively in the work of ecumenicity. It is reflected in our name. We were born of secession, but want to say to the world, we're not about being by ourselves. We want to seek in whatever ways we can to bring true unity to expression.

I can speak personally of the blessing of witnessing walls and barriers coming down. We thank God for this, his work.

At the same time we need to strive for more. In relation to John 17 there are those, Martyn Lloyd-Jones being one, who emphasize the *essentialness* of spiritual unity over against the *expression* of unity. We should not take that approach.

If unity is a spiritual reality (and it is), why does Jesus continually pray for it? Because he wants to see more of it. He wants it manifested that the world may know. Now, we can sit back complacently and say, "Ultimately in eternity, eschatologically, all will be well." Or we can become disillusioned and say, "It's hard work. We'll never attain perfect unity until the eschaton anyway, so why bother?" But that would be like saying with regard to our own personal sanctification, "I'm not going to be perfect this side of eternity anyway, so what's the use?"

We are not antinomians; we never stop striving in our desire to be renewed after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise with our ecumenical calling, we strive for more.

John Murray wrote:

It is to be admitted that the fragmentation and lack of coordination and solidarity which we find within strictly Evangelical and Reformed

churches creates a difficult situation. And how this disunity is to be remedied in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is a task not easily accomplished. But what needs to be indicted and indicted with vehemence is the complacency so widespread, and the failure to be aware that this is an evil, dishonoring to Christ, destructive to the edification defined by the Apostle as the increase of the body into the building up of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16) and prejudicial to the evangelistic outreach to the world. If we are once convinced of this evil, the evil of schism in the body of Christ, the evil of disruption in the communion of saints, then we have made great progress. We shall then be constrained to preach the evil, to bring conviction to the hearts of others also to implore God's grace and wisdom in remedying the evil, and to devise ways and means of healing these ruptures to the promotion of the united witness to the faith of Jesus and the whole counsel of God.⁶

What is to be indicted, as Murray says, is complacency.

The challenge for us is, are we willing to work, to strive sacrificially? Are we willing, as Calvin was, to cross ten seas for the unity of the church? ☺

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5 R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 54.

6 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 335.

✦ Servant Living

The Path to— and from—Here: Reflections on Sexual Identity Past and Present

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by Carl Trueman

I want to start this article by making a number of foundational points.² First—and most important—is the distinction between the issues surrounding the pastoral care of those subject to sexual dysfunction and the way in which sexuality is being used as the primary idiom of a form of politics in the Western world. As to the former, it is a truism that all human beings struggle with sexual dysfunction to some extent and that a central part of pastoral work is always going to be concerned with such. That is not my topic today. I am going to restrict myself very specifically to—for want of a better term—sexuality as cultural politics. The distinction is key because to confuse the two is highly problematic. It can lead us on the one side to be mesmerized by the aggressive campaigns for normalizing dysfunction and thus to lose sight of the agony of individuals who want pastoral care in such matters. On the other, it can lead us

to underestimate the ruthless and comprehensive intentions of the political lobby groups who have sexuality at the heart of their campaign to transform the civic realm, not least in the area of religious freedom.

The second foundational point is the importance of understanding the particulars of the matter before us. When faced with particular matters, there is a tendency in Christian circles often to resort to the answer “Well, the world is fallen and we are sinful. What more explanation do we need?” That is true—but also unhelpful in knowing the times and responding to them. I could make the case for gravity being the reason why the Twin Towers collapsed on 9/11, and that would be a technically true statement. But it would tell me next to nothing about why they really fell down. Universal principles which explain everything, in general, actually explain almost nothing, in particular. And it is important to respond in an informed way to the particularities of our times if for no other reason than we need to help our congregations understand why we believe as we do and how the world around us is attempting to reshape their thinking. There is therefore a need for studying the path to our present age beyond resorting simply to the category of sin.

The third point is this: We need to be aware that the particular pressure points in the current situation, primarily matters of sexual identity, are themselves only a part of a much more comprehensive shift in the way in which society thinks. The fact that transgenderism has moved so quickly from the exotic outer margins to the very center of political discourse indicates that the politics of sexual identity rests upon a much wider and deeper transformation of human identity than simply sexual preference. And that so many of us have been caught by surprise by the rapid acceptance of transgenderism, not to mention federal mandates with reference to such, reveals how blind we have been to these tectonic cultural shifts and to the means by which they have been made both normal and normative.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=566&issue_id=117.

2 This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness,” sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The Battle for the Self

At the heart of the social and political transformation we are witnessing lies a fundamental transformation in the way that individuals understand themselves. This is a complex phenomenon and cannot be reduced to a single cause, or even to a couple of causes.

To press the conclusion first, I would suggest that sociologist Phillip Rieff's argument that we live in the era of psychological man is extremely useful.³ Rieff's taxonomy of the self is overdrawn but helpful. The self in ancient Greece was political man, one who found his meaning in engaging in life in the polis. Political man gave way to religious man, who found his meaning in religious rites and observances. Religious man gave way to economic man, who found his meaning in economic activity. And economic man gave way to psychological man, who finds his identity in his own inner well-being and happiness.

The taxonomy is overdrawn because self-understanding has always been complicated. Thus, the Augustine of the *Confessions* is arguably a psychological man, finding his identity in his inner dialogue and struggles. Yet if we take Rieff as pointing to dominant characteristics of particular ages, then his taxonomy holds.

The precise nature of this Psychological Man has been established by various forces, some sophisticated, others decidedly demotic. At an intellectual level, we might make a case for the role of voluntarism and philosophical nominalism, increasingly dominant since the late Middle Ages, as downplaying the objective givenness of the world. Later, romanticism, too, played its part as the artistic counterpart to such philosophical developments. Of course, romanticism is a vast movement, but we might perhaps take the preface to Wordsworth and Coleridge's influential collection of poems, *Lyrical Ballads*, as something of a manifesto for the romantics. Here Wordsworth

makes *pleasure* the central purpose of the poet's task and poetry itself "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."⁴ The inward, psychological term is obvious, as we might also note, for example, in William Blake's poem "The Garden of Love," in Beethoven's late string quartets, or in the powerful artwork of J. M. W. Turner.

We might add to this the role of consumerism within society. The role of advertising, easy credit, and the capturing of the popular imagination by the idea that consumption is the key to happiness is yet another element in the story that places the individual at the center of the universe. Indeed, this is a story that makes the individual believe that he is able to construct his own meaning and significance.

The Marriage of Psychology, Sex, and Politics

Perhaps the most significant background to our current problems, however, has been the fusion of politics and psychology. This story is wide-ranging and complicated but a central narrative can be identified. The influence of Sigmund Freud is central. It was Freud who both set sex at the center of human identity, both individual and social, and who identified happiness with genital stimulation and satisfaction. Here is what he says in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: "Man's discovery that sexual (genital) love afforded him the strongest experiences of satisfaction and in fact provided him with the prototype of all happiness."⁵

For Freud, happiness in its most basic sense was sex, but notice how this connected to what had gone before. Happiness and personal satisfaction had been the hallmark of Enlightenment thinking and found its most artistic expression in romanticism. What Freud did was to take the internalizing impulse of romanticism and set it forth in scientific idiom of psychoanalysis, thus giving his philosophy a persuasive form of expression. He also, thereby,

3 See Phillip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (New York: Viking, 1959), 329–57; *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (1966; repr., Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006).

4 William Wordsworth, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 598.

5 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. and W. Norton, 1961), 56.

focused the issue of human identity and happiness specifically upon human sexuality. We might perhaps paraphrase an argument from Rosaria Butterfield here and say that Freud turned sex from something we do into something we are.⁶

The second part of the narrative is the connection between the Freudian shift in the understanding of what it means to be human and the transformation of Left-wing politics.

By the 1950s, it was clear that old-style Marxism was failing to deliver the utopias which it had promised. Classical Marxism had operated with a notion of oppression which was understood in economic terms. Workers were alienated from the products of their labor, a situation to be rectified by their seizing control of the means of production.

From the 1930s onwards, however, the notion of “oppression” in Left-wing theory underwent a transformation that ultimately saw it rooted in psychological, and therefore sexual, categories.

Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce summarized the developments on the Left as follows:

It is clear that what today is called the left fights less and less in terms of class warfare, and more and more in terms of “warfare against repression,” claiming that the struggle for the economic progress of the disadvantaged is included in this more general struggle, as if the two were inseparable.⁷

Key figures in this shift were Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, both of whom were important inspirations for the sexual and political revolutions of the 1960s. Reich is particularly important. His book *The Sexual Revolution* was published in 1936 but reads as if it were written yesterday.

Where Freud saw the repression of sexual instincts as key to civilization, Reich saw such repression as inhibiting true human identity and

as creating the pathologies and the dysfunctions of the world. He believed that human beings needed at least one orgasm a day and proposed that the government should supervise and indeed enforce the sexual liberation of the populace. Here is a key quotation:

The free society will provide ample room and security for the gratification of natural needs. Thus, it will not only not prohibit a love relationship between two adolescents of the opposite sex but will give it all manner of social support. Such a society will not only not prohibit the child’s masturbation but, on the contrary, will probably conclude that any adult who hinders the development of the child’s sexuality should be severely dealt with.⁸

Two things are important here—two things that help explain our current situation: human beings are seen as having an identity that is fundamentally sexual (one might even perhaps say “orgasmic”) in nature; and the state is seen to have a duty to provide the conditions where this individual, sexual, orgasmic identity can be realized. Politically, that has implications for everything, perhaps especially for the family. Del Noce summarizes it as follows: “What is the repressive social institution par excellence? To Reich it is the traditional monogamous family.”⁹

No Private Matter

This is why the sexual revolution through which we are now living is not, and never has been, a private matter. Libertarian notions that the government should not interfere in the bedroom are, I believe, correct. What consenting adults do in the privacy of their own home is really none of the government’s business. But the problem is that the sexual revolution is not about the private bedroom. It is about the public square. This is because we are not dealing with personal tastes and

6 Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015), 94–98.

7 Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, ed. and trans. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 166.

8 Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Regulating Character Structure* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 23–24.

9 Del Noce, *Crisis*, 161.

freedoms. We are dealing with what it means to be allowed to be human.

And this helps explain one of the most potent moves in the sexual revolution in the United States: the co-opting of the rhetoric of the civil rights movement. When sexuality is identity, then sexuality has access to all of the cultural rhetoric which surrounds other identities and, most significantly, to the moral history of such.

We should not underestimate this connection. Because the language of freedom/oppression and the background of the civil rights movement has been so comprehensively adopted by the LGBTQ lobbyists, it is virtually impossible to express any dissent with the movement without being immediately categorized as an irrational bigot motivated by hate.

The Transformation of Everyday Ethics

The story of the populist end of the sexual revolution is complicated, so once again what I present is neither exhaustive nor elaborate.

First, we need to understand that nobody has argued society in general into changing its opinions on human identity and sexuality. This is one of the points often missed by those who think with their brains. For example, I am regularly asked in class how to argue against gay marriage. My response is that it is pointless to argue against something for which no arguments have been made in the first place. That is, of course, hyperbole but my point is basically sound: the sexual revolution is part of an overall revision of what it means to be a person; and that revisionism has been brought about not so much by argument as by other means.

Foremost in this regard is the entertainment industry. Movies and commercials are essentially advertisements for particular understandings of personhood. More than anything else, they have created the stories with which people identify and thus the understanding of what it is to be human. Of course, these stories are often not simply fictional in their plotlines but also fictional in their presentation of the basic realities of human existence.

Take, for example, soap operas. The plots

often deal with outrageously improbable happenings, but there are sufficient elements of ordinary life contained therein. Thus, affairs, divorces, and deaths abound. But is it very, very rare that these things are portrayed as truly devastating. Human beings are presented as constituted by a series of isolated experiences, not really as the complex social and historical creatures that we are.

Soap operas may be a crass example, but the kind of simplistic presentation of the dynamics of human existence occurs in movies too. I have coined the term “sempiternalorgiast” to try to capture the kind of human life presented therein—those who live merely for their own personal satisfaction in the present moment. And in a world where movies are reality, that message is powerful.

To this we might add the role of commercials. Interestingly enough, it was Freud’s American-based nephew Edward Bernays who is the key figure here. He was the man who turned the advertising industry from one which sold goods on the basis of function to that based upon the sale of an image. For example, the earliest commercials for automobiles focused on the practical usefulness of being able to go from A to B in a swift, efficient manner. Bernays altered this, connecting cars to an image, and often an attractive, sexual image, in order to make them desirable objects. That move was critical—and amazingly successful. And it is that powerfully seductive notion of desire, image, and personal fulfillment thereby, which undergirds the commercial industry to this day. We need to understand that every commercial we ever see is projecting an image of Psychological Man to us: human beings as those who find fulfillment in the purchase of goods that will make us happier and, more often than not, sexier.

We should also note here that the narrative dynamics of movies and commercials depend for their power on what we might call aesthetics, or taste. Take the sitcom *Will and Grace*, for example. The plots were carefully constructed to make the lead gay character an attractive and likeable person. Implicitly, this presentation carries moral weight, for who wants to say to attractive and likeable people that they are fundamentally wrong

in the matter of their own personal sexual preferences? But this ethical weight is carried by the aesthetics and nothing else. One could say many things about the way such products of pop culture function in shaping the ethical debates within our society, but two things are of especial note: they do not present arguments, but they do grip the moral imagination; and they are ubiquitous.

The Role of Pornography

This brings me to another part of the popular story: pornography. It is by now a truism that we live in an age where pornography is more widely available and more heavily used and—if reports are true—more varied and extreme than at any previous point in history. The social costs of this are yet to be discerned, but it is easy to believe that regular exposure to pornography from an early age will create serious dysfunction in adult sexual relationships.

My interest here today, however, is not in the dysfunction which pornography is going to generate in relationships. It is instead the matter of how pornography is reshaping the understanding of what is sexually normal. Again, recall what I said earlier about the nature of Psychological Man and the importance of sexual fulfillment as the core of human happiness.

Here is a quotation from an essay by Roger Scruton in the important volume *The Social Costs of Pornography*, a wide-ranging book which covers many aspects of the problem:

Pornography exactly conforms to the myths about desire that I have rejected: it is a realization of those myths, a form of sexual pleasure from which the interpersonal intentionality has been surgically excised. Pornography takes hold of sexual desire and cuts away the desire. There is no real object, but only a fantasy, and no real subject, since there is nothing ventured of the self. To say that this is an abuse of the self is to express a literal truth—so it seems to me.¹⁰

10 Roger Scruton, “The Abuse of Sex,” in *The Social Costs of*

Scruton’s point is important: pornography divorces sex from any real relationship. Think of the consequences of that: to detach sex from relationships is to detach sex from any moral narrative extraneous to the personal pleasure derived by the participants. And that is to offer an ethic of sex which says “anything goes.”

In other words, pornography is the ultimate commercial designed to resonate with the desires of Psychological Man. Its message is simple: it really is all about you and you alone and your immediate sexual gratification. The problem is therefore far deeper than mere lust. It presents a deep and disturbing view of human identity. And given what we now know about the impact of pornography on human physiology, particularly its ability to transform the neural pathways of the brain, it is surely no surprise that a society basting itself in pornography is a society where sex is deemed central to human identity and where sexual ethics have all but vanished. We might almost say that pornography is hardwiring society for a repudiation of traditional sexual ethics. As I have noted elsewhere, the real victor in the culture wars is perhaps an unexpected one: the Marquis DeSade.¹¹

So Where Do We Go From Here?

First, I want to start by noting that we should not underestimate the power of what we are dealing with. That should seem obvious, given the outline I have offered above. The issues of gay marriage or transgenderism are not isolated and discrete problems for which there is some specific, narrow answer. They are part of a much longer and broader change in how we understand human personhood. So much is clear. But I want to add one more complicating factor at this point, drawing on the work of Charles Taylor.

In Taylor’s books *The Ethics of Authenticity*

Pornography: A Collection of Papers, ed. James R. Stoner, Jr., and Donna M. Hghe (Princeton: The Witherspoon Institute, 2010), Kindle locations 2632–2636.

11 Carl R. Trueman, “We’re All Sadists Now,” <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/08/were-all-sadists-now> (accessed July 11, 2016).

and *The Malaise of Modernity*, he addresses the issue of narcissism, which we might well understand as virtually synonymous with Psychological Man.¹² Taylor points out that it is typical to dismiss narcissism as shallow, but he attempts to offer a more ethical account of it in order to understand the passion with which it manifests itself. Take homosexuality, for example. Why is it that the recognition, the public, social recognition and acceptance of homosexuality, is so important to homosexuals? Taylor would argue that this is because there is an ethical dimension to it: the recognition of a person's identity is an important social imperative. This is because, however fluid and psychological we care to make our identities, selves only exist in a social setting, in relation to other selves.

Why do I raise this as a point? For this reason: we need first and foremost to understand that the language about community that is used by homosexuals is not incidental. It points to the importance of homosexuality to their identity. The ideology of the New Left is powerful at the political level, shaping public discourse, but at the local level the power of identity manifests itself not so much in a political cause but in the ethics of community. We need to bear that in mind as we consider our response.

Second, we need to understand that political discourse in the United States is forever changed. Patrick Deneen noted with reference to the Indiana RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act, 1993) that something new had emerged in the way politics is being done: an alliance between socially liberal causes and big business.¹³ That is a powerful, even overwhelming, combination which can intimidate and coerce even those whose personal sexual ethics have not been transformed by popular entertainment. When you throw into the mix the law courts, the entertainment industry, and social media, it is hard to know how to mount any

kind of large-scale resistance. For most, I suspect the alliance is not threatening because they are not worried about the policies it is promoting. But for those who dissent, the fear factor is significant. And that is going to spill over into impacting members of our congregations who will be faced with demands in the workplace that collide head-on with their own personal morality and Christian beliefs.

So what are we to do? I want to suggest four things.

First, we need to go about business as usual in the sense that we need to be obedient to our beliefs about how God's grace operates. Word, sacrament, and prayer should remain foundational.

Second, we need to be better educated in the field of ethics. I say this because as the gap between social practices and biblical morality becomes larger, and the proponents of those social practices become more aggressive and more litigious, pastors are going to be called upon to respond to questions from congregants where the immediate biblical answer may not be obvious.

Third, understand that times have changed and that nothing can be taken for granted. You preach to your congregation for just forty-five minutes once or twice a week. The television and the computer screen preach to them for countless hours from Monday to Saturday. With young people in particular, that homosexuality is unbiblical is not immediately obvious. That needs to be borne in mind as we preach and as we teach.

Fourth, remember the ethics of authenticity. To object to homosexuality is in one sense the same as objecting to any other sin — adultery, greed, anger. Yet in another sense it is quite different, for few if any think of their fundamental identity as being that of an adulterer, a greedy person, or an angry man. Nobody talks of the “adulterer community” or “the greedy community” or “the angry community.” There is an ethical drive relative to homosexuality that grips the moral imagination in a way that none of these others do and therefore demands social legitimation.

What is the practical implication of this? Well, once again it is reminder to us not to underestimate the human difficulty of reaching homosexuals for

12 Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1991).

13 Patrick J. Deneen, “The Power Elite,” <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/06/the-power-elite> (accessed July 11, 2016).

Christ. As with Muslims, conversion is in a sense making a much greater demand on them than others. This is clear from Rosaria Butterfield’s account of how her conversion really destroyed her life, humanly speaking, in that it immediately wrecked her career and isolated her from the community, which now regarded her as a traitor.

Second, it is a challenge to us to make sure that our churches are precisely what the New Testament calls them to be: communities, and communities marked by love. This is not a plea for the replacement, or subordination, of the means of grace to some kind of notion of church as social club. But it is to say that to be Christian is to be one whose fundamental identity is in Christ and who is therefore marked by a number of realities: a trust in the proclaimed Word of God and a love for God and for fellow believers in the community of the church.

And with this point I conclude. I believe that the battle at the national level is lost and will remain lost for at least a generation or more. But I also believe that the battle can be prosecuted successfully at a local level. Ironically, I am reminded at this point of a criticism the late New Left intellectual Edward Said made of Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. Said’s point was simple: at the local level, where people live next to each other, where they speak to each other, where they have to make their communities work because perpetual street fighting is not an option, the situation is always more complicated and hopeful than a collision of ideologies. Indeed, I might add to Said’s thoughts this paraphrase of something George Orwell said in another context: it is much harder to hate a man when you have looked into his eyes and seen that he too is a human being as you are.

Therein I believe might lie our glimmer of hope. As we go about our daily business, as we make the church a community of the preached Word, yet marked in practice by openness and hospitality for the outsider—indeed, as the church reflects the character of the one about whom she preaches, the one who loves the widow and the orphan and the sojourner—we may not be able

to transform national legislation or the plots of sitcoms and movies. But we will be able to demonstrate to those around us in our neighborhoods that we do not fit the caricatures that the media present, that we do care for those who are in active rebellion against the God we love. And there, in that local context, we might be able to start building our counter-offensive to the dominant culture of Psychological Man and his Reichian sexual revolution. ©

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Living under Foreign Law

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by **Randy Beck**

In *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) the Supreme Court recognized a constitutional right of same-sex couples to marry.² The decision has raised questions for churches holding the traditional view that God established marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman. My goal in this

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=567&issue_id=117.

² This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness,” sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

essay is to highlight shifts in constitutional doctrine that paved the way for the Court's decision, and to note some of the legal issues biblically-oriented churches and individuals may face as they seek to follow Christ in a culture that views the world through other lenses. My purpose is educational; I do not intend to offer legal advice. I want to provide information about how we've gotten to this point in our legal history and highlight some of the possible implications moving forward.

When I consider the church's relationship to the surrounding culture, I focus on Scripture describing believers as citizens of a heavenly city. Paul says "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). Peter writes that we live "as sojourners and exiles" among the nations (1 Pet. 2:11–12). The author of Hebrews brings those ideas together, noting that our ancestors in the faith "acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" and that God "has prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13–16). We are citizens of heaven living as sojourners in this world. In some respects, we're like Israelites residing in Babylon during the captivity. Just as Daniel and his friends studied the language and literature of the Babylonians, I want us to understand how the Supreme Court reached its decision about same-sex marriage so we can think wisely about the ramifications.

Modern constitutional doctrine concerning regulation of marriage and sexuality derives from two clauses of the post-Civil War Fourteenth Amendment. The Due Process Clause provides that no state can "deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law." The Supreme Court has concluded that some liberties protected by the clause—including marriage—are sufficiently important to be deemed "fundamental." Fundamental liberties are so significant that the government needs an unusually strong justification to interfere with them. This theory of the Due Process Clause has been controversial, raising questions about whether courts should decide which liberties are most important and what methods they should use for identifying such fundamental rights.

The other relevant provision of the Fourteenth

Amendment is the Equal Protection Clause, which provides that no state shall deny any person "the equal protection of the laws." The courts have understood this provision to require an unusually strong justification for certain classifications the government might want to draw. The easiest case is race, since the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted to protect the newly-freed slaves. When government treats people differently based on race, the courts have been very skeptical and have demanded a really persuasive justification. The more difficult question is what other distinctions between people are analogous to race and should be viewed with similar skepticism.

Let us begin with the Supreme Court's decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1964). Connecticut had a criminal statute punishing "any person who uses any drug, medicinal article or instrument for the purpose of preventing conception." Individuals connected with a family planning clinic were fined for counseling married couples about contraceptive use. Justice Douglas's opinion for the Court found that the statute violated a constitutional "right of privacy" that protected married couples:

We deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights—older than our political parties, older than our school system. Marriage is a coming together for better or for worse, hopefully enduring, and intimate to the degree of being sacred.

In a series of later decisions, the Supreme Court struck down laws deemed to intrude on fundamental marriage rights. For instance, in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the Court invalidated a Virginia law forbidding interracial marriage.

The Court's understanding of the right of privacy evolved in subsequent cases. *Griswold* had relied heavily on the importance of the marital relationship, but later cases extended the right in ways that viewed marriage as non-essential. In *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972), for example, the Court rejected a Massachusetts law forbidding contraceptive distribution to unmarried persons. The Court had to explain why *Griswold* applied in a case that

did not involve marriage:

It is true that, in *Griswold*, the right of privacy in question inhered in the marital relationship. Yet the marital couple is not an independent entity, with a mind and heart of its own, but an association of two individuals, each with a separate intellectual and emotional makeup. If the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child.

While the Court still talked about a right of “privacy,” notice that it substituted a different meaning for the word. The “privacy” at issue in *Griswold* was that of a married couple in a particular space—the marital bedroom. In *Eisenstadt*, “privacy” now meant the ability to make important decisions without government involvement. *Eisenstadt* was relied upon the following year when the Court recognized a right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

As the Court expanded the constitutional rights protected by due process and equal protection, people wondered whether the Court would recognize heightened constitutional protection for same-sex relationships. The Court initially resisted such claims. In the first case claiming a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, *Baker v. Nelson* (1971), the Court summarily concluded that the appeal did not raise a substantial federal question. The Court later decided that states could continue the historical practice of criminalizing sodomy in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986).

The tide began to turn in *Romer v. Evans* (1996), when the Court struck down a state constitutional amendment that prevented enactment of local laws protecting homosexuals against discrimination. One passage from the majority opinion illuminates the change in the Court’s thinking:

[The amendment’s] sheer breadth is so discontinuous with the reasons offered for it that the amendment seems inexplicable by anything

but animus toward the class it affects; it lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests.

Notice two things about this passage. First, the majority believed the amendment was so broad in its prohibition of anti-discrimination laws that it could only be explained by animus—i.e., animosity—toward homosexuals. While the dissent disagreed with that assessment, it’s important because it draws upon a popular narrative that opposition to legal protection for homosexual rights reflects at base an irrational dislike of homosexuals. The second point worth highlighting is that the Court here views homosexuals as a “class.” The Court is no longer thinking primarily in terms of behaviors that anyone might engage in, but is instead focusing on group characteristics and issues of identity. The focus on homosexuals as a distinct class of people allowed them to be perceived as a kind of minority group.

A particularly significant ruling came in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), when the Court overruled *Bowers v. Hardwick* and invalidated a Texas sodomy statute. In the years after *Lawrence* a number of states began to recognize same-sex marriages, or to afford legal recognition under other labels, like “civil unions” or “domestic partnerships.” The effects of those state laws were localized because of a federal statute called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), enacted in 1996 and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. One section of DOMA adopted the traditional definition of marriage for federal law and another provided that a state could deny recognition to a marriage from another state that violated its public policy.

In *Windsor v. United States* (2012), the Supreme Court invalidated the portion of DOMA dealing with federal law, requiring the federal government to recognize a marriage deemed valid in New York. The decision employed reasoning analogous to *Romer*:

DOMA seeks to injure the very class New York seeks to protect. By doing so it violates basic due process and equal protection principles applicable to the Federal Government. The

Constitution's guarantee of equality "must at the very least mean that a bare congressional desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot" justify disparate treatment of that group.

Windsor suggested that a majority of the Court was moving toward recognition of a constitutional right to marry for same-sex couples, a point ultimately reached in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). The *Obergefell* Court concluded that refusing to recognize same-sex marriage violates the liberty to marry protected by the Due Process Clause and the equal treatment required by the Equal Protection Clause.

Obergefell was a 5–4 decision, and each dissenting Justice authored a separate opinion. For the most part, the dissenters argued that the Court should leave the issue of recognizing same-sex relationships to resolution by the political process in each state. Chief Justice John Roberts predicted that the decision would generate future conflicts in connection with religious organizations that for theological reasons embrace a traditional understanding of marriage:

The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to "advocate" and "teach" their views of marriage. The First Amendment guarantees, however, the freedom to "exercise" religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses.

Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage—when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage. There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be before this Court.

It's worth spending some time thinking about ways same-sex marriage rights could raise legal questions for traditional religious communities.

One question that has received a fair amount of attention is whether a church or pastor can be legally compelled to perform a same-sex wedding or to admit members married contrary to the beliefs of that religious tradition. This is an issue on which—at least at this point—there seems to be widespread agreement. The Supreme Court has interpreted the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment to prevent government interference with a church's determination of doctrine, selection of ministers, and internal government and discipline. Most people involved in this issue agree that the Religion Clauses protect a church or pastor against compulsion to violate sincerely held religious beliefs in these contexts.

Considerable protection also exists in this country for freedom of religious speech, though not complete protection. In many situations, those with religious objections to same-sex marriage should be able to voice their opinions without fearing the reaction of the government. Of course, the First Amendment does not protect a person against private reactions. Someone who speaks out on this issue might experience consequences in the workplace or in other non-governmental settings. Even in cases where the First Amendment does apply, there will be difficult cases at the margins. For instance, there may be tough cases concerning free speech rights of government employees.

While there are reasonably strong protections for churches and in some contexts for religious speakers, the law gets a good bit more complicated and less protective when the government regulates conduct. The baseline rule is that the government can regulate religiously motivated conduct through general laws that do not target religious believers. In *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990), the Court decided that Oregon could enforce a law against peyote use and did not have to grant an exemption for members of a Native American church to use peyote in a religious ceremony. Based on *Smith*, the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment would not prevent the government

from enforcing generally applicable anti-discrimination laws against those who claim compliance would violate their religious beliefs. Even before *Smith*, in a decision alluded to in Chief Justice Roberts's *Obergefell* dissent, the Supreme Court allowed the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of a school that prohibited interracial dating on religious grounds. In that case, *Bob Jones University v. United States* (1983), the Court found that the government had a compelling interest in eradicating racial discrimination that overrode the school's claims based on free exercise of religion. Under *Smith*'s no-exemption principle one can easily envision potential legal conflicts arising in areas like employee benefits or provision of services by religious schools, charities or wedding-related businesses.

The *Smith* decision was very unpopular at the time and resulted in bipartisan federal legislation designed to enhance protection for religious freedom. Under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993) (RFRA), if the federal government substantially burdens a person's exercise of religion, an exemption must be granted unless the burden is the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling government interest. This was the statute the Supreme Court applied to protect Hobby Lobby and the Little Sisters of the Poor against the Obamacare contraceptive mandate. RFRA passed unanimously in the House and in the Senate by a 97–3 vote. Many states adopted comparable rules through legislation or interpretation of state constitutions.

Some religious freedom advocates hope state RFRA will protect believers from laws requiring conduct in tension with their religious beliefs. However, after *Obergefell*, religious freedom principles that were once the subject of bipartisan consensus have now become politically controversial. Further, it is not clear RFRA principles would necessarily shield believers in all contexts. For instance, a Washington state court ruled that RFRA-like principles did not protect a florist who claimed her sincere religious beliefs prevented her from providing flowers for the same-sex wedding of a long-time customer.

I want this essay to be longer on information than advice, but let me close with some New Testament passages that seem relevant as we sort through these issues. First, passages like 1 Corinthians 5 seem to teach clearly that we should interact differently with members of the church than our unchurched neighbors. That should influence how we understand what it means to walk wisely among those who live around us.

Second, it's worth recalling that the political divisions in Jesus's day were starker and more dangerous than those we face. We should therefore pay attention to how Jesus navigated treacherous political minefields, such as the question in Luke 20 of whether to pay taxes to Caesar. It's interesting that Jesus never directly answers the question he is asked. He never utters the sound bite that will justify denouncing him to the Roman authorities, but he also never utters the sound bite that will undermine his credibility with devout Jews. He instead reframes the issue, refusing to let his political adversaries force him into their trap. Jesus teaches us not to be too predictable. We should not allow the secular culture to define the available options, but should think deeply about how we can respond in faithful yet surprising ways that undermine some of the stereotypes driving the culture wars. ©

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Ministry to Those with Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Confusion

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by Timothy J. Geiger

One might assume that there is no subject too controversial to discuss in the twenty-first century.² Social mores have fallen right and left over the previous three decades, to the extent that nothing seems shocking anymore.

Yet there are two topics that may seem too tender to touch, particularly in the Reformed church: sex and gender confusion. The reasons for this are many and diverse, and the purpose of this article is not to debate them. As a pastor, and as the leader of a parachurch ministry that interacts with thousands of sexually struggling and confused Christians annually, I make a singular appeal: we in the Reformed church *must* talk about sexual sin and sexual struggles among the members of our churches.

Here are three simple reasons why leaders must address same-sex attraction and gender confusion, in particular:

1. Scripture plainly tells us that temptation to sin of a sexual nature is a *common* temptation—whether that particular temptation is to sin of a heterosexual, homosexual, or transgender nature. Not every Christian will experience temptation to all possible types of sexual sin, but every Christian will experience temptation to at least one of them. One citation that illustrates this point is 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.”

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=568&issue_id=117.

2 This article is based on an address given at the pre-assembly conference on June 8, 2016, entitled “Marriage, Sexuality, and Faithful Witness,” sponsored by the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

2. If the church is silent about biblical sexuality, sexual sin, and repentance, and the fact that it is common for those in the church to struggle sexually, it misses an opportunity to address one of the chief ways in which church members and their families fall into idolatry and unbelief. There is not a member of a Reformed church anywhere in the Western world who is not bombarded daily with sexualized images and enticements to sexual sin. Our members—particularly those under the age of thirty—are developing worldviews regarding sex, sexuality, and gender that are radically at odds with Scripture. We *must* speak the truth in love into the often-silent spiritual battle being waged in the hearts of our members.

3. Sin of a sexual nature is *already* part of the church. It should no longer be the priority of church officers and leaders to build a high wall to keep sin out of the church. It is already here, and has been here for longer than we think.³ We must actively call our members stuck in patterns of secret sexual sin to walk in faith and repentance. We, as their leaders and brothers and sisters, have a covenantal obligation and privilege to do so.⁴ I should note that the object of this holy ministry of discipleship is to restore the brother or sister to God and to the church.

Common Obstacles for Sexual Strugglers in the Church

Sean⁵ sat in my office, visibly shaken. As he told me the story of his thirty-year struggle with same-sex attraction and secret homosexual behavior, he didn’t once look up from the floor. With his wife’s discovery of his sin last week, Sean sat convinced that his marriage, family, career, and reputation were all lost.

Sean had been a deacon and an active member of his church for years. So, I asked him why he

3 Numerous citations in Scripture humbly remind us that sin of a sexual nature, including homosexual behavior and gender-confused behavior, was a major problem among both Old Testament and New Testament believers.

4 See Galatians 6:1–2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14.

5 Not his real name.

never asked anyone in his church for help. After all, he was a member of a large church with plenty of pastoral and counseling resources.

The answer came after a moment of thought: “I was afraid.”

“I was afraid” hardly took me by surprise. As a matter of fact, it’s the response that roughly 90 percent of people give when asked that same question. But what was Sean afraid of?

The same things that many people fear. Some are valid; others, irrational. Regardless of the facts, to the Christian earnestly struggling with same-sex attraction or gender confusion, these fears constitute reality. Pastors and other leaders need to be aware of these fears in order to publicly minimize them, thereby making the gateway to confession and repentance as wide as possible.

Here is a list of twelve common sources of fear that often paralyze sexual strugglers in the church:

1. Shame. Not all shame is bad, but this shame is distorted, disproportionate, and crippling. Strugglers generally believe that they have sinned so greatly that they have no means of redemption.

2. Guilt. Guilt not so much over specific sinful acts, but a pervasive, overwhelming sense of guilt that leads the struggler to feel hopelessly separated from God.

3. Fear of exposure. Control is a significant feature in the lives of secret sexual strugglers. To many, exposure of the sin equates to a loss of control and the ability to carefully maintain the struggler’s façade, often crafted to mask the underlying struggle.

4. Fear of judgment. Also known as “fear of man.” The opinions of others are disproportionately important for many secret sexual strugglers. Consequently, the potential to be judged by another⁶ is too great a risk to take.

5. Culture of deception and self-deception.

6 The fear of judgment is linked directly to the struggler’s sense of identity. To have that carefully constructed identity challenged through the judgment of another is tantamount to being told, “You’re worthless,” or, “You’re a fraud.” One way pastors and leaders may combat this fear is to teach, preach and counsel strongly and consistently that one’s true identity comes from God alone (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20).

Secret sexual strugglers have generally kept their struggle secret for years, perhaps decades, through an intensive series of lies and other deceitful activities aimed both at others—to keep them unaware of the struggle (or the extent of the struggle), and at themselves, to justify their behavior.

6. Saying, “I’m the only one. No one else in the church struggles like this.” Same-sex and gender strugglers often perceive that no one else in the church struggles with these issues.⁷ This reinforces the already-present feeling that they are different than others, and if different, then they are alone.

7. Saying, “Real Christians don’t struggle with sin of a sexual nature.” The same-sex or gender struggler often believes that he or she may not be an authentic Christian, inferring (incorrectly) that one mark of genuine faith is the absence of serious, even life-dominating sin patterns.⁸

8. Believing that same-sex attraction, homosexual sin, and gender confusion are worse than other types of sin. This conclusion is generally drawn either from the experience of personal guilt and shame, and/or a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:18.⁹

7 In fact, they are not alone. Studies have shown that as many as 11% of adolescents and young adults struggle with significant same-sex attraction (G. Remafedi, “Demography of Sexual Orientation in Adolescents,” *Pediatrics*, 89(4)(April, 1992):714–721). Scientifically reliable estimates of transgender individuals don’t exist to my knowledge, primarily because persons experiencing gender dysphoria (the clinical name for gender confusion) are generally more “closeted” than those experiencing same-sex attraction. However, one estimate cited by ABC News was that there are approximately 700,000 transgender individuals in the United States: about two-tenths of one percent of the population (*7 Questions Answered about Transgender People*, Mary Kathryn Burke, posted on abcnews.go.com on 08/15/2015 and accessed on 07/02/2016).

8 The apostle Paul authored 2 Corinthians to Christians (“To the church of God ... with all the saints,” 1:1) but lamented with grave warning near the end of the letter that there were some in the church who refused to repent of sexual sin (12:21). WCF 17.3 states that it is possible for Christians to “fall into grievous sins, for a time, and continue therein.”

9 The limits of this article do not permit a full discussion of this point. Suffice it to say that sin of a sexual nature has different consequences for the individual and the church, as it does specific violence to God’s covenant of grace. This does present particular pastoral challenges. However, there is nothing in Scripture indicating that sin of a sexual nature is forensically worse in God’s eyes than any other kind of sin.

9. Fear of church discipline. There may be the fear that confession of sin will automatically lead to the exercise of discipline in the church, which the struggler anticipates will be shaming.

10. Prior, unsuccessful attempts at change. Those struggling with same-sex attraction or gender confusion often report the onset of their attraction and/or struggle at around age eleven. So, the average forty-year-old adult who struggles will have been battling this temptation and sin (unsuccessfully) for nearly thirty years. That long of a struggle will often prove disheartening and will make the struggler less liable to attempt to walk in repentance again.

11. A functional misunderstanding of grace. Many secret strugglers will not understand the nature or extent of God's grace. Because of their own "track record" in pleasing the Lord, they generally perceive that God's grace both to save and to refrain from sin operates differently for them than it does for others.

12. Misunderstanding the *real* problem. Virtually all sexual strugglers view their problem as being behavioral in nature. In reality, the behavior is merely the fruit of the real problem, which is idolatry, located in the heart.¹⁰

Hopefully as you've read through this list of common obstacles to sexual strugglers coming forward for help, you've begun to think of some ways to circumvent these obstacles in your own church. I'll share a few concrete ways to break down these barriers later in this article. You may find others on our website at harvestusa.org.

What Is the Real Problem?

To begin to help someone is to understand the nature of their struggle. And to do that, we need to move past the superficial manifestations of sinful behavior in one's life.

Treating sin is a bit like treating an illness. While there are times you treat symptoms, a doctor will generally treat the underlying cause of those symptoms. To refuse to treat the underlying cause

will only lead to a recurrence of those symptoms—or ones that are even more troubling.

Scripture indicates that the cause of sinful behavior—the "sin behind the sin," if you will—is idolatry. In Luke 6:43–45, Jesus tells us that it shouldn't surprise us when we see sinful behavior in the lives of others; it is merely the overflow of that which controls their heart.

Seeing idolatry as the primary problem to be addressed pastorally doesn't excuse the sinfulness, or the consequences of outward sinful behavior. It does, however, give pastors, leaders, and strugglers a "root" sin to focus on, rather than only dealing with the superficial manifestations of that sin. After all, if you merely pull off the part of the weed you see above ground, the weed will grow back—and quickly. But if you pull out the root, the leaves and fruit come along with it—and it will not return.

What are some of the underlying idols that lead to sinful behavior of a sexual nature? They are common idols, and in and of themselves, in their proper context, they are generally good desires. Good desires that, in our sinful seeking for self-importance and self-worship, become disordered. To quote Tim Keller,¹¹ the otherwise good desire becomes for us an ultimate desire, which must be satisfied, no matter the cost. That is when the desire becomes an idol.

Some of these common idols are: love, a positive self-image, affirmation, affection, security, freedom from pain or suffering, control, comfort, being understood, and intimacy. Sin of a sexual nature can give a plausible counterfeit that these desires are being satisfied (albeit in ungodly ways). To the extent they are truly idols for us, we make excuses to justify our need, and therefore, our behavior.

Steps You Can Take to Help Sexual Strugglers

Each one of the following measures is only effective to the extent that it takes place within the

¹⁰ Matthew 15:18–20; Luke 6:43–45.

¹¹ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (London: Penguin, 2009), ix.

context of an authentic relationship with you or with someone else in the church. The goal of this ministry must be reconciliation: leading the sinner to become a more fully-engaged, fully functional member of the church. That goal is reached only through the medium of real, authentic, life-on-life relationship with another brother or sister in the church.¹²

Here are concrete action steps you can take in your church both to encourage secret sexual strugglers to come into the light, and then to help them walk in repentance.

1. Focus on discipleship. If the real issue to deal with is idolatry, then the real place to begin is with discipleship. Focus in your discipleship relationship not merely on knowing *facts*, but on the *experiential reality of those facts in the life of the believer*. In other words, help the struggler to wrestle with the question: “What difference does the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ make for me in the particular areas in which I struggle?” Help the struggler to understand his or her major idols, and then work through particular strategies to see Jesus as strong and able to help when those specific desires cry out to be satisfied.

2. Model and expect *proactive accountability*. Accountability isn’t supposed to be purely reactive in nature (“This is what I’ve done”); it is supposed to be *proactive*, and as such, it is meant to head off sin in the first place (“This is what I’m feeling and where I’m making room in my life for sin”). Here are some questions to ask in the course of practicing proactive accountability with a sexual struggler:

- a. What are the idols that are controlling my heart, thoughts, and desires today?
- b. In what particular ways am I making room in my life for sin today?
- c. In what particular ways do I need to be severe in cutting off the means to sin in my life today?
- d. In what particular ways am I consciously

¹² We encourage that male sexual strugglers work with male leaders and mentors, and that female strugglers work with female leaders and mentors. This follows the biblical model for discipleship explained in Titus 2:2–6.

denying the sovereignty of God over my life today?

e. In what particular ways am I refusing to submit myself to the ordinary means of grace¹³ for help in my struggle against sin today?

3. Make repeated invitations for your church’s sexual strugglers to come forward for help. Keep in mind all of the obstacles mentioned earlier. Make repeated invitations publicly and privately in your preaching, teaching, announcements, and personal conversations for people to come forward to you (or specific others in the church) for help. Communicate that your church is a safe place for people to be broken and to seek repentance.

4. Offer training to your church officers, women leaders, and other non-ordained leaders to help. There are any number of resources that are helpful; you can contact us at harvestusa.org for specific suggestions. Any resources you use should equip your leaders to engage with strugglers at a heart level (i.e., talking more about idols than behavior) and should equip your leaders to engage in ongoing relationship (discipleship) with strugglers.

5. Make it an expectation in your church that everyone is involved in some sort of small group fellowship. This might include home groups, men’s or women’s groups, or cell groups—but make it a church-wide expectation that everyone is under the care and within the view of an elder or another trusted, mature leader. It’s much more difficult to remain isolated and in secret sin when you’re in close fellowships with others.

6. Intentionally create discipleship relationships in your church. Match up more mature men with younger men and more mature women with younger women (*vis a vis* Titus 2) for discipleship relationships. Before doing so, provide training for your mentors/disciples and then provide ongoing support and encouragement for them.

7. Offer a confidential ministry for sexual

¹³ The term “ordinary means of grace” as used here includes, but is not limited to: reading and meditating on Scripture, prayer, confession of sin, fellowship, accountability, participation in private and public worship.

strugglers in your church. Not an addictions ministry or a twelve-step program, but a facilitated, peer-support group with a focus on life-on-life discipleship.¹⁴

8. Pray. Pray yourself, and ask a group of men and women in your church to gather together to pray on a regular basis that the Lord would bring forward members and attenders caught in secret sexual sin—and that when they do come forward, you and the rest of the church would be ready and able to help.

9. Be patient. A struggle with same-sex attraction or with gender confusion generally has a long, complex, and painful history. It is not easily overcome. Temptation, and actual struggles with that temptation, may never go away completely. Even if they do, it will likely take a long time. So, be patient with the sinner, as Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 5:11. And, restore him or her gently, as Paul exhorts in Galatians 6:1.

As you are no doubt aware, this is a complex and long-duration issue for the church to handle. Yet we must handle it, since one of the chief objectives of the church is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to [maturity]” (Eph. 4:12–13).

There are many resources available to you for help in this task, Harvest USA among them. But the church’s chief resource is the Holy Spirit, who works to sanctify his people and to give them the grace and wisdom necessary for discipleship. Ask for that grace and wisdom from him. He will not withhold it from you. ☺

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¹⁴ Harvest USA can help your church, no matter how large or small, start an intentional ministry to function as an outworking of your ordinary pastoral oversight. Contact us at harvestusa.org to find out how.

Exercising Wisdom about “All Things”

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by **Andy Wilson**

When I point out the problems inherent in attempting to make the gospel appear culturally relevant, I am frequently met with this response: “But doesn’t the Bible tell us that we need to be ‘all things to all people’?” This is a reference to a statement that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 9:22, a verse that is extremely popular among contemporary Evangelicals. In fact, it is so popular that it could be seen as a sort of “theme verse” for American Evangelicalism. Unfortunately, it is a verse that tends to be misunderstood and misapplied, resulting in cultural accommodation instead of faithful witness.

Over the past few decades, theologian David Wells has been one of the most astute critics of contemporary Evangelicalism’s accommodationist impulses. In one of his books, he makes the following observation about the way in which many Evangelicals relate to our culture’s spirituality of self-realization and self-discovery, a spirituality that has its roots in ancient paganism:

Those who see only the contemporaneity of this spirituality—and who, typically, yearn to be seen as being contemporary—usually make tactical maneuvers to win a hearing for their Christian views; those who see its underlying worldview will not. Inevitably, those enamored by its contemporaneity will find that with each new tactical repositioning they are drawn irresistibly into the vortex of what they think is merely contemporary but what, in actual fact, also has the power to contaminate their faith. What they should be doing is thinking strategically, not tactically. To do so is to begin to see

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=579&issue_id=119.

how ancient this spirituality actually is and to understand that beneath many contemporary styles, tastes, and habits there are also encountered rival *worldviews*. When rival worldviews are in play, it is not adaptation that is called for but confrontation: confrontation not of a behavioral kind which is lacking in love but of a cognitive kind which holds forth ‘the truth in love’ (Eph. 4:15). This is one of the great lessons learned from the early Church. Despite the few who wobbled, most of its leaders maintained with an admirable tenacity the alternative view of life which was rooted in the apostolic teaching. They did not allow love to blur truth or to substitute for it but sought to live by both truth and love.²

Motivated by a desire to reach people with the gospel, Evangelicals (including Reformed Evangelicals) often allow the broader culture to determine the standard of relevance that the gospel needs to meet. As a result, 1 Corinthians 9:22 is taken to mean that we should employ the tastes and style of a particular group of people (typically the young and hip) in order to reach them with the gospel. Instead of telling people that the human soul needs to be conformed to the pattern of sound teaching that is set forth in God’s Word, the focus of much ministry today is upon showing how Christianity can be made to conform to the things that the world values. Such a move does far more than contextualize the gospel. It changes it, both in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. It also cultivates an uncritical posture towards the surrounding culture, causing Christians to fail to listen to the messages that are being communicated by specific forms of cultural expression. In this article I will explore this problem by considering how Paul’s statement about becoming “all things to all people,” in 1 Corinthians 9, needs to be held in tension with an assertion that he makes in the next chapter of the same letter: “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not

all things build up” (1 Cor. 10:23).

“All Things to All People”

The general principle that Paul sets forth in 1 Corinthians 9:22 is that he is not willing to allow matters of spiritual indifference (such as the kind of food that he eats) to be a barrier as he seeks to bring the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In the words of J. V. Fesko:

Paul was willing to adapt external things (e.g., his diet and dress) to the expectations of the people around him so as not to offend them. This way, they could focus on the gospel rather than a perceived offense. By being mindful of Jewish dietary sensitivities in some contexts and Gentile concerns in others, the apostle allowed the gospel to stand out, not what type of food he ate.³

The specific example that Paul has in mind in 1 Corinthians 9 is that he handled the Jewish ceremonial laws differently when he was around Jews compared to when he was around Gentiles. This does not mean that he was willing to do anything to win a hearing for the gospel. If that were the case, Paul would be contradicting his statements elsewhere that he “renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways,” refused “to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word,” and was committed to “the open statement of the truth” (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul was no compromiser. He did not use bait-and-switch tactics in his preaching of the gospel. But he was willing to be flexible on matters that were indifferent to the gospel in order to avoid giving unnecessary offense to people.

Paul knew that the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law were no longer in effect because Jesus had fulfilled them. While Paul was no longer obligated to abide by the law’s ceremonial regulations, his general practice was to keep the ceremonial law when he was around Jews. He did not do this because he had to, but because he did not

2 David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 155–56.

3 J. V. Fesko, *Galatians*, *Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament* (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege, 2012), 121.

want Jews to dismiss him as someone who disregarded God's law. As he explains, "To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law"(1 Cor. 9:20). On the other hand, Paul did not concern himself with keeping the ceremonial law when he was around Gentiles. He says, "To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law"(1 Cor. 9:21). For Paul, becoming "all things to all people" meant not allowing matters of indifference to be a barrier as he attempted to communicate the gospel to people.

We see a good example of how Paul put this principle into practice in Acts 16:3, where Luke says that Paul had Timothy circumcised before taking him with him on his second missionary journey. Paul did this even though he knew that circumcision was a matter of indifference at this point in redemptive history. Timothy was raised as a Jew by his devout mother, but because his father was a Greek he had never been circumcised. Paul knew that having an uncircumcised Jew in his party would be a source of offense to the Jews among whom he intended to preach. While it was not necessary for Timothy to be circumcised as far as his salvation was concerned, it did remove a stumbling block that potential Jewish converts might have had with Paul's ministry.

The basic principle being expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:22 is that when we are communicating the gospel to people, we should try to remove all of the potential stumbling blocks that we can without compromising the gospel message itself. For example, if you are talking to someone who has liberal political views, you need to be able to distinguish between issues to which the Bible clearly speaks (e.g., the immorality of abortion) and issues for which there is no clear "Christian" position (e.g., proper levels of taxation). While it is not wrong for us to form an opinion on matters concerning which the Bible does not speak, it is a mistake for us to say that there is only one position that a person can hold on such matters and be a faithful Christian.

"Not All Things Are Helpful"

It is interesting that Paul made the opposite decision about circumcision when he brought Titus with him to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:3). Paul refused to have Titus circumcised because the false brothers mentioned in Galatians 2:4 wanted to replace the freedom of the gospel with slavery to the law. While circumcision itself was a matter of indifference, the circumstances in this situation made it a threat to the gospel. The false brothers were saying that a person cannot be right with God without being circumcised. Were it not for these men, Paul might have been willing to have Titus circumcised. As Calvin explains, it was as if Paul said, "I would have been prepared to circumcise Titus if higher matters had not been involved."⁴ But because the gospel was at stake in this situation, Paul would not yield.

This relates to 1 Corinthians 10:23, where Paul explains that having the freedom to do something does not mean that it is always the right thing to do: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up." In saying, "all things are lawful," Paul is not promoting antinomianism but is quoting a saying that had become popular among the Corinthian Christians, who were abusing the concept of Christian freedom. While Paul grants that there are matters in life that are not governed by explicit laws from God, he is also careful to point out that this does not mean that Christians should do whatever they want in these areas.

To understand 1 Corinthians 10:23, we need to remember that this verse appears in a context in which Paul says that Christians should always flee from the idolatrous practices of their surrounding culture. In the preceding paragraph he says, "Flee from idolatry.... [W]hat pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, trans. William Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 51.

cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (10:14, 20–21). Paul makes it clear that idolatry is never a matter of indifference. We should never think that we have the freedom to participate in the idolatry of our surrounding culture.

At the same time, it is possible in some situations for a Christian to partake of something that has idolatrous associations without participating in the idolatry itself. As Paul explains:

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.” (10:25–27)

In other words, the fact that pagans use something for idolatrous purposes does not mean that it is contaminated and entirely off limits to Christians. Nevertheless, Christians still need to handle such matters in a sensitive manner, taking care not to offend those who are unable to separate a particular practice from its idolatrous associations. Paul writes, “But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his”(10:28–29). Christian freedom is not to be used for selfish purposes but should be exercised in a manner that is edifying to the body of Christ (see also 10:23–24).

To Tattoo, or Not to Tattoo?

In this last section I will apply Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 9 and 10 to the practice of tattooing, which is becoming increasingly popular not only in the broader culture but also among contemporary Evangelicals. I want to clarify from the outset that I am not suggesting that it is a sin to get a tattoo. While there is a prohibition against tattooing in Leviticus 19:28, that prohibition is no longer in effect because it belonged to Israel’s

ceremonial law and concerned specific cultic practices in ancient paganism. Tattooing is a matter of indifference for God’s people today. Some Christians even think that tattooing is a good way to express their Christian identity and demonstrate the contemporary relevance of their faith. In order to assess this, we need to think about the reasons why people in our culture get tattoos so that we can be aware of any assumptions and attitudes that may be in conflict with God’s Word.

It seems to me that people in our culture get tattoos because they see it as a way of creating and expressing their identity as individuals. The person getting the tattoo is essentially saying, “This is my body and I can do what I want with it in order to define and demonstrate what makes me uniquely me.” In light of this, it is reasonable to ask whether there might be a relationship between the increased popularity of tattooing and the idolatrous individualism that is so pervasive in our culture. David Wells describes this as an attitude that refuses

to live within the parameters and boundaries which are drawn by others, within doctrine which it has not constructed, within a corporately practiced belief since that would do violence to the delicacy and authenticity of its own private sensibility.⁵

In our culture, the plausibility of this individualistic mindset is strengthened by a number of factors, including our consumerist economy, the use of social media to craft the image of ourselves that we present to others, the importance of being able to adapt in our ever-changing world, and our deep suspicion toward traditional forms of external authority. In short, we are living in a cultural ecosystem that encourages people to think of themselves as autonomous individuals who are free to create their own unique identity.

If we are going to resist the pull of our culture’s idolatrous individualism, we need to be mindful of what the Bible tells us about a Christian’s body and

⁵ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 155.

identity. We need to listen carefully to 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 when it says, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” We need to ponder the instructions of Romans 12:1 to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” These passages, along with 1 Corinthians 10:23, set forth principles that can be applied as we think about tattooing. It is permissible to get a tattoo, but how is it helpful? How is it edifying? How does it glorify God? Are there ways in which it could be harmful? Even if a Christian plans to get a tattoo of a Bible verse or a Christian symbol, what is driving him to get a tattoo in the first place? Why does he feel the need to express his individuality in this way when the Bible says that his badge of identity is the mark that the Lord placed upon him at his baptism (see Rom. 6:3–4)? Is it possible that he is adopting an individualistic mindset and being “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2)?

I realize that some Christians may be able to answer these questions without feeling any constraint against tattooing. That is perfectly fine, because tattooing is a matter of indifference. At the same time, I suspect that some Christians have never thought about tattooing along these lines. Some may have regrets because they realize that their decision to get a tattoo was influenced by unbiblical ways of thinking. If so, they can take comfort in knowing that their identity is found in having their lives “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). My purpose in using this example is not to put people on the defensive or to make people feel badly, but simply to encourage us to give more careful thought to these sorts of issues.

We do not have grounds from 1 Corinthians 9:22 to take any cultural form that strikes our fancy and fill it with Christian content in hopes of demonstrating the gospel’s contemporary relevance and transforming power. For one thing, the faddish nature of pop culture makes such efforts a grasping at the wind. As William Inge once said, “He who marries the spirit of the age soon

becomes a widower.”⁶ (If you have doubts about that assertion, just ask anyone who was into the disco scene back in the 1970s.) In addition, when Christians fail to think through the meaning that is inherent in specific cultural practices, they can come across as poseurs in their attempts to relate to their non-Christian neighbors. This is not what Paul had in mind when he spoke of becoming “all things to all people.” It is the exact opposite. My tattooed neighbor is not likely to be offended by the fact that I do not have any tattoos myself. But he may very well be offended if he thinks that I am co-opting his form of self-expression and attempting to “Christianize” it by getting an image of a cross emblazoned on my forearm. I can show him greater respect by getting to know him and trying to understand why *he* gets tattoos. Why is this important to him? What is he trying to express by doing this to his body? What does this practice reveal about his basic beliefs and why he believes them? And as I get to know him, I can look for opportunities to explain that the gospel offers something completely different, not just a “PG-rated” version of the life that he is already living. ©

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⁶ Cited in Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 63.

Servant Witness

Exposing the Darkness: A Call for Presuppositional Elenctics, Part I

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by **Brian L. De Jong**

A parable from modern times: when I was first ordained as a minister, I served as a campus minister to international students at the University of Florida in Gainesville. During my two years there, I became interested in their football team. Since then, I have followed the ups and downs of Gator football. During the Tim Tebow years, the Gators marched up and down the field at will, scoring touchdowns and collecting national championship trophies with apparent ease. After Tebow's graduation, and the departure of coach Urban Meyer, the university hired a defense minded coach. In the coming years, that coach built a ferocious defense that was annually ranked among the nation's best. At the same time, the offense became more and more offensive to fans, seemingly unable to master the mechanics of the forward pass. Calling their offensive unit "inept" would be a generous assessment. Each week a sportswriter at the local newspaper would "grade the Gators" for their game performance. While the defense frequently got As, the grades for the offense ranged from D to F most weeks. Not surprisingly, no championships were won during those years.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=552&issue_id=115.

It often seems that the Reformed world is not that different. In presuppositional apologetics we have a ferocious defense. When it is practiced rightly, it stops the unbeliever in his tracks and leaves even outspoken atheists spluttering. But where is the offense? Do we know how to attack the unbelief of unbelievers? I think we fail miserably on the "offensive side of the ball."

The reason for this lack of offense is due to ignorance of the science of elenctics. Elenctics is a much neglected facet of the Christian life, of gospel ministry, and of presuppositional apologetics. Indeed, the very term "elenctics" is unfamiliar to most believers, although it is a thoroughly scriptural concept. David Hesselgrave has called elenctics "a neglected subject in contemporary theology"²

In these articles, I propose to correct this oversight by introducing the reader to the concept of elenctics. In part 1 we will consider a definition of elenctics, sketch some of its chief characteristics, and consider a three-pronged model for ministry. In part 2, we will look in depth at the biblical foundations of the concept of elenctics.

In my estimation, the practice of elenctics should be central to our engagement with the world around us—a world that is increasingly covered in the thick darkness of unbelief, skepticism, cynicism, and creeping secularism. When it is properly grasped, elenctics will enable us to let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works, that the wickedness of this evil age will be effectively exposed, that the darkness of sin will be scattered, and that our Heavenly Father might be more properly glorified.

The term "elenctics" comes from the Greek verb ἐλέγχω (*elengchō*), which means "1. to bring to light, expose, set forth; 2. to convict or convince someone of something; 3. to reprove, correct; 4. to punish, discipline."³

2 David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 419.

3 William F. Arndt, Walter Bauer, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 249.

Dutch missiologist J.H. Bavinck explains the development of the term in *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*:

In Homer the verb has the meaning of “to bring to shame.” It is connected with the word *elengchos* that signifies shame. It later underwent a certain change so that the emphasis fell more upon the conviction of guilt, the demonstration of guilt. It is this later significance that it has in the New Testament. Its meaning is entirely ethical and religious.⁴

Consider the following occurrences of the verb ἐλέγχω (*elengchō*) in the New Testament:

John 16:8, “And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict [ἐλέγξει *elengxei*] the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

Hebrews 12:5, “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved [ἐλεγχόμενος *elengchomenos*] by him.’”

John 3:20, “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed [ἐλεγχθῆ *elengchthē*].”

1 Timothy 5:20, “As for those who persist in sin, rebuke [ἐλεγχε *elengche*] them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”

2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof [ἐλεγμόν *elengmon*], for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Titus 1:9, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke [ἐλέγχειν *elengchein*] those who contradict it.”

Titus 1:13, “This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke [ἐλεγχε *elengche*] them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.”

Titus 2:15, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke [ἐλεγχε *elengche*] with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”

Ephesians 5:11, 13, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose [ἐλέγχετε *elenchete*] them.... But when anything is exposed [ἐλεγχόμενα *elengchomena*] by the light, it becomes visible.”

Luke 3:19, “But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved [ἐλεγχόμενος *elengchomenos*] by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done.”

From the number of these passages, their relative significance, and the strength of their exhortations, we can see that elenctics is not a peripheral practice on the edges of Christianity. In fact, this is an essential component of Christian ministry if such ministry is to be considered thoroughly biblical.

The concept of elenctics, then, finds its roots in the New Testament. The discipline of elenctics, however, was first articulated by Abraham Kuyper in his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*.⁵ In a class on elenctics taught at Westminster Theological Seminary, Professor Harvey Conn argued that Kuyper saw elenctics as a defensive science and tended to treat it in isolation from apologetics. In Kuyper’s thought elenctics became an abstract intellectual tool for changing epistemologies rather than a missionary instrument for changing people.

Kuyper’s concept was later developed by two prominent Dutch theologians: J. H. Bavinck and Cornelius Van Til. Bavinck’s contributions on elenctics were greater than Van Til’s, although Van Til’s work in apologetics dovetails nicely with elenctics.

In his introduction, Bavinck takes elenctics in

4 J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), 221.

5 Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898).

a different direction from Kuyper. Bavinck places elenctics in a more intimate relation with missions and practical theology, thus avoiding Kuyper’s weaknesses. Bavinck writes:

Elenctics is strongly controlled by the missionary motive. It is not primarily a defense against the dangerous power of non-Christian religions, but it is rather itself a direct attack upon them. As we have already seen, elenctics calls the non-Christian religions to a position of responsibility, and attempts to convince their adherents of sin and to move them to repentance and conversion.⁶

Bavinck’s missionary thrust is further seen when he says “In all elenctics the concern is always with the all-important question: ‘What have you done with God?’”⁷ He adds, “*Elengehein* does not in the first place refer to arguments which show the absurdity of heathendom. Its primary meaning refers to the conviction and unmasking of sin, and to the call to responsibility.”⁸

Van Til, in his apologetics, deals with a similar concept:

The natural man at bottom knows that he is the creature of God. He knows that he should live to the glory of God. He knows that in all that he does he should stress that the field of reality which he investigates has the stamp of God’s ownership upon it. But he suppresses his knowledge of himself as he truly is. He is the man with the iron mask. A true method of apologetics must seek to tear off that iron mask.⁹

The unmasking of the non-Christian in order to call him to repentance and faith is the method of both Bavinck and Van Til. This is the high water mark for elenctic theory, up to this point in

6 Bavinck, *Introduction*, 232.

7 *Ibid.*, 223.

8 *Ibid.*, 226.

9 Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 101.

history. Others, including Donald McGavran,¹⁰ John Stott,¹¹ and Samuel Zwemer¹² have touched on the subject, but none have surpassed the Dutch theologians.

What, then, would be a working definition of elenctics? Bavinck defines elenctics as “the science which unmask[s] to heathendom all false religions as sin against God, and it calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God.”¹³

In another place he adds, “Elenctics is the science concerned with a very special aspect of the approach: our direct attack upon non-Christian religiosity in order to call a man to repentance.”¹⁴

Abraham Kuyper saw elenctics as Christian ethics in their antithetical relationship to pseudo-Christianity, pseudo-religion, and pseudo-philosophy. Elenctics is the Christian response to such false thought.

Harvie Conn taught:

Elenctics for Kuyper is the discipline setting Christian faith and life over against false religions. Kuyper tried to reject any neutral understanding of elenctics. Elenctics presumes the inadequacy and falsehood of religions over against the absoluteness and purity of the Christian faith.¹⁵

Conn himself treated elenctics as a theory of approach to the world religions. He saw it as more closely connected to apologetics than to missions. He did not, however, equate elenctics with apologetics nor did he make it merely a subdivision of apologetics.

For our purposes, I propose to define elenctics as the offensive counterpart to apologetics. Whereas apologetics is “the vindication of the

10 See Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 223.

11 See John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 73.

12 See “Princeton Semiannual Bulletin.”

13 Bavinck, *Introduction*, 222.

14 *Ibid.*, 233.

15 Recorded class notes from Westminster Theological Seminary.

Christian philosophy of life against various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life,¹⁶ elenctics is the direct attack upon the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life. It is the public exposing of sin as sin, and the call for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Having understood a definition of elenctics, let us next consider some leading characteristics of elenctics.

The first characteristic of elenctics is that it is *spiritual*. By this I mean that elenctics is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human spirit. As we saw in John 16:8, the Holy Spirit is said to elenctify the world. Bavinck comments:

The Holy Spirit is actually the only conceivable subject of this verb, for the conviction of sin exceeds all human ability. Only the Holy Spirit can do this, even though he can and will use us as instruments in his hand. Taken in this sense, elenctics is the science which is concerned with the conviction of sin. In a special sense then it is the science which unmasks to heathendom all false religions as sin against God, and it calls heathendom to a knowledge of the only true God. To be able to do this well and truthfully it is necessary to have a responsible knowledge of false religions, but one must also be able to lay bare the deepest motifs. Elenctics is possible only on the basis of a veritable self-knowledge, which is kindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Van Til also stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in elenctics when he says:

It is upon the power of the Holy Spirit that the Reformed preacher relies when he tells men that they are lost in sin and in need of a Savior. The Reformed preacher does not tone down his message in order that it may find acceptance with the natural man. He does not say that his message is less certainly true

because of its non-acceptance by the natural man. The natural man is, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, always accessible to the truth; accessible to the penetration of the truth by the Spirit of God. Apologetics, like systematics, is valuable to the precise extent that it presses the truth upon the attention of the natural man. The natural man must be blasted out of his hideouts, his caves, his last lurking places.¹⁸

Secondly, elenctics is *intrapersonal*. If a Christian is not undergoing the elenctic work of the Spirit in his own life, he will not be able to elenctify others effectively. Indeed, the Christian ought to search his own heart and life for sin against God. The Christian is commanded to put off the old man with his practices—to mortify his own sin. Only then will he be able to help others deal properly with their sin. As Bavinck says, “Elenctics can actually occur only if one recognizes and unmasks these same undercurrents within himself.”¹⁹

Third, elenctics is *interpersonal*. Bavinck notes that knowing a religious system is never enough. We must know what the particular adherent believes and experiences. We must deal not with abstract religious and philosophical systems, but with an individual person’s understanding and expression of his religion. Only by asking appropriate questions can we determine what the person actually believes, and what he experiences. Then we can begin to formulate an elenctic plan.

Fourth, elenctics is *contextual*. Bavinck rightly says:

Abstract, disembodied and history-less sinners do not exist; only very concrete sinners exist, whose sinful life is determined and characterized by all sorts of cultural and historical factors; by poverty, hunger, superstition, traditions, chronic illnesses, tribal morality, and thousands of other things. I must bring the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to the

16 Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 1.

17 Bavinck, *Introduction*, 222.

18 Van Til, *Defense*, 105.

19 Bavinck, *Introduction*, 222.

whole man, in his concrete existence, in his everyday environment.²⁰

Fifth, elenctics is *full-orbed*. Man is organically united in his essential being. His physical existence cannot be divorced from his spiritual life, his body is not separate from his soul, or vice versa. The elenctic approach must recognize the organic unity of man, and by word and deed encounter the whole man in his total depravity. We must bring the whole counsel of God to bear upon his entire sinful condition, settling for nothing less than wholehearted repentance and thorough-going faith in Jesus Christ.

Sixth, elenctics must be both *narrow* and *broad*. An individual sinner's particular sins must be exposed as sin, and that specific person should be called to individualized repentance. But it is also true that the sinful worldviews of large groupings of humanity must be exposed, dissected and refuted. For instance, not only should an individual Muslim be shown that his personal rejection of Christ is wrong and requires repentance and faith, but the religious system of Islam must also be evaluated, critiqued and disproven as a system. Elenctics can and should be practiced both specifically and generally at a micro level and a macro level.

Seventh, elenctics must be *patient*, *humble*, and *gracious*. Especially in the Pastoral Epistles, patience, humility, and graciousness are presupposed for the effective overseer. As elenctic work is part of every pastor's duty, the humility and patience of a pastor must undergird his elenctic encounters. He extends the grace and mercy of God as he helps sinners to recognize their sin and to repent and believe. This can only happen, again, if we are regularly performing elenctics upon ourselves.

In conclusion, what would an elenctic ministry look like? Perhaps the following might be something of a model for carrying out the principles from this study.

The minister of the gospel understands and

accepts his duty to defend the Christian faith, to challenge the unbelief of others, and to positively present the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. By understanding apologetics, elenctics, and evangelism, he develops a three-pronged approach.

First, when he encounters the non-Christian, he readily defends the Christian philosophy of life against the attacks of the non-Christian. He does this by implementing the main components of a covenantal, or presuppositional apologetic. He knows his own system thoroughly enough to give a reasonable defense to everyone who questions his commitments, always going to the root issues. He does not answer the fool according to his folly, lest he be like him. Rather, he rigorously defends the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Secondly, he challenges the non-Christian's adherence to a false religious and philosophical system. He diagnoses, dissects, and exposes the beliefs of the non-Christian as rebellion against God the Creator. By patiently and persistently interacting with the non-believer, he can determine particular lines of thought and lifestyle. Graciously and winsomely, he can show the unbeliever where and why his perspective is wrong. He can also demonstrate how the unbeliever's life is sinful and self-defeating. In this sense, he is answering the fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Thus, having defended his own religious commitments and also having exposed the non-Christian's commitments, he can present the positive facts of the gospel of Jesus Christ. At every step, whether defending Christianity, exposing unbelief, falsehood, and sin, or presenting the gospel facts, there is a direct and urgent call for repentance and faith. Depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to establish a work of grace in the heart of the unbeliever, he relies upon God alone for the outcome. As he sees the Spirit quickening the unbeliever, all credit, praise, and glory goes to the God who saves. Even when his efforts result in the hardening of an unbelieving acquaintance, praise is given to the sovereign God for his wisdom and justice.

²⁰ Ibid., 81.

Not only is the minister carrying out such a ministry personally, but he is equipping the saints for the work of ministry. He is training the congregation in this three-pronged approach, and encouraging them as they put this approach into practice. Being a man of prayer, the minister also intercedes to the Lord for the folk among whom he lives and works—both believers and unbelievers.

In all of this, the minister is careful to maintain truly Christian conduct and a good conscience. He speaks and he acts with gentleness and reverence, even when dealing with the provocations and hostility of an unbeliever. The minister's exemplary behavior stands as a silent witness to all whom he encounters, reinforcing the message he communicates verbally. He realizes all too well that hypocrisy will undermine his testimony and give the unbeliever an excuse for dismissing the truth claims of Christianity. Therefore, even when he sins, he is careful to repent, and to exhibit deeds in keeping with repentance. His faith in Christ burns brightly before men as he walks daily by faith in the Son of God. By living in this way, he will put to shame those who revile his good behavior in Christ, and leave them truly without excuse before the Judge of all the earth. ©

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Exposing the Darkness: The Biblical-Theological Foundation, Part 2

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by **Brian L. De Jong**

In my first article on the science of elenctics, I proposed a definition of this much neglected practice. I also sketched the main characteristics of elenctics, and proposed a model for ministry. That article was resting implicitly on a biblical theological foundation. In this second installment, I will attempt to make this foundation explicit. This will enable us to think more thoroughly and carefully about the practice of elenctics in ministry, as well as shedding light on a variety of scriptural passages and themes.

The cornerstone of a biblical theology of elenctics should be Christ himself. Jesus's earthly ministry is summarized in John 3:19–21:

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.

Jesus came into the world as the Light of the world. His very presence had an elenctic quality to it. He exposed things simply by being who he was. As he shined upon men, there were two distinct reactions to his presence. On the one hand, the men of the world loved the darkness rather than this newly arrived Light. Their deeds were evil and they instinctively knew he would expose them for

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=559&issue_id=116.

who and what they were. Because they practiced evil, they hated the Light and refused to come near to the Light, lest he elenticize them for all to see. This establishes the important role of elenticics toward unbelievers.

The other reaction also involves exposure. The Light also shines on those who practice the truth. They have no fear, so they gladly approach the Light. As the Light shines upon them, it is plain to all that their good deeds have been wrought in God. God's grace has had its effect, and these justified persons are now bearing the fruit of righteousness. When Jesus elenticizes them, it is altogether positive. Praise is given to God for his great salvation and its impact upon the righteous of the earth. So we see that elenticics is also practiced toward believers, though with much different purposes and results.

No matter where he went, or what he did, Jesus constantly practiced elenticics. As the Light, he could no more cease exposing men than could the physical sun stop illuminating the earth.

Another important passage is John 16:8–11. In teaching about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says this:

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

An overlooked area of the ministry of the Spirit is his work among unbelievers. His impact upon Christians is widely appreciated, but what does he do among the unbelieving men of this world? First and foremost, he convicts them. In other words, the Holy Spirit is elenticizing unbelievers in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. In this usage the verb ἐλέγχω (*elengchō*) carries the connotation of condemning what is exposed. This is not a dispassionate exposé of unbelief, but rather a passionate demonstration of the guilt of sin in the sinful world, together with God's negative judgment against it.

The elentic ministry of the Spirit has three aspects. First, he is convicting the world concerning sin because they do not believe in Christ. Here is the chief sin of the ungodly man—his failure to believe Jesus to be all that he claims to be. From this serious sin of unbelief flow all sorts of other evils, but failure to believe in Jesus is the fountainhead of their many soul-damning corruptions. Unbelief is everywhere exposed and condemned by the Holy Spirit.

In his commentary on John, D. A. Carson says:

The Holy Spirit presses home the world's sin *despite* the world's unbelief; he convicts the world of sin *because* they do not believe in Jesus. This convicting work of the Paraclete is therefore gracious: it is designed to bring men and women of the world to recognize their need, and so turn to Jesus, and thus stop being "the world."²

The second component of the Spirit's elentic work is more obscure—"concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see me." Carson argues that the righteousness in view is the world's righteousness—a righteousness of their own making. Just as Jesus frequently exposed the utter inadequacy of the so-called "righteousness" of the Jews, Carson asks:

Is it not therefore thematically appropriate that the Paraclete should convict the world of its *righteous*?... The reason *why* the Paraclete convicts the world of its righteousness is because Jesus is going to the Father. As we have observed, one of Jesus' most startling roles with respect to the world was to show up the emptiness of its pretensions, to expose by his light the darkness of the world for what it is. But now Jesus is going; how will that convicting work be continued? It is continued by the Paraclete, who drives home this conviction in the world precisely *because* Jesus is no longer

2 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 537.

present to discharge this task.³

The final prong of the Spirit's elenctic ministry concerns judgment. The world has weighed Christ in the scales and found him wanting. Their judgment is wrong and wicked, and the Spirit will demonstrate this fact. In reality, the world willingly links arms with the devil and joins his cause. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the prince of this world was exposed and condemned. The Spirit would therefore expose and condemn all of Satan's allies for their part in this cosmic rebellion against God the Son.

A third passage that deserves our attention is arguably the single-most important statement in Scripture about Scripture. The bedrock for our understanding of the inspiration of the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Those familiar verses say this: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” In this passage the elenctic work is focused upon the believer—the “man of God.”

The second function of “all Scripture” in that text is “elenctics”—for reproof and the rebuking of the sinner. This is a necessary step in the sequence outlined in these verses. Scripture is profitably taught in a broad and general sense, but it is also profitable for zeroing in on the specific misdeeds of men. As sin is exposed and rebuked, then Scripture can be applied for correction. In other words, before the cure can be applied, the wound must be opened and cleansed. Scripture opens up and cleans out the wound, and then applies the healing ointment so restoration can proceed. Finally, Scripture trains a man in righteousness so that he will not fall back into the same trap again. Thus is the man of God made adequate, equipped for every good work.

What Paul records in 2 Timothy 3:16 provides the important complement to Jesus's words in John 16. Elenctics is the work of the Holy Spirit, and he sovereignly and graciously employs the Scriptures

in this work. Since the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, it makes sense that he would employ his own sword in this necessary ministry.

Next, reflect upon Paul's words to Titus:

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith. (Titus 1:7–13)

Here Paul spells out qualifications for an overseer. These instructions relate especially to ministers. A minister is to hold fast the faithful word in accordance with the teaching. He must be theologically sound and biblically orthodox. His commitment to the word of God is for two purposes. First, so that he will be able to exhort believers in sound doctrine. Through a ministry of preaching and teaching, he must expound and apply the Scriptures to the minds, hearts, and lives of Christians.

The second purpose for holding fast to the faithful word is so that he can elencticize those who contradict the truth. This may include members of the visible church, or those critics from outside the church. In this instance the verb ἐλέγχω (*elengchō*) emphasizes the exposing, contradicting, and refuting of false doctrine, together with an explanation of what the truth actually means. Ministers who preach must be equipped to identify heresy, to dissect it and to use the word to refute whatever is erroneous.

3 Ibid., 538.

Often when rebellious men inject their influence into the church, they gain a hearing from well-meaning but gullible Christians. Such deceivers were at work in the first century, and they inflicted profound damage. They were upsetting whole families by teaching things they should not. To top it off, they did so for the sake of sordid gain. How should Titus respond? Paul prescribes elenctics. Reprove them severely, he says. The severity of this elenctic encounter is needed because of the persuasive strength of the opposition. Later Paul underlines this when he says in Titus 2:15, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” Reproving is elencticizing. Speak and exhort and elencticize with all spiritual authority, and allow no one to disregard you!

When it comes to the duty of ordinary believers, we look to Paul’s words in Ephesians 5:11–14, where he writes:

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Here the apostle exhorts believers to refuse participation in the “unfruitful deeds of darkness.” To be involved in such sins would constitute hypocrisy and would blunt any criticism offered by the believer against pagan practices. Paul’s warning does not stop there. He does not merely counsel Christians to steer clear of those deeds of darkness. Instead, Paul advises that Christians should even expose those pernicious practices. Here is the command to “elencticize” the unfruitful deeds of the sons of darkness. Such wickedness must be exposed for what it is so that everyone can see the disgraceful nature of such conduct. In verse 13, Paul expands the thought by saying that all things become visible when they are exposed by the light. This again shows us the nature of elenctics — it is the exposing of all things to the light, so that those

things might become visible to everyone — believer and unbeliever alike. Shining the light on sin displays the true corruption and ugliness of sin. So long as it lurks in the shadows, and operates under the cover of darkness, no one can actually see what sin looks like. Only in the blazing brilliance of the light of Christ can these actions and motives be shown for what they truly are. In verse 14 Paul then draws together various ideas and phrases from Isaiah to call the sleeper to awake “and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Now we see the function of elenctics in calling the exposed sinner to repentance and faith — to new life in Christ.

As this falls in the midst of a chapter of ethical imperatives for believers, the duty to practice elenctics is not restricted or limited to ordained ministers or professional apologists. Elenctics is a duty of each and every Christian. No Christian should ever participate in unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead every follower of Christ should expose the disgraceful deeds done by evil men.

Having looked at a number of key passages from Scripture about the practice of elenctics, let us briefly survey some historic examples of elenctics in practice. Perhaps the most memorable instance of elenctics in the history of Israel is found in 2 Samuel 12. King David had sinned grievously in his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite. David hid his sin, but God saw what his servant had done. Hence, the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to King David. While Nathan wove his tale about injustice and arrogance, David was caught up in the narrative. David’s anger burned against the main character, and he demanded justice and fourfold restitution. Nathan then uttered those immortal elenctic words, “You are the man.” Nathan exposed David’s sins and crimes for the king to see, and David was broken by it. After Nathan details the offenses of David against Bathsheba, Uriah, and the Lord himself, and pronounces God’s judgment on the wayward monarch, David replies, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Psalms 51 and 32 detail David’s confession, repentance, and restoration, which flowed from Nathan’s effective elenctic

ministry.

Another Old Testament instance of elenctics is the confrontation of Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Before the eager eyes of the watching Israelites, this is what Elijah said about Baal in 1 Kings 18:27: “And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.’ ”

This exposé was the necessary prelude to Elijah’s humble prayer before a waterlogged altar. When the fire fell from heaven and consumed everything, then the people realized that Yahweh is God and Baal is not. Before they could be brought to their senses, they had to see convincingly that Baal was no god at all, and that the prophets of Baal were religious charlatans. Having exposed the bankruptcy of Baal worship, the compelling scene at Elijah’s altar had a decisive effect. Before men can know that the Lord, he is God, they must be convinced that Baal, he is no god at all.

Moving to the New Testament, among the first figures we meet is John the Baptizer. When John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he said this in Matthew 3:7–9: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”

When tax collectors came to be baptized, John exposed their sins of greed: “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to” (Luke 3:13 NASB). To soldiers he said, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14 NASB). In saying this he exposes three failures of the soldiers: (1) their thievery; (2) their bearing false witness; (3) their discontentment with their wages. John’s elenctic ministry came to a zenith when he reprimanded Herod the tetrarch for unlawfully taking Herodias, his brother’s wife—an elenctic encounter that led to imprisonment and death.

No better practitioner of elenctics ever existed

than our Savior himself. Examples abound in the gospels, including the clear instance recorded in John 10:24–26:

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.”

The Jews were disingenuous in their demand. Jesus had told them plainly, as well as demonstrating the truth of his claim by his works. Jesus therefore calls them on their hypocrisy and then exposes their essential problem—unbelief. Twice he convicts them of sin because they did not believe in him or the works he had done. On an even deeper level, he exposes the true cause of their refusal to believe—“you are not my sheep.” These were the recognized religious elites of their day, but Jesus was showing them for what they truly were—blind guides and false professors.

The quintessential elenctic chapter is Matthew 23. There Jesus exposes the scribes and Pharisees for their high handed hypocrisy. Observe how Jesus blisters them:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (Matt. 23:23, 25)

The apostles also carried out elenctics in their ministries. Peter’s Pentecost sermon ended on this note: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

That last phrase—“whom you crucified”—tore the iron mask off the audience. They were faced with their sin, and their hearts were pierced.

In Acts 3 Peter struck the same chord again, saying “But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 3:14–15).

Likewise, Stephen’s defense before the high priest was a piece of strong elenctic preaching. He concluded in Acts 7:51–52 with these words:

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.

On Paul’s first missionary journey, he encountered Elymas the magician. Paul exposed that deceitful man’s heart with strong words: “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10).

Preaching in Pisidian Antioch, Paul rebuked the envious Jews. He said in Acts 13:46, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”

Paul’s ministry among pagan Gentiles was no less pointed. Speaking in Athens to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, Paul showed them that they worshiped in ignorance. Since the Greeks boasted in their wisdom, Paul’s insistence on their ignorance would be galling to their selfish conceits. Moreover, as Paul critiqued the rampant idolatry of that society, and illustrated its obviously ridiculous nature, he was proving that the philosophers of Athens were not as insightful as they supposed. He drove his point home by announcing that God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent—including the philosophers in his audience that day.

Not only did Paul use elenctics in his preaching, but he employed this approach at times in his epistles. He chided the Corinthians for their divisions and disunity. He called them arrogant, and suggested that their tolerance of sexual immorality in their congregation was something even the pagans of that day wouldn’t condone. Likewise he had sharp words for the “foolish” Galatians. Other New Testament writers are equally scathing at points, such as the scorching section in James 4:1–4.

But alas, we have only scratched the surface. God’s Word overflows with elenctics—it is a biblical theme impossible to miss! ☺

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Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Toward a Union of Spirit, Wisdom, and Word

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by James D. Baird

Introduction

The Evangelical Philosophical Society has held an online colloquium for the past three years called the “Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project.”² This project has centered on constructive engagements with Paul K. Moser’s model of Christian philosophy, which construes Christian philosophy as a distinctively *Christ-shaped* discipline. Moser has articulated his model with the utmost care and precision, engendering responses from a plethora of Christian philosophers, representing a broad range of perspectives. Some of these Christian philosophers have provided a more friendly response to Moser than others, but nearly all of them have focused in one way or another on whether his model of Christian philosophy qualifies as legitimate philosophy.

It seems clear to me that Moser’s work on Christ-shaped philosophy is courageous, incisive, and timely. Moser has called for Christian philosophers to adopt a process of wisdom acquisition that is characterized by obedience to the redemptive authority of God in Christ. He has largely used the letters of Paul as the departure point for his model of Christian philosophy which is a refreshing breath of spiritual air in a discipline that is dominated by stagnate, religiously neutral professionalism. Nevertheless, while many of Moser’s peers

have asked the question whether his model should be considered a model of *philosophy proper*, too little has been said about whether Moser’s model should be considered *Pauline*. In this brief paper, I will first outline Moser’s model of Christ-shaped philosophy. Second, I will argue that because Moser’s model purports to be Pauline, it should require Christian philosophizing to submit to Christ’s inward agent-power *and* to the Word of God.³

Moser’s Christ-Shaped Philosophy

Moser intends his model of Christ-shaped philosophy to be decisively Pauline.⁴ He devotes much of his exegetical work to Paul’s writings, especially his epistle to the Colossians, and has thence concluded that the discipline of philosophy must be brought under the Lordship of Jesus. More specifically, Moser understands the correct mode of Christian philosophy in terms of the characteristics that exuded from Jesus throughout his earthly ministry: willing submission to the power of God’s Spiritual love. This divine, Spiritual love floods the Christian’s experience via what Moser calls *Gethsemane union with Christ*; that is, “the inward agent-power of Christ working, directly at the level of psychological and motivational attitudes, toward a cooperative person’s renewal in God’s image as God’s beloved child.”⁵ So, Moser argues, the Christian philosopher must embrace and enrich his Gethsemane union with Christ by placing his most devout attention on transformation after the image of Christ’s life of self-giving

3 By the “Word of God,” I mean what theologians call *special verbal revelation*; that is, God’s interpretation of his divine being and action expressed to human creatures via oral or written communication that is accommodated to fit their creaturely cognitive capacities. For a helpful outline of the nature of revelation in its various forms, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The Redemptive-Historical View,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 91–93.

4 Moser’s model is intended to be Pauline, but not *solely* Pauline. As I allude to below, Moser also designed his model after what he takes to be the example of Jesus. See Paul K. Moser, “A Reply to William Hasker’s Objection to ‘Christ-Shaped Philosophy,’” *Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project* (2012), 2–3 and 6.

5 Paul K. Moser, “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” *Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project* (2012), 4.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=553&issue_id=115.

2 All of the papers from this colloquium cited in the present paper are available at <http://bit.ly/ChristShapedPhilosophyProject>.

love. Moser eschews definitions of philosophy that do not move beyond the systematic application of reason to include the transformative project of God's Spirit in Christian philosophers.

Perhaps Moser's Christ-shaped philosophy model could be best construed as a call for Christian philosophers to see Jesus as their Rabbi—as their teacher—rather than, say, Socrates. And in calling Christian philosophers to see Jesus as their teacher, Moser has (self-consistently) elicited the teaching of Jesus himself: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). As Christian philosophers, Moser has reminded us that we are first and foremost disciples of Jesus. Our primary philosophical aim, therefore, should be a wisdom that forms us into Christ's image.

Uniting Spirit, Wisdom, and Word

So far as I have explicated it, Moser's model is in line with the teaching of Paul (see 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 2:8, 3:1–17). The divergence between Moser's model of Christian philosophy and Paul's model appears most clearly in how Moser and Paul conceive of the Spirit's role in forming Christian philosophers after Christ's image. From what I can tell, Moser's reading of Paul assigns the Spirit of God with the responsibility to work in the Christian with redemptive authority, calling her to cooperate with divine love, molding her after the image of Christ, quite apart from the Word of God.⁶ Paul does not, however, bifurcate the Spirit of God and the Word of God in the way Moser's model suggests. From passages like Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 15:1–2; Ephesians 1:13 and 5:25–26; Philippians 2:14–16; Colossians 1:28 and 3:16; as well as 2 Timothy 3:16–17, it is clear that Paul sees the Word of God as having a vital role in the Spirit's internal work, especially when that Word is proclaimed and preached. Paul's thinking in this respect is most succinctly summed up in Galatians 6:17: “The sword of the Spirit . . . is the word of God.”

6 For example, see *ibid.*, 2–5.

From Paul's perspective, the Spirit works *by* and *with* the Word of God to shape Christians in the image of Christ. For example, Paul teaches that the Spirit shines “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) *through enlightening* “the open statement of the truth” of God's Word, the “gospel,” and the proclamation of “Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:2–5; cf. John 15:26, 16:13–14). For Paul, the Spirit's redemptive and authoritative informing of the Christian is tethered to the Word of God.⁷ The two divine realities of the Spirit and Word⁸ function together in a harmonious union toward the same end: the cognitive and affective renovation of God's children. It seems to me, then, that a model of philosophy that wishes to be Pauline (like Moser's) must characterize the Christian philosopher's redemptive authority in terms of the Word of God as enlightened and enlivened by the Spirit.⁹

7 Hence Paul's strong words to Timothy: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:1–2). The “word” that Paul commands Timothy to preach here alludes to “all of Scripture” in 2 Timothy 3:16. These passages taken in conjunction, therefore, give strong credence to the idea that the authoritative role Paul assigns to the word (of God) cannot be filled by Paul's gospel *alone*, but rather necessitates a canon of “sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). In other words, on my reading of Paul, his teachings demand philosophy to take on a good news orientation that is bolstered by the Word of God as a body of authoritative texts, not merely by a kerygma as Moser argues (see Moser's “Christ-Shaped Philosophy: Wisdom and Spirit United,” Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project (2012), 2–3, and *The Elusive God* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], esp. chapter 3 and chapter 4).

8 Of course, the former divine reality is God himself, while the latter is merely God's special verbal revelation. Nevertheless, granting this important distinction, Herman Bavinck insightfully insisted on a close link between the Godhead and the Word of God: “It is not the authenticity, nor the canonicity, nor even the inspiration, but the *divinity* of Scripture, its divine authority, which is the true object of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. He causes believers to submit to Scripture and binds them to it in the same measure and intensity as to the person of Christ himself. He assures them that in life and death and all the crises of life, they can bank on the Word of God and even fearlessly appear with it before the Judge of heaven and earth.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:596 (emphasis in original).

9 Throughout this paper, I am arguing for a refinement of

A more systematic account of Paul's teaching might categorize the Word of God as the *objective principle* and the Spirit of God as the *subjective principle* of Christian philosophical reflection, but we need not enter into that detailed discussion here.¹⁰ However, the Spirit and Word might be precisely defined and related, according to Paul they are *both* the Christian's redemptive authority—that much is abundantly clear from Paul's letters—and as the Christian's redemptive authority, they are regulative of the *mode* and *content* of Christian philosophy. For Paul, the Spirit and Word are determinative for *how* Christian philosophers should go about deriving conclusions and taking stances on particular theoretical issues (for example), and determinative for *what* conclusions they derive and stances they take (Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Cor. 10:5–6; Col. 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:15–4:5). The Spirit and Word do not grant outright solutions to every philosophical problem, but they do say plenty of pertinent things about philosophical issues, and these pertinent things should be taken *most* seriously by the Christian philosopher.¹¹

But what *is* the Word of God? The passages listed above show that for Paul it is *at least* the Hebrew Bible and the gospel message of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), although good arguments exist for Paul's having granted authority to the apostolic witness as a whole.¹² It is doubtful, however, that Paul believed the 66 books of the

Bible were the Word of God when he was alive, since some New Testament books were written after his death. This being so, it is not necessary for Paul to have assented to the 66 books of the Bible as the Word of God in order to argue (as I would like to) that Christian philosophers desiring to be Pauline (like Moser) must grant to the whole Bible the same high divine status and spiritual use that Paul attributed to the Word of God. Christians know directly by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.¹³ It follows, therefore, that Christian philosophers must treat the Bible as Paul treated the Word of God if they are to follow Paul's example. To insist otherwise would be to follow the letter of Paul's teaching while neglecting the Spirit.

Conclusion

If we are to be Pauline, uniting wisdom and Spirit is not enough, *contra* Moser. Distinctively Pauline philosophy must set up a disciplinary model that unites Spirit, wisdom, *and* Word. Such a fully Pauline conception of Christ-shaped

Moser's *model* of Pauline philosophy, not his *practice* of Pauline philosophy. In many ways, Moser's use of the Bible is exemplary; the problem is that on his model, as I understand it, his use of the Bible is unnecessary for his philosophy to qualify as Pauline.

10 Preliminarily, I submit that the fact that the Spirit and Word are (organically) related in Paul's thinking as objective and subjective philosophical principles follows from the aim of Pauline philosophy: wisdom “not of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6). See Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 9–10 and 116–18.

11 See Joseph N. Partain, “Christian Philosophy and Philosophy's Perennial Problems,” *Christ-Shaped Philosophy Project* (2013).

12 See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 240–41 and 483. See also Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1988) and Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

13 See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Systematic Theology and Hermeneutics,” in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), 40–41: “The conviction expressed (or that ought to be expressed) in saying, ‘The Bible is God's Word,’ arises immediately from being exposed directly to Scripture—not only, perhaps not even primarily, to its explicit self-witness in passages like 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20–21, but also to Scripture throughout. This conviction, produced by the Holy Spirit, may not be called into question.” The great Reformed confessions take the position outlined here by Gaffin. The Belgic Confession article 5 reads: “We receive all these books [of the Bible] and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith. And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them—not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.” See also the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.4 and 1.5. Building on the work of John Calvin (cf. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960], 1.7.2), these Reformed Christian confessions describe a cognitive process of acquiring knowledge about the divine origin and authority of the Bible similar, but different in important respects, to Alvin Plantinga's extended A/C model. See his *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

philosophy should call Christian philosophers to submit themselves and their quest for wisdom to authoritative inquiry by Christ's Spirit speaking *in* and *through* the Word of God.¹⁴ Christ must be preeminent in all things, even in philosophy (Col. 1:18)—and if Christ is to be preeminent, his Word must be preeminent as well (Col. 1:23; cf. John 15:26; 16:12–15; 17:3, 8, 12, 17–19). Rather than undermining the better thrust of Moser's labors, supplementing his model in the way I am proposing should enhance his vision for a Christian philosophy that is cast principally as messianic discipleship. After all, it was the Messiah himself who saw most clearly the causal link between obeying his divine words and acquiring wisdom: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man" (Matt. 7:24).¹⁵ ©

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14 Here, I am in agreement with Partain: "This 'redemptive inquiry by God in Christ' (that which calls for Moser's 'obedience mode' in a Spirit-empowered, 'Gethsemane union with Christ') is itself—at every point—informed and guided by biblical content" ("Christian Philosophy and Philosophy's Perennial Problems," 7).

15 I would like to thank William D. Dennison, Joel Carini, Paul K. Moser, and Tedla G. Woldeyohannes for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

✦ Servant World

Why Shakespeare Matters

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by Leland Ryken

When William Shakespeare died at the age of 52 on April 23, 1616, he was buried inside Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. He had been baptized in the same church as an infant. Shakespeare was buried inside the church in a day when most people were buried in the churchyard surrounding the church. Why?

When Shakespeare retired from a theatrical career in London five years before his death, he became a lay reader (also called lay rector) at the local Anglican church. At the very least this means that he supported the church financially and wanted to be affiliated with it in the eyes of townspeople. I believe that it meant a lot more than that. A lay reader in an Anglican church takes a leadership role in worship services, at least to the extent of public reading of Scripture.

Shakespeare's untimely death at age 52 was preceded by a period of illness of unknown duration. A month before his death, he signed his will. The preamble to that will reads,

In the name of God Amen. I William Shakespeare (sic.) of Stratford upon Avon in the county of Warwickshire gent., in perfect health & memory God be praised, do make & ordain this my last will & testament in

manner & form following. That is to say first, I commend my Soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping & assuredly believing through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made partaker of life everlasting. And my body to the earth whereof it is made.

I have begun my article with these details for two reasons. First, the English-speaking world is now celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The article you are reading right now is occasioned by that anniversary. Second, I want to plant a seed that will lead to fruition at the end of this article. I have come to regard Shakespeare as a Christian writer. I make no claim to know the state of his soul during his life and at the time of his death. But no matter how much we qualify the data I have already cited as being rooted in the Protestant milieu of Shakespeare's day, the data is indisputably there. It is also present in Shakespeare's writings. The myth of the secular Shakespeare is a fallacy foisted on an intimidated public in an unbelieving age.

I will place one more enticing tidbit on the plate of readers of *Ordained Servant*. Shakespeare's biblical knowledge was extensive (of which I will say more below). The English Bible that he primarily used in his works was the Puritan Geneva Bible, translated in Calvin's Geneva by Protestant exiles from England.

A Word of Encouragement to the Fainthearted

I am about to make lofty claims for the greatness of Shakespeare (without doubt the greatest English author), but I do so in an awareness that not everyone begins at the same starting point in relation to the bard. To readers with little acquaintance with Shakespeare, let me offer the advice to begin where you are. In every area of life, acquiring a taste for the excellent requires contact with it. There are printed guides to the plays of Shakespeare that can take you by the hand and say "look." Of course the best initiation or reentry into the plays of Shakespeare is to watch a performance of a play.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=547&issue_id=114.

I also need to state the following disclaimer. With all literary authors, the quality falls off drastically once we move beyond their best works. In fact, we usually drop into a black hole. This does not mean that the lesser works do not have their moments, nor that they lack champions who might even claim them as favorite works. Nonetheless, the claims that I make for the importance of Shakespeare are based on what nearly everyone would acknowledge to be the *crème-de-la-crème* works in the Shakespeare canon: two romantic comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*), three relatively early plays that have problematical aspects to them but nonetheless belong to the inner circle (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*), the four great tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*), and the greatest of the late romances (*The Winter's Tale*). Other Shakespeare lovers include additional plays and are often passionate about them. I have no problem with that, but I do not want to be held accountable for plays beyond the ones I have listed, in case my readers dip into them and find them wanting (as I do).

In addition to the plays, the sonnets of Shakespeare are as great as his best plays. The following at least are among the choicest treasures of English literature: sonnets 12, 18, 29, 73, 98, 106, 116, and 146.

A final note of encouragement that I want to offer is that Shakespeare's highly poetic and often archaic language makes him a very difficult writer. There is no need to apologize for finding Shakespeare's language difficult. I offer the following perspectives: (1) we do not need to understand all the words in order to enjoy Shakespeare's works; (2) repeated contact with the text makes it more and more familiar; (3) the greatest literature does not carry all its meaning on the surface but embodies much of it below the surface.

To give shape to what I will say in praise of Shakespeare, I will provide five answers to the question, Why does Shakespeare matter for Christians?

1. Shakespeare Matters Because Beautiful Language Matters

Multiple sources tell us that when American pioneers headed west in their covered wagons, the two books that they were most likely to have in their possession were the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare. What did these two books represent amid circumstances that threatened the continuity of civilization? One answer is that these two books are the very touchstone of English language at its most beautiful and powerful. I do not have space to prove that, so I will just appeal to people's experiences over the centuries to confirm my claim. One signal is the space allotted to the King James Bible and Shakespeare in compilations of famous quotations.

Why does beautiful language matter? It matters because God is the source of both language and beauty. Christianity is a religion of the word. Beautiful and exalted language has a power that prosaic language lacks. We need a space in our lives where the best language is liberated to be itself and elevate our spirits beyond the idiom of everyday discourse. We cannot always reside at such lofty heights, but we are diminished if we never do.

The greatness of Shakespeare begins with the words that he wrote. The worlds of imagination that he created use words as their building blocks. I was struck by the statement of an actress who said about playing Shakespeare, "You need more than the character; you need the words."

2. Shakespeare Matters Because the Understanding of Human Experience Matters

It is a truism that literature is the voice of authentic human experience. Literature as a whole is the human race's testimony to its own experience, and Shakespeare wrote so much and covered so many aspects of human experience that he himself constitutes a major chapter in the history of the literary portrayal of human experience. A book title from several years ago was so preposterous as to cheapen the idea that I am advocating—*Shake-*

speare and the Invention of the Human. Shakespeare did not invent the human. But the more modest claim that he is an unsurpassed portrayer of the human is true.

Wherein lies the secret of Shakespeare's ability to do this? It starts with skill in character creation. Every one of the plays I listed earlier provides us with a gallery of memorable characters. These characters have such a life force pulsing through them that they are almost impossible to forget. I remember once reading along in Northrop Frye's book *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* and encountering the following sentence: "Characters in Shakespeare or Dickens take on a life of their own apart from their function in the play or novel they appear in."² Yes they do.

In addition to the vividness of Shakespeare's imagined characters, we should note their range. The range of Shakespeare's characters comes close to embracing humanity as a whole. We encounter the proverbial good, bad, and ugly. We meet young people in love, people in their prime, and old people. When I teach Shakespeare's "seven ages of man" speech, I tell my students that Shakespeare got it right. I do not have space to quote the whole speech, but here are the sixth and seven ages of a person, which I quote as a parallel passage when I teach the portrait of old age in Ecclesiastes 12:1–8:

... his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.
Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every-
thing.³

In addition to the vividness and range of Shakespeare's characters, we may note their universality. We have met Shakespeare's characters in real life. In fact, we see some of them when we look in the mirror. The best comment on Shakespeare's uni-

versality comes from his contemporary poet and playwright Ben Jonson. In a memorial poem on Shakespeare, Jonson called Shakespeare "soul of the age," but then he went on to say that Shakespeare "was not of an age but for all time."⁴

Wherein lies the value of Shakespeare's portrayal of human experience? It yields a kind of truth—truthfulness in human experience. When we contemplate the experiences that Shakespeare places before us, we come to see human experience accurately. I call this knowledge in the form of right seeing. It is representational truth as compared with ideational truth. Shakespeare gives us both, but it is the living through of experiences like young people in love and destructive ambition and the mysteries of providence that we chiefly carry away from an immersion in Shakespeare plays.

3. Shakespeare Matters Because Good Entertainment Matters

We live in a day of cheap and tawdry entertainment. The sonnets and plays of Shakespeare offer an alternative. In addition to the crisis of entertainment at a societal level, the subject of leisure has always been a topic of neglect in the church. Because we do not dignify the concept of leisure and surround it with a Christian defense, we usually sink to a low level by default. The leisure life of most Christians does not rise much above the general level of our culture. Reading and viewing Shakespeare (along with other great literature) provides a better way.

What things constitute what T. S. Eliot called "superior amusement"⁵ (which I prefer to call superior entertainment)? For starters, many of the pleasures of Shakespeare's plays are the pleasures of narrative or story. One ingredient is the characters that Shakespeare invented, of which I have already spoken. A second is the plots that captivate us. Shakespeare's plays are a primer on storytelling, with such elements as conflict moving to

2 Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 238.

3 *As You Like It*, Act 2, scene 7, lines 160–66.

4 Ben Jonson, "To The Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us," lines 17 and 43.

5 T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920, 1960), viii.

resolution, suspense, moments of revelation, surprise, and dramatic irony. Novelist E. M. Forster famously said that a story has only one essential requirement, namely, making us want to know what happens next.⁶ Once we allow ourselves to be immersed in the opening scene of a Shakespearean play, our curiosity about what happens next and how it all ends can usually be trusted to work its magic.

The third narrative ingredient is setting. Shakespeare's plays do not employ realistic stage props, so the concept of entering an imagined world takes the place of setting in the usual sense. When we read or view a Shakespearean play, we enter a whole world of the imagination. That world is so compelling that it is easy to enter it and stay there. But literature is bifocal: it asks us first to look *at* the work and then look *through* it to real life. Shakespeare's poems and plays give us windows to the world.

Two additional avenues toward understanding what makes Shakespeare's poems and plays pleasurable have already been mentioned. To see human experience observed and recorded accurately and with insight into the human condition is pleasurable. Shakespeare's works deliver the goods. Additionally, Shakespeare's way with words is pleasurable. He exploited the resources of poetry, metaphor, and symbol in a way that makes his poetry (in which most of his plays are written) meet Robert Frost's definition of a poem as "a performance in words."⁷ Shakespeare's exploitation of the resources of language is a performance by a master.

Through the years I have frequently gone on the Wheaton College summer literature program in England. Our students watch many plays as the summer unfolds. When I fly back to the U.S. at the end of the program and reflect on the summer, it is obvious to me that after 400 years, in the field of drama Shakespeare is still the best show in town.

6 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 35.

7 Robert Frost, quoted by Elizabeth Drew, *Poetry: A Modern Guide to Its Understanding* (New York: Dell, 1959), 84.

4. Shakespeare Matters Because the Bible Matters

Whole books have been written on the Bible as a presence in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays. It is a subject that is dear to my heart. We need to begin with Shakespeare's cultural milieu. The Bible was the best selling and most talked about book. Children learned to read from the English Bible. The Catholic Thomas More offered as proof that the Bible should not be translated into English the fact that the Bible was being disputed in taverns by "every lewd [ignorant] lad."⁸

A "fact sheet" on Shakespeare's knowledge of the Bible yields the following data. The total number of biblical references in the plays and sonnets is approximately 2,000. Experts on the subject regularly theorize that there are so many references to the first four chapters of Genesis that Shakespeare must have known them virtually by heart. To the end of Shakespeare's writing career, he made so many references to the Bible, often based on detailed biblical knowledge, that he must have been a lifelong reader of the Bible. As one scholar notes, Shakespeare's plays suggest that he owned an extensive personal library, and it would be unthinkable that his library would not have included the best selling book of his day.

Before 1598, Shakespeare's biblical references were based on the Bishop's Bible, and after that on the Geneva Bible. What caused the shift? Shakespeare's family resided in Stratford while he pursued an acting and writing career in London (with Shakespeare returning home during the off-season). When residing in London, Shakespeare eventually became a lodger in the home of a Huguenot family, where he would have heard the Geneva Bible read at meals and in family worship, and where a Bible was always available on the table. But Shakespeare's first acquaintance with the Geneva Bible came during his grammar school education, when students at the Stratford Grammar School translated passages from the

8 Quoted in R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 254.

Geneva Bible into Latin and then back into English. Occasionally Shakespeare even alludes to the marginalia of the Geneva Bible and not just the main text.

For a Christian reader or viewer, one of the sources of edification in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays is the biblical presence in them. We do not *need* those references when we have the Bible itself, but if we grant that we want wholesome literature in our lives beyond the Bible, then the rootedness of a work in the Bible becomes an avenue toward increased pleasure and edification. In some Christian circles there is an unwarranted disparagement of Christian literature because it represents "second level" discourse, whereas the Bible is the primary level. But sermons based on the Bible are in the same category as literature. Authors like Shakespeare and Milton do the same thing that preachers do—they create human discourse on the foundation of the Bible itself. In principle, a sermon and Christian work of literature have the same potential for truth and error.

The Bible enjoins us to sing a new song—a new poem, a fresh metaphor, an original story. Placed into an unexpected setting, the Bible can come alive or be confirmed in new ways. It can perform the same function as a good sermon, with the added element of entertainment and artistic enrichment. I will speak personally in saying that my life has been continuously enriched by seeing the Bible and its truths enshrined in the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare.

5. Christian Shakespeare?

Great literature that embodies Christian truth has been a major source of spiritual input in my life. Over the course of my career as a literary scholar, Shakespeare's works came to seem more and more Christian until I reached the point of not hesitating to claim him as a Christian writer. The rewards of reading his best works are the same as those of reading Donne, Herbert, and Milton: we view human experience from a Christian perspective. This is not say that Shakespeare's works are as overtly Christian as those of Milton, but sometimes

a work in which Christian patterns are latent can be all the more powerful for that understated quality. There is a place for implicitly Christian literature as well as explicitly Christian literature.

The myth of the secular Shakespeare casts a long shadow, even among Christians, so when I meet resistance, my first strategy is to ask, What is there in Shakespeare's works that contradicts Christianity? My own answer is that I am disappointed by bawdy and indecent scenes and language. But these passages are relatively few and far between. Certainly we cannot ascribe to Shakespeare the indecencies and assaults on Christian morality that are visited on us by modern directors of his plays.

What, then, constitutes the Christian element in Shakespeare's plays and poems? I have already noted the biblical presence. *Macbeth* is the Shakespearean play that I teach most often, and one authority on the subject of the Bible in Shakespeare identifies over 200 biblical references and echoes in this play. That averages out to a biblical presence once every minute.

Additionally, the perspective from which human experience is viewed (the themes or embodied ideas) is consonant with Christianity. Here is a brief list that covers all of the genres in which Shakespeare wrote: affirmation of romantic love and marriage; the potential of the human heart for both good and evil; the destructive effects of unchecked ambition and other passions; the workings of divine providence; the necessity of forgiveness; the certainty of justice and retribution for evil; the importance of order within the individual and society; the need to choose good rather than evil. That is a beginning list.

Also Christian is the world that Shakespeare creates in his plays. That world is based on Christian premises. The best summary statement on this comes from a guide to Christian historical sites in London. Shakespeare's plays are Christian, claims the author, because they assume the same kind reality that the Bible does. That is exactly right.

Shakespeare's works assume the reality of God and the Christian supernatural, including heaven and hell, angels and demons. His plays accept the premise that every human soul is destined for

either heaven or hell, based on the choices that people make. Shakespeare's moral vision lines up with the Christian scheme of virtues and vices. *The Winter's Tale* even affirms belief in the resurrection from the dead with a story in which the statue of a dead woman comes to life. I return to a question that I put on the table earlier: what ideas in Shakespeare's plays can be said to be incongruous with Christian doctrine? If we cannot name them, they must not exist.

It is true that often the embodied themes are implicitly or inclusively Christian, by which I mean that they are ideas that are shared by other religious and philosophical systems. But that does not make them any less Christian. Furthermore, when Shakespeare fills his plays with biblical allusions and echoes, he signals that the framework within which he expects his themes to be understood is the Christian one. He expects us to connect the dots and see an overall Christian world picture.

Summary

What is the takeaway value of this article for readers of *Ordained Servant*? I have two answers. First, to the degree to which you take time for literature, I want you to consider spending some of that time with the greatest English author. The rewards are abundant, and some of them are spiritual. Second, secular forces are trying to excise all Christian elements from Western culture. I hope that I have said enough that you will take a stand for the Christian element in Shakespeare as occasions arise. You do not have the time or expertise to fight the battle, but you can plant a flag of initial resistance. Resources are available to provide a supporting army. ☺

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✦ Servant History

The Good, the Bad, and the Neutral: Calvinism and the School Question

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Darryl G. Hart

In 1898 when Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch Reformed minister, institution builder extraordinaire, and soon to be prime minister of the Netherlands, spoke at Princeton Seminary about the virtues of Calvinism, he discussed schools in ways that may have left his listeners scratching their heads. On the one hand, Kuyper complimented his hosts for living in a country where Calvinism was still vigorous. One sign of such health was a “common school system” which began each day with Bible reading and prayer. Although such tepid religious exercises suggested a “decreasing distinctness” of Calvinistic convictions, they still reflected the genius of the American founding and its debt to the “Pilgrim Fathers who gave the United States, as opposed to the French Revolution, a decidedly Christian character.”² For those paying careful attention to the series of six lectures, such praise of America’s public schools was at odds with Kuyper’s remarks about Calvinism and science. In that lecture he contended that educational institutions needed to reflect distinct outlooks. Instead of implementing a common university or school

system, as liberal governments in the Netherlands had tried, Kuyper argued for institutional pluralism so that Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and “Evolutionists” might have their own schools and universities. The idea of “one Science only,” Kuyper asserted, was “artificial” and its days were “numbered.” A better approach was for intellectual endeavor to “flourish in . . . multiformity.”³

As much as Kuyper and his hosts from the Presbyterian Church’s original seminary shared in their understanding of Calvinism, the Dutchman’s praise for a “common” educational system in the United States and advocacy of academic institutional diversity in the Netherlands was just one indication of differences between American and European Protestants about education. Those divergences in turn stemmed from political developments that played out differently in Europe and North America after the revolutions of the eighteenth century in the United States and France. What follows is an effort to place Presbyterian and Reformed Protestant ideas about education within a wider historical and cultural context. That larger perspective may well indicate that Calvinists, instead of carving out a distinct and high view of education, were much more dependent on the accidents of history in their approach to education. The heirs of a longer lasting pattern of church-based and church-sponsored education during the Middle Ages, the Reformers perpetuated schools that made religion central to learning. When civil governments in the modern era of liberal politics took over the responsibilities of universal education, Reformed Protestants had to adjust and they did so largely on terms set by their churches’ relationship to the national government.

The Reformation of Learning

For good reason, historians credit the Protestant Reformation with an emphasis on education that had significant consequences for the expansion of formal learning beyond the confines determined by medieval Europe. Prior to the sixteenth

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=527&issue_id=111.

2 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 14–15.

3 *Ibid.*, 141.

century, the Roman Catholic Church was largely responsible for education. After the demise of the Roman Empire, the burden for education fell on bishops and religious orders. Cathedral schools and monasteries taught the trivium and quadrivium to young men and boys mainly for the purpose of training future priests. The recovery of Roman and Greek antiquity with the Renaissance provided an alternative model of education, but formal learning remained largely in the hands of the church. The Reformation set into motion a new set of expectations for education. Protestants not only set high standards for a learned ministry but also advocated literacy for the laity so that average Christians could fulfill their obligations for Bible reading, learning catechisms, and worship in the home. For instance, John Calvin in the early stages of his reform of church life in Geneva took steps to establish an academy (the initial stage of a university) for the education of pastors and called for the institution of schools that would train boys at an early stage for future education either as clergy or civil servants. In the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541, Calvin wrote:

But since it is possible to profit from such teaching (of theology) only if in the first place there is instruction in the languages and humanities, and since also there is need to raise up seed for the future so that the Church is not left desolate to our children, it will be necessary to build a college for the purpose of instructing them, with a view to preparing them both for the ministry and for civil government.⁴

Calvin's reforms in Geneva inspired the Scottish Reformer John Knox, who sought a similar expansion of educational opportunities for children and improved training for pastors. The Church of Scotland's First Book of Discipline provided the rationale for the reform of the nation's educational

4 Calvin quoted in Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, ed., "1541 Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 41.

institutions:

Seeing that men are born ignorant of all godliness; and seeing, also, that God now ceases to illuminate men miraculously, suddenly changing them, as that he did his apostles and others in the primitive church: of necessity it is that your honours be most careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm, if either ye now thirst unfeignedly [for] the advancement of Christ's glory, or yet desire the continuance of his benefits to the generation following.⁵

Funds for a system of schools in each parish were difficult to find at first, and Knox's call for an improved education required using the existing institutions created before the Reformation and adapting them as much as possible. But by the seventeenth century, Scottish parliament had taken steps to provide education in each parish and to implement curricular reforms at Scotland's universities that dovetailed with training for Protestant ministers.

The Problem of State Schools

Because the Reformation was magisterial—meaning it relied on the support and patronage of civil authorities—the educational programs for which Protestants called were also heavily dependent on the approval and funding of the state. In fact, the experience that governments in Protestant nations gained from the Reformation's expanding educational opportunities led by the nineteenth century to the creation of state-run educational systems designed more for national unity than for religious fidelity. After the French Revolution as European governments centralized and consolidated social affairs for the sake of strong national identities, public education became an important vehicle for nurturing a unified citizenry. On the one hand, the expansion of state control of schooling brought more children into the system and so

5 From "The Book of Discipline" (1621), reprinted in John Knox, *The History of the Reformation in Scotland* (New York: Revell, 1905), 382.

increased literacy. On the other hand, religion became a potentially divisive matter. In which case, national school systems might still include religion but did so in generic ways that included Christian morality without theology. In other words, state control of education inevitably involved a weakening of overtly Christian teachings and practices.

Examples of state involvement in education varied but also indicated the dilemma that Reformed Protestants faced after having been stakeholders in the early modern reform of schooling in the West. In a nation such as France, at one end of the spectrum, the ideology of the republic was hostile to religion and so state schools removed any vestiges of church influence. In Scotland the demands of a modernizing economy and politics required a gradual abandonment of the old parish model of local schools and the adoption of a public system in which religion supported national ideals. Churches responded by turning to voluntary institutions such as Sunday schools where children might receive a religiously based education. In the Netherlands, the state adopted a liberal system of education that included a bare minimum of Christian influence designed not to offend either Protestants or Roman Catholics. Abraham Kuyper protested this “neutral” educational system and advocated instead a pluralistic model where parents might receive state funding for schools true to religious convictions—Roman Catholic schools for Roman Catholics, Calvinist schools for Calvinists. In the United States where political institutions were weak and decentralized, public schools often served community interests instead of a national agenda. Even so, the public school system involved the assimilation of children to American ideals about God and virtue; as a result, common schools included prayer and Bible reading in ways that seemed too Protestant for Roman Catholics. School controversies in the 1830s and 1870s led some bishops to implement parochial school systems for Roman Catholic children. Some American Presbyterians also entertained the idea of establishing a system of church schools out of frustration over the thin character of religious instruction in the common schools. Not until the

1960s, however, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that prayer and Bible reading in public schools were unconstitutional, did the bulk of American Protestants become alert to the kind of arguments that Abraham Kuyper had made about the problems of a state-run education devoid of religion.

Who Is Responsible for Education?

Christians from a variety of backgrounds often look at school curricula or daily school exercises for religious elements to discern whether public schools are congenial or hostile to faith. Often missed, however, is the much more basic and equally difficult question of who is responsible for educating children. If the state does not take the lead for education, if schooling is in the hands of churches or families, will schooling be divisive and upset a shared understanding of public life? Will such an education even contribute to inequality as families send children to schools according to available financial resources? But what is a state-sponsored education supposed to do with religion? Especially in a religiously diverse environment, excluding questions about faith that could readily cause disagreements both in the classroom and at parent-teacher meetings, looks like a plausible alternative. But if religion is important at least to cultivating the morality of students and as a piece of historical development, how can schools meaningfully exclude religious perspectives and subjects?

For a century or two after the Reformation, when churches and civil authorities cooperated in a common enterprise, such questions were not pressing. But since the expansion of religious freedom and public education with the modern state after the political revolutions of the eighteenth century, such questions have haunted considerations of primary and secondary education. What individual Christians, families, or churches may decide about such matters is of course impossible to predict. But looking beyond the curriculum or religious exercises during the school day to much more basic theological and political reflections

about who is responsible for education, as Abraham Kuyper communicated to his American audience at Princeton, may help to clarify what is at stake in these difficult decisions. ©

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✦ Servant Humor

From the Back Pew

Eutychus II continues the tradition of Eutychus I, Ed Clowney’s pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutychus (and His Pin)*: “Eutychus 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, Eutychus 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.

Lest We Remember

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2016¹

by Eutychus II

Here is an episode that has occurred countless times in three decades of marital bliss. I will recall a story in our past and punctuate it with some colorful detail. This will prompt the missus to exclaim, “How do you remember? I had completely forgotten all of that!” Which in turn inflames pride in my faculties of recollection.

A recent encounter with an old friend in ministry put me in a strange reversal of roles. The two of us were reminiscing over some adult beverages. We broached an episode that took place over two decades ago, when the two of us shared the experience of being victims in a minor miscarriage

of justice by our presbytery. My friend proceeded to rewind the tape with the precision of a near-photographic memory. I was stunned at what he remembered—the wound was as raw as though it happened yesterday. It struck me how much better off I was, unable to let this fester.

As I steadily near the expiration of my warranty (see Psalm 90:10), what impresses is less the evidence of the fragility of the body (though there is plenty of that), than the fallibility of memory. Old men forget, as Shakespeare’s Henry V put it plainly. It is not so much that I am losing my memory. Instead, I have come to appreciate how selective and idiosyncratic it is. I have even come to reinterpret the words of my wife. She may not have been paying me a compliment after all, but perhaps more of a gentle chastisement. “Why do you remember that?” is what she really intends to ask. “Why devote your obviously limited mental resources to preserving that useless set of details? And how do you still forget what day of the week is recyclable pickup?”

There are dangers of forgetting, to be sure. We know the fate of those who forget the past in Santana’s famous warning. There is a short distance between forgetting and denial. Let us be glad the OPC has invested in cultivating its corporate memory and hope that our denominational archives will preserve the historical record for this vital end.

But are we at risk in placing too much importance on memory? Is it wise to shame forgetfulness as if it is some moral failure? I don’t mean to make light of the challenge of Alzheimer’s for patients and caregivers. We rightly treasure our memories. But memory is never pure or innocent. It is fragile and superficial and as sin-stained as the rest of our faculties. It can manipulate the past in the interests of self. And if there even is such a thing as a photographic memory, is that a blessing or a curse? My minister friend seemed to wallow in a prison of self-absorption.

If I have moved on from such unpleasant memories, how much more have I forgotten my own offenses? This too is the grace of God, who, in Isaac Watts’s colorful take on David’s penitential

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=557&issue_id=115.

psalm, will “blot their memory” from his book.

Of course, Scripture constantly calls us to remember. But when, for example, our Lord instructs us to partake of his supper “in remembrance of me,” he is not asking for feats of mental strength. Rather, we eat and drink in the confidence that our God remembers. And we are not to doubt that his covenant promises are forever. ☺

✦ Servant Exchange

Owen Anderson's Reply to Paul Helseth's Review

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2016¹

by Owen Anderson

I am thankful to Paul for taking the time to read my two books and write his review. The main thread of his review had to do with his claim that I raised questions about the orthodoxy of Charles Hodge and Early Princeton thinkers. I doubt that even liberal theologians who disagree with Hodge could successfully make such a claim. I make no such claim. Instead, my books are asking the question: what caused an alteration at Princeton from its founding doctrine, and why wasn't the theology of Princeton in the work of Charles Hodge lasting? What caused the change that we see today at both Princeton Seminary and Princeton University?

An example of two answers that I do not think are sufficient is the progressive answer and the pessimistic answer. The progressive answer says that Princeton Seminary and Princeton University have grown into more truth as they exchanged outdated opinions for what we see today. Perhaps they would argue this new understanding of truth is to be found in the theology of Karl Barth. The more conservative explanation tends to be a pessimistic answer saying that all human institutions must decline and decay and therefore nothing surprising happened in the changes we see at Princeton. A downward spiral, compromise with falsehood, and loss of vision in succeeding generations are the

path of all man-made programs.

By way of contrast I suggest that challenges tend to reveal the places where our foundational presuppositions are not sufficient to give an account of the Christian claims about redemption. The particular claims of Christianity about the need for redemption through the atoning work of Christ presuppose that unbelief is inexcusable in the face of clear general revelation about the eternal power and divine nature of God. If we offer circular arguments that beg the question, or use fallacies like appealing to authority or testimony, and we are not taking thoughts captive, we are at least implying if not conceding that unbelief has an excuse.

My research about early Princeton and Charles Hodge is set in the context of asking why the original foundation of that institution did not last. Far from claiming that the answer is that they were not orthodox, or suggesting there is some new truth they must accept, I instead dig deeper into the Westminster Standards to ask if they were used to their fullest to respond to challenges. Specifically, the Confession begins by affirming that the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the nature of God so that unbelief is without excuse. This is the basis for the redemptive claims of special revelation and the need for Christ. Christians should be eager and willing to show that the light of nature, reason, clearly reveals God and leaves no excuse. This foundational work is affirmed in the Confession, and is presupposed in the claims of Princeton about piety and the knowledge of God, but it was not firmly and explicitly set in place. Particularly, affirming the combined truths of WSC questions 1, 46, and 101 to say that the chief end of man is to know God in all that by which he makes himself known, in all the works of creation and providence.

My hope is to bring these foundational truths into greater focus and encourage the need for getting them into place for lasting work and fruit. ©

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1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=560&issue_id=116.

Rejoinder to Owen Anderson

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June-July 2016¹

by Paul K. Helseth

Professor Anderson's response to my review raises two important questions. The first has to do with the question of whether and to what extent it is possible to be orthodox in principle but not in practice. While it is certainly true that Professor Anderson does not explicitly call the orthodoxy of Hodge and his colleagues at Old Princeton into question, he does so implicitly. The central thrust of his argument is that Princeton's institutional integrity was finally compromised because the Old Princetonians' "foundational presuppositions" were "not sufficient to give an account of the Christian claims about redemption," and they were not sufficient precisely because they were not grounded in a faithful commitment to the full and clear teaching of the Westminster Standards. Indeed, Professor Anderson's explanation for why Princeton's "original foundation . . . did not last" is that the Old Princetonians failed to "firmly and explicitly set in place" the Standards' teaching about God's revelation of himself through "the light of nature" and in all his works "of creation and providence," and they failed to do so because they had accommodated assumptions that prevented them from bringing the full resources of the Standards to bear upon the "challenges" of their day, resources that would have ensured a more lasting foundation because they would have left unbelievers without an excuse for unbelief.

If this is the case, and if it is indeed true that the Old Princetonians failed to establish a lasting foundation because they had embraced assumptions that were derived from some place other than faithfulness to the full and clear teaching of the

Westminster Standards, then how can we avoid the conclusion that for Professor Anderson, the Old Princetonians failed to establish a lasting legacy because they were committed—in practice even if not in principle—to a doctrine of the knowledge of God that was finally grounded in something distinct from the Confession, something that by its very nature would indicate that they were—at least with respect to this critically important doctrine—less than orthodox in the most elementary sense of the term? This is the basic point that I was trying to make, especially in the conclusion of my review, and it is a point that I still think holds at least a little bit of water.

Professor Anderson's response to my review raises another, perhaps even more foundational question, namely the question of what kinds of presuppositions in fact are sufficient to give "an [adequate] account of the Christian claims about redemption." According to Professor Anderson, the Old Princetonians failed to provide an adequate basis "for the redemptive claims of special revelation and the need for Christ" because their "foundational presuppositions" discouraged them from offering a rational account of precisely why unbelief "is inexcusable in the face of clear general revelation about the eternal power and divine nature of God." Indeed, they were not as eager as he thinks consistently orthodox believers would have been "to show that the light of nature, reason, clearly reveals God and leaves no excuse [for unbelief]," and for this reason they more or less conceded "that unbelief has an excuse." But did the Old Princetonians in fact not provide a sufficient foundation for the claims of special revelation, as Professor Anderson claims, or did they simply not do so in precisely the way that he thinks it can and must be done? Unfortunately, the answer to this question begs a theological discussion that is beyond the scope of this exchange. ☺

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¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=561&issue_id=116.

✦ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

Reason and Faith

by Owen Anderson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2016¹

by Paul K. Helseth

Reason and Faith at Early Princeton: Piety and the Knowledge of God, by Owen Anderson. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, x + 151 pages, \$45.00 Kindle, \$67.50 paper.

Reason and Faith in the Theology of Charles Hodge: American Common Sense Realism, by Owen Anderson. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xiv + 137 pages, \$42.45 Kindle, \$44.68 paper.

Owen Anderson is an accomplished philosopher with an ongoing research agenda that focuses on the religious epistemologies of those who taught at Princeton College and Princeton Theological Seminary from the time of the college's founding in 1746 to the time of the seminary's reorganization in 1929. In these volumes, which form the two halves of a single, more comprehensive argument, Anderson advances that agenda by attempting to account for what he regards as the Old Princetonians' rather tenuous relationship

to the Westminster Confession's doctrine of the knowledge of God. Whereas the Old Princetonians considered themselves to be confessional and were eager to defend orthodox commitments in the theological and philosophical controversies of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, nevertheless the doctrinal integrity of their efforts was undermined, he contends, by their accommodation of epistemological assumptions that led them to conclude—contra the Confession—that “for an entire and clear knowledge” of both God and the highest good, “special revelation alone will suffice” (*RFEP*, 122).

At the heart of Anderson's analysis in both volumes is his repeated insistence that even though the Old Princetonians, in fact, were not committed rationalists, as many commentators would have us believe, nevertheless their doctrine of the knowledge of God was compromised by an “unnoticed” and “undeveloped” dichotomy that subverted their ability not only to respond in an orthodox fashion to the more thoughtful challenges of informed skeptics, but also to sustain an approach to education that was robustly, distinctly, and enduringly Christian (*RFEP*, 28; *RFTCH*, 48). On the one hand, the Old Princetonians affirmed “that to bring glory to God means knowing him in all that by which He makes Himself known, in all His works of creation and providence,” but on the other they insisted “that the goal of life is to praise God in heaven while experiencing the beatific vision” (*RFEP*, 28; cf. *RFTCH*, 125ff.). The unnoticed “tension” (*RFEP*, 110; *RFTCH*, e.g., 5, 39, 126) at the heart of this dichotomy was problematic, Anderson contends, because it opened the door to an otherworldly tendency that, when embraced, encouraged the Old Princetonians not only to set aside the clarity and sufficiency of God's revelation of himself “through the light of nature (reason), and his works of creation and providence” (*RFEP*, 110; cf. *RFTCH*, e.g., 6, 40, 68), but also to insist that “full and clear” (*RFEP*, 126, 134; *RFTCH*, 6, 7) knowledge of both God and the highest good is found not through the thoughtful exploration of general revelation, but in “a direct perception of God” (*RFEP*, 32), the kind

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=530&issue_id=111.

of perception that is mediated by Scripture and fully and finally realized only in the new heavens and the new earth. In short, Anderson maintains that Old Princeton’s religious epistemology was less than orthodox because it was grounded in a “truncated” (*RFEP*, 136) view of knowledge that “minimized” (*RFEP*, e.g., 20, 32, 35, 41, 110, 136) the role of natural theology in knowing God. In so doing, it allowed more thoughtful skeptics not only to retain an excuse for unbelief, but also “to co-opt the name of reason” for the purpose of advancing relentlessly secular visions of truth, goodness, and beauty (*RFEP*, 123). This explains why the distinctly Christian commitments of Princeton’s founding fathers were eventually abandoned by their institutional descendants, Anderson contends. To prevent such a tragedy from happening again in other contexts, believing academics must recover a more orthodox—and therefore a more robust—understanding of the role of reason in knowing God in this—and not in the next—world.

While there are many things to commend about Anderson’s spirited defense of the clarity and sufficiency of God’s revelation of himself in the light of nature and in his works of creation and providence, it goes without saying that a number of the more thoughtful readers of *Ordained Servant* will find themselves wondering if he has fairly represented not just the epistemological commitments of Hodge and his colleagues at Old Princeton, but even more importantly those of the tradition that Hodge and his colleagues claimed to be defending. Were the Old Princetonians really less than orthodox because they insisted that the Bible reveals God more fully and clearly than general revelation? Were they really guilty of undermining the Confession because they were persuaded that the goal of human existence is not found in knowing God “through His works” (*RFEP*, 110, 127, 131; *RFTCH*, 118, 126) in this world, but in an immediate perception of God in the world to come? Since Anderson argues forcefully that they were, it may be the case that his volumes need to be thoughtfully considered not just by those who have an enduring interest in the theology and theologians of Old Princeton Seminary, but also

by those who have a general and far more basic interest in the epistemological entailments of what the Westminster Confession teaches about the relationship between general and special revelation. Indeed, if Anderson is right and Hodge and his colleagues at Old Princeton really were less than orthodox because they wavered on matters relating to natural theology, then his analysis demands a wide reading precisely because of its wide-ranging and potentially paradigm-shifting implications for all those who are eager to subscribe to the Westminster Standards. ©

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God Is Not One

by Stephen R. Prothero

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2016¹

by John R. Muether

God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter, by Stephen R. Prothero. New York: HarperOne, 2010, \$26.99.

Boston University professor of religion Stephen Prothero has a beef with the prevailing viewpoint of many colleagues in his field. He is weary

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=536&issue_id=112.

of the approach to the study of world religions that pictures all religious pilgrims ascending the same mountain. If Jews and Confucians and Hindus begin at different points in the foothills, they will eventually converge at the top. Best-selling champions of this view include Karen Armstrong, Joseph Campbell, and Bill Moyers.

Prothero presents an alternative perspective in this follow-up to *Religious Illiteracy* (his 2007 exposé of the shocking ignorance of world religions on the part of Americans). Neither book should be mistaken for a conservative Christian analysis of religion. Still, while he describes himself as a “religiously confused” Christian, Prothero provides much clarity in *God is Not One*, especially in the light of recent controversies on the proper conduct of inter-religious dialogue.

According to Prothero, this Enlightenment approach from which he dissents demands a condescending dismissal of the particularity of religious truth claims and practices. He finds this thinking common among his undergraduate students in religion. If the study of world religions demands a measure of winsome disagreement, his students characteristically excel at cordiality, but they fail in discerning genuine differences. While intentions may be conciliatory, the results are catastrophic. Religious tolerance makes the world a safer place, but false assertions of religious unity make it a far more dangerous place, Prothero insists.

He explains that “religion does not exist in the abstract” any more “than you can speak language in general” (9). Particular religions have different goals and aspirations, and he proceeds to analyze them in terms of problem, solution, technique, and exemplar. Christianity, for example, defines the human condition as sinful, the solution as salvation through Jesus Christ, the technique (and here he aims to be inclusive) “some combination of faith and good works.” His exemplars range from the saints of Roman Catholicism to ordinary believers of Protestantism. In contrast, Muslims see humanity less in a “fallen” sinful condition than as wanderers from the straight path. The solution is submission to Allah, the technique is the practice of the five pillars, and the exemplar, of course is

the great and last prophet, Muhammad.

Prothero goes on to survey eight major world religions, and the book as a whole is an engaging introduction, though not without its weaknesses. Even the ordering of his chapters, from the greatest religion to the smallest, will prove unsettling for the Christian reader, because he begins with Islam. Predicting Christian objections, he provides this wake-up call. “To presume that the conversation about the great religions starts with Christianity is to show your parochialism and your age,” he counters. “The nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have belonged to Christianity. The twenty-first belongs to Islam” (63). After Christianity, he goes on to cover Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoruba Religion, Judaism, and Daoism.

His treatment of Islam is a helpful primer on its origins and history. He devotes careful attention to both the unity and the diversity in worldwide Islam. In the process, he takes aim at the simplistic and sentimental claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Irreconcilable differences separate the Father of Jesus Christ from the God of Muhammad. Christians and Muslims will live more cordially with each other only when they reckon with these differences and not deny them. (Note well, disaffected Wheaton College alumni and friends.)

Less reliable is the author’s treatment of Christianity. Reformed Protestantism is given the briefest of treatments, equal to that of Anabaptists and half of the attention devoted to Anglicans. Included among the myriad of Protestant denominations are Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Christian Science.

One bonus feature in the book worth noting is his treatment of a ninth “world religion” in his final chapter, “A Brief Coda on the New Atheism.” While acknowledging the existence of “friendly atheists,” the focus falls on the angry take-no-prisoners rhetoric of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and others. Although they would strongly object to finding themselves in such company, Prothero considers them religious for several reasons. First, its advocates argue “with the conviction of zealots” (318) rhetorically

matching “the dogmatism of their fundamentalist foes” (322). More significantly, atheism manifests the functional elements of a religion: it has a creed, an ethical code, a community, and a cultus (yes, they even have their own rituals). His insights are accompanied by a lively rhetoric as in this sample: “Like fundamentalists and cowboys, [new atheists] live in a Manichean world in which forces of light are engaged in a great apocalyptic battle against forces of darkness” (322).

By dissenting from both the mountain climbers who would commend the unity of all religions and the skeptical dismissal of anything religious by new atheists, Prothero promotes the cultivation of humility as an essential outcome of the study of world religions. Humility does not necessarily demand a relativism that erodes the certainty of one’s theological convictions. But it may make room for greater civility in a world where religious pluralism is intensifying dramatically. The author makes this appeal in his conclusion:

I too hope for a world in which human beings can get along with their religious rivals. I am convinced, however, that we need to pursue this goal through new means. Rather than beginning with the sort of Godthink that lumps all religions together in one trash can or one treasure chest, we must start with a clear-eyed understanding of the fundamental differences in both belief and practice between Islam and Christianity, Confucianism and Hinduism. (335) ©

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Puritan Portraits

by *J. I. Packer*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* February 2016¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Puritan Portraits: J. I. Packer on Selected Classic Pastors and Pastoral Classics, by J. I. Packer. Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2012, 188 pages, \$14.99, paper.

James Innes Packer is one of the pioneers of the Puritan studies that restored, or in most cases introduced, them to the evangelical world. A generation before, secular Ivy League historians Perry Miller and Edmund S. Morgan had rejuvenated the Puritans’ reputations in academic circles. Miller and Morgan demonstrated how different the real Puritans were from the late Victorian prudery with which they had become perennially confused.

Packer is his usual lucid and interesting self as a thinker and writer. And this extremely readable style only amplifies the deep connection Packer has with his subject. He sets the stage with a chapter explaining the Puritan clergy and their message in general categories: “Puritan Pastors at Work.” Their literary legacy is their most important contribution to the church since by it we may learn the nature of their ministries. Packer appreciates and thus elaborates on the profound blend of deep theology and pastoral application.

Part II gives the profiles of seven Puritan pastors, highlighting a major work of each: Henry Scougal, Stephen Charnock, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, John Owen, John Flavel, and Thomas Boston. Actually, Packer explains three of Boston’s works. Part III presents “Two Puritan Paragons,” in the work of William Perkins and Richard Baxter. He concludes with a very useful epilogue: “The

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=537&issue_id=112.

Puritan Pastor's Programme.”

Not only is Packer imbued with Puritan divinity but he is a theologian who is painfully aware of the modern situation of the Western church.

And have you not noticed that much of Western Christianity is treading this path to extinction? It seems clearly so to me. What then can stop the rot and turn the tide? One thing only, in my view: a renewed embrace of the Puritan ideal of ministerial service. Without this nothing can stop the drift downhill. (181)

I leave you with a brief sample of my favorite Thomas Boston treatise, *The Crook in the Lot* (1737). During my college years my wife and I attended the auction of the George Woodbury estate in Bedford, New Hampshire, where I had been reared. Woodbury had left his Harvard post as a professor to restore his ancestral estate and rebuild the John Goffe Mill. This estate had a mysterious aura for those of us reared in the area. Woodberry had restored the mill to saw lumber and grind grain as it had done centuries before. I remember accompanying my mother to have wheat ground. So even though we were poor students, we felt compelled to attend the auction on a fair summer day.

I had just begun to collect antiquarian books and found a box of leather treasures. The one that caught my eye was Boston's bewildering title *The Crook in the Lot*. It was a 1791 London edition with Eliza B. G. Woodbury's signature, dated 1811. I didn't dare bid when the box came on the block. It would have been futile as it went for a price way beyond my meager budget.

But several years later I found the very same book in a bookstore for a price I could manage. So I discovered that the crook has nothing to do with theft, but with the wacky path life in a fallen world takes us down. The book is made up of three sermons on how to deal with “losses and crosses” (104–13). Ecclesiastes 7:13 inspired the book's title: “Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?” (KJV). Packer sums up Boston's pastoral conclusion:

A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them; and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense; for it is the . . . Word alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and consequently, designs becoming the divine perfections. (110)

So what of today, queries Packer? He wisely observes that Boston's biblical teaching will cause serious cognitive dissonance for the modern Christian because the world around us teaches that “trouble-free living is virtually a human right” (112). How necessary, then, is the wisdom of this little book in the present.

This is a masterful selection, given the volume of material available. It is laid out in bite-sized portions, not for fast-food consumption, but for slow, thoughtful chewing. For the busy pastor, Packer's summaries will remind us of the gist of works we have already read and stimulate us to read them over or read some for the first time. ©

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Suggested Reading on Adoption

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by David B. Garner

Below I suggest a number of books; of course, my listing here does not indicate endorsement of all their content.

Historical Works

Houston, Thomas. *The Adoption of Sons, Its Nature, Spirit, Privileges and Effects: A Practical and Experimental Treatise*. Paisley, UK: Alex. Gardner, 1872.

Webb, Robert Alexander. *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947.

Academic Works

Burke, Trevor J. *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 22. Edited by D. A. Carson. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.

Scott, James M. *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of YIOTHESIA in the Pauline Corpus*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992.

Popular Works

Johnston, Mark G. *Child of a King: What Joining God's Family Means*. Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1997.

Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Children of the Living God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987. ©

Got Religion?

by Naomi Schaefer Riley

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* March 2016¹

by John R. Muether

Got Religion? How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back, by Naomi Schaefer Riley. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014, \$24.97 (cloth), \$15.95 (paper).

Got Religion? is journalist Naomi Schaefer Riley's contribution to a growing field of books, seeking to expand on sociologist Christian Smith's groundbreaking analysis of the spirituality of "emerging adulthood." This term, recently coined by developmental psychologists, refers to eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds who are delaying their transition into adulthood. Often labeled as the "millennial generation," emerging adults tend to defer the "traditional markers" of adulthood such as leaving home, assuming financial independence, getting married, and establishing roots in a community. One surprising result of Smith's studies is that this demographic may actually be more spiritually inclined than their boomer parents. But that does not translate into faithful commitment to traditional religious practices.

Riley explains that "delayed adolescence" extends to several faith traditions. Separate chapters are devoted (in order) to evangelical Protestants, Muslims, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and African American churches. In every case, a sharp loss of religious identity markers results when these religious minorities assimilate into the broader host culture following college graduation. She cites two particular common factors that shape the religious sensibilities of emerging adults.

First, there is a strong anti-institutional bias. Millennials prefer the à la carte experience that

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=541&issue_id=113.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=544&issue_id=113.

feasts on a merry-go-round of choices. And in a world of unbridled choice, paralysis can set in because “consumers of jam and religion think that they will not be happy with their choice because they will always think there was something better out there” (132). Institutional loyalty is a hard sell in a culture of choice.

Compounding institutional resistance is a second factor that is perhaps more profound: many young people are busy in the cultivation of multiple identities. A young Jewish adult explains: “If I were going to describe myself, I wouldn’t use Jewish in the top five descriptors. I’m from Atlanta, an artist, I love to play Frisbee. Judaism is a big part of my identity but not the main label” (79). As young people are encouraged to experiment with lifestyle options, identities become less stable and more malleable. Again, institutional restraints are eschewed. As one young adult put it frankly: “What people in the past have gotten from the church, I get from the Internet and Facebook” (89).

Riley challenges some of these assumptions in lively prose that often turns a clever phrase, as, for example, when she insists that “practicing faith is a team sport” (82). Here is “plausibility structure” made simple. Without social confirmation from a religious community, faith commitments will atrophy under the intensely pluralistic pressures of modern life. She also turns a skeptical eye toward some popular religious trends. Short-term missions experience often gets “lost in translation” and does not result in a long-term commitment to religious service. She upholds the value of smaller churches and warns that the attractational, or seeker sensitive, church can cease to be the church.

At the same time, Riley identifies initiatives that she believes may bring young people back to institutional commitment. Millennials are urban tribes, and peer-to-peer activity seems to work, at least for the short term. One example she commends is an urban church plant (a congregation in the Presbyterian Church in America) in a large southern city that is attracting young people with a particular emphasis on a “theology of place.” But even here, the reader is left wondering whether concessions to the millennial mindset might

jeopardize long-term success. The church eschews gimmicks, the pastor noted, “because twenty- and thirty-somethings value authenticity” (30). But might “authenticity”—rarely is that virtue ever defined—simply be the latest gimmick? Consider that Riley further notes that this congregation is so eager to welcome and affirm all of its members that it only recently took the step of installing elders (and this was to spare the pastor from making all of the church’s financial decisions, including about his salary). A congregation without discipline seems a mighty thin expression of genuine community.

Another innovation that Riley commends is “Charlotte ONE,” an ecumenical collaboration of forty evangelical and mainline Protestant churches that seeks to bring college graduates back with more “wow factor”—expensive bands, charismatic speakers, and elaborate social events—with the intention ultimately of “funneling” them back into more traditional churches. By pooling their resources, these churches pledge not to compete against each other for this demographic. Charlotte ONE deliberately avoids features of traditional Christianity that prompted young people to leave in embarrassment (i.e., the “cringe factor”) and high on that list was the sermon. Young people do not listen, organizers explain, because they “want to have their voice heard” (126). It is difficult to imagine how this mindset will funnel millennials into settled, adult spirituality, enabling them to “grow into their faith.” In these and other initiatives that Riley commends, we see superficial expressions of community that conform to the desires of young adults rather than engage them in their spiritual formation. The language of self still seemed to trump any vocabulary of service.

The challenge of (re-)incorporating millennials into religious communities is at the same time the task of taking them from “here to maturity,” to borrow from the title of Thomas Bergler’s latest book. In this and in his previous book, Bergler has described perceptively the problem of “juvenilization” in American churches (which he defines as the developmental characteristics of adolescents

becoming normative for Christians of all ages).² It seems wise to explore the extent to which juvenilization plagues the spirituality of emerging adults, but this is a question left largely unexplored by Riley.

Got Religion? is a lively introduction to the challenge of emerging adulthood. Riley documents adequately how the “whole idea of delayed adolescence is very much real” (91). But she comes up short in demonstrating concrete solutions for turning emerging adults into sustaining members of religious communities. In the end, her suggestions of innovative forms of young adult ministry only serve to delay the inevitable crisis of belonging. She virtually concedes this point when she posed this question in her description of a Latter Day Saint program to segregate Mormon millennials into “Young Single Adult” wards: “What happens when they turn thirty-one?” (103). ©

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The Triumph of Faith

by Rodney Stark

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by John R. Muether

The Triumph of Faith: Why the World Is More Religious Than Ever, by Rodney Stark. Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2015, 258 pages, \$24.95.

What if the sociologists of religion get it all wrong? What if their projections for the future of religion are based on false assumptions, unscientific polling, and bad data? That is the claim of Rodney Stark in this feisty book. Stark taught the sociology of religion at the University of Washington for three decades before accepting his present appointment at Baylor University. In some thirty books, which he has authored or co-written, Stark commends the study of world religions in terms of competition that yields winners and losers. (Thus phrases like “rise of,” “victory of,” and “triumph of” appear in his book titles, including the one under review.) Reared in the Lutheran tradition, Stark’s own religious convictions have shifted from agnostic to “independent Christian.”

“Until now,” Stark asserts, “worldwide religious statistics have been based on substantial guesswork” (12). Many surveys severely limited religious questions to matters of institutional affiliation or attendance at religious services. (Stark singles out the Pew Research Center surveys as particularly unreliable.) The effect has been to inflate the appearance of secularism, from Europe to China. The introduction of more sophisticated surveying (such as the Gallup World Polls, begun in 2005) is yielding a more reliable picture, he explains. (A warning to the statistically challenged: charts of survey results take up a good 20 percent of this book.)

2 Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), and *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming Juvenilization in American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=550&issue_id=114.

Stark takes the reader on a quick world tour, beginning in Europe, where the claim of a “secularized Europe” is simply a “grand illusion” (37). Declining church attendance is not an indication of a rise in atheism, because the continent is replete with a “smorgasbord of spiritualities” (48), and even alleged secular strongholds such as Sweden and the Netherlands are awash in New Age and Eastern beliefs ranging from reincarnation to mental telepathy. These “believing non-belongers” (44) elude the measurement of pollsters who fixate on church membership. Stark even suggests that fears of growing Muslim populations in Europe are overstated. His research indicates that Muslim fertility rates in Europe, as with the rest of the European population, have dropped below replacement level. Indeed, the only demographic in Europe that has a fertility rate above replacement level are women who attend church weekly.

Subsequent chapters make stops in Latin America, the Muslim world, Africa, Asia (including Japan, China, and the “four tigers”—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea), and finally America. Sociologists continue to predict the withering of religious conviction under modernity. But across the globe, the evidence consistently reveals otherwise: a remarkable revival of religion is unfolding. Stark gleefully notes the irony: “It is their unshakable faith in secularization that may be the most ‘irrational’ of all beliefs” (212).

The key to Stark’s optimism is competition. Modernity does not secularize; rather, it pluralizes. And Stark confidently asserts that religion flourishes under unconstrained free-market conditions. “Lazy churches” (such as state churches in Europe or Roman Catholicism in settings without Protestant competition) wither in numbers, because they lack the incentive for aggressive evangelization. He finds the evidence particularly striking in South America, where the rise in Pentecostal Protestantism has awakened the Roman Catholic Church. Thus church attendance in that continent exceeds that of the United States and even of most Muslim nations. “Contrary to the sociological orthodoxy, pluralism results in active and effective churches” (80). The winners are new religious movements,

including innovative conservative churches. The losers are “theologies of doubt and disbelief” (199). Thus “Protestantism is as strong as ever in America—only the names have changed” (201). And atheists? They may be louder now than in the past, but they remain a tiny portion of the population—less than 5 percent.

But is the stubborn and worldwide endurance of religious conviction any comfort to orthodox Christianity? Stark’s better polling data becomes less hopeful here. He concedes, for example, that Christianity’s rapid expansion in sub-Saharan Africa is producing indigenous churches that are shocking in the extent of their theological heresy. Polygamy, Old Testament dietary laws, and the prosperity gospel are common in many African Initiated Churches. (Moreover, the persistence of tribalism in new Christian sects has enflamed much Christian-against-Christian violence.)

Towards the end of the book, Stark takes on Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher who has argued, in books such as *A Secular Age* (2007), that the Enlightenment has created a “disenchanted world.” Stark dismisses Taylor’s claims as superficial, and he associates them with the reductionistic polling data he has exposed. Yet it seems that the charge of superficiality may be turned against Stark. When the author finds signs of faith in beliefs in lucky charms, fortune tellers, and the like (187), he is hardly describing a rise in the triumph of true faith. Moreover, Taylor and others have explained that such practices are often quite compatible with secularist convictions. To paraphrase Immanuel Kant, Stark seems willing to settle for “enchantment within the limits of modernity alone.” As sociologist Christian Smith has observed, conceiving of God as one’s personal “cosmic butler” is a domesticated form of enchantment.

Finally, Stark does not reckon fully with the effects of supernatural beliefs becoming *privatized*. Guardian angels, for example, may be effective coping devices in creating and maintaining personal identities. But they are unwelcome in the highly rationalized world of the public square. Simply put, religious values can be very popular

and highly marginalized at the same time. So believe what you want about the sanctity of life in the womb or the importance of traditional marriage. Just keep those opinions to yourself. ©

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I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills

by *Walter C. Kaiser Jr.*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2016¹

by **Bryan Estelle**

I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament, by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver, 2015, 176 pages, \$12.99, paper.

Walter Kaiser has written a book surveying significant prayers made by prominent Old Testament saints. The prayers come from familiar sections of the Hebrew Bible and are offered by significant characters of the Hebrew Bible: Abraham, Moses, Hannah, David, Solomon, Jonah, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, Ezra, and Daniel. Kaiser introduces each chapter with a translation of the passage, followed by contextual and historical

analysis. At the end of each chapter there is a summary of the points made throughout the exposition followed by a list of discussion questions that may easily be adapted for small group Bible study or Sunday school lessons and probably for family worship in the home as well. In short, Kaiser seeks to derive important lessons from the prayers that can be applied to the New Testament believer.

One of Kaiser's main goals is to inspire Christians to take up the work of prayer, based on the examples of the prominent place of prayer in the lives of Old Testament people. Indeed, it is striking to be reminded of the piety of these Old Testament saints. However, although the author seeks to demonstrate that prayer did hold a prominent place among these notable Old Testament saints, repeatedly they failed to act on prayer. This should serve, in Kaiser's view, as a notable warning for believers today.

One strength of this little book is Kaiser's sensitive reading of texts. It is obvious that much work in the Hebrew and in the historical background of the passages containing these prayers informs Kaiser's discussion. It is also rewarding to see that he takes pains to focus on exalting God's glory and majesty throughout the book. The publisher, Weaver, has a target audience of lay people in view. Kaiser has written admirably at a level and with clarity that matches this goal. The reviewer found no typos in the book.

There are some weaknesses, however. First, Kaiser uses too many exclamation points for effect. This is distracting. Second, there is a tendency to lift "timeless principles" out of these narratives and seek to apply them concretely in present circumstances within the lives of New Testament saints. This reviewer would have preferred more sensitivity to the so-called principle of periodicity (cf. Geerhardus Vos). That is to say, Kaiser could have been much more helpful to the reader if he had dealt with each of these prayers in its own covenantal context. Let me explain. Take an example from the prayer of Solomon. Kaiser asks in the study questions and discussion starters section at this chapter's end: "In what sense are your prayers the source of exercising responsibility for securing

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=556&issue_id=115.

the blessing and peace of God on the nation to which you belong? Are we in any sense the keepers of our nation?" (85). In the previous chapters there is no discussion of the uniqueness of the theocracy of Israel. Nor is there any lengthy discussion about how the promises of tenure in the land of Canaan or exile from it were unique to God's people of that age. This would have offered a great benefit for Christians reading this book. Surely the apostle Paul makes clear that we are to pray for our civil leaders and the nations in which God has placed us. But how is this different than the manner in which the Old Testament saints prayed. More explanation on this point would have strengthened the book.

Third, Kaiser opens himself up to another criticism as well. It would be helpful to discuss in the book the prayers of these Old Testament saints in light of the whole canon of Scripture, especially the work, ministry, and role of our Lord Jesus Christ as Mediator (WCF 8). Moreover, discussion about a responsible use of typology (WCF 7.5–6) and Spirit-wrought obedience in the work of prayer among the saints (WCF 16.5–6) would have greatly enriched these meditations. Much of the discussion, but not all, seems to fall within the category of timeless principles being extracted from the Old Testament without due respect for covenantal contexts. This approach often leads to setting forth these saints, and their prayers, as mere examples for New Testament saints without duly noting the important ways in which the anticipatory work of Messiah Jesus should inform the instruction.

This does not mean that this work cannot be used profitably within the church. However, a trustworthy guide or leader will be necessary in order to redress the above concerns. Then, this newly published study on the great prayers of Old Testament saints may bear profitable fruit in the lives of saints in God's church today. ©

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Divine Rule Maintained

by Stephen J. Casselli

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Ryan M. McGraw

Divine Rule Maintained: Anthony Burgess, Covenant Theology, and the Place of the Law in Reformed Scholasticism, by Stephen J. Casselli. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016, 188 pages, \$30.00.

The function of God's law in Scripture has always raised difficult theological questions. With the advent of modern exegesis and theological methods, the proposed options for understanding divine law have only multiplied. In this climate, historical theology often challenges contemporary assumptions and pushes us beyond the bounds of current proposals. Stephen Casselli's work on Anthony Burgess does all of these things and more. Since Burgess was a prominent member of the Westminster Assembly, this book helps explain the teaching of the Westminster Standards on God's law, bringing a vital strand of the Reformed tradition into contemporary debates.

Casselli's book is a useful introduction to Westminster's teaching on God's law. In six concise chapters, he introduces his topic, sets Burgess in his historical context, and then treats creation and law, the law in the Mosaic covenant, and the law/gospel distinction, followed by a conclusion. His findings include ideas such as the law as an expression of God's nature, natural law and moral law, the threefold division of God's law, the threefold use of God's law, the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace, and the law and the gospel as expressing primarily the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. He delves deeply and broadly into British Reformed theology, introducing

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=562&issue_id=116.

English readers to a wide array of important resources. Though Casselli writes historical theology, he does so with today's church in view by singling out law and creation (including the nature of natural law), law and covenant, and law and gospel (139–43). One of the most useful features of his analysis is his observation that Burgess distinguished between the law as a reflection of God's character and the law as a covenant (61). This distinction undoubtedly undergirds chapter 19 in the Westminster Confession of Faith ("On the Law of God"). The tendency in much modern theology to ignore or to deny this distinction renders this chapter in the Confession virtually unintelligible.

Though *Divine Rule Maintained* is well written and useful, some points require greater clarity. For example, Casselli treats natural law as virtually synonymous with moral law. Yet James Bruce shows helpfully in his recent work on Francis Turretin that natural law referred to natural relationships between God and people and between people and one another as created by God.² The content of moral law was identical with natural law, but the relationship between them is that of underlying principle and its outward expression.

A related issue is how Casselli classifies Reformed uses of law. Though he notes most of the vital components of Reformed teaching, such as the threefold division of law (moral, ceremonial, and judicial), the threefold use of the law, the law as a covenant of works, the law as the Old Testament, and the law as distinct from the gospel, he does not always distinguish these categories clearly. The most prominent example of this is his chapter on the law and the gospel, in which he states without explanation that Burgess treated the law as the Old Testament and the gospel as the New. While hinting at the fact that Lutherans dichotomized law and gospel regarding justification and showing that Reformed authors agreed with them on this point, he does not illustrate adequately how and why Reformed authors modified the law/

gospel distinction. James Bruce has established elsewhere that Reformed authors treated the law as reflecting God's character, which led to natural law as reflecting God's relation to his creatures, which then led to moral law as its outward expression.³ This moral law was the bedrock of the three divisions and three uses of law. The gospel created these uses and divisions of the law. This raises the related issue that in Reformed theology, law as opposed to gospel referred to various things. It could refer to the covenant of works as opposed to the covenant of grace. It could refer to the Old Testament versus the New Testament. Or, it could refer to the Mosaic covenant versus the new covenant. The complexity of treating the law in Reformed theology reflected the diversity of the uses of law in Scripture. What Casselli highlights rightly is the close relationship between the law and covenant theology. However, his study raises several unanswered questions regarding the above Reformed uses of law. This may result from the virtual absence of Latin Reformed dogmatic works, without which readers lose some of the precise distinctions within Reformed orthodoxy as well as its international character.

Casselli's book on Anthony Burgess regarding the nature and function of divine law cannot solve today's theological difficulties. Scripture alone can serve this purpose. However, his work shows us that contemporary voices on the subject are not the only ones worth hearing. The church needs books like this one in order to help her read the Bible better by lifting her gaze from her current outlook to the horizon of church history. Though the church is not infallible, yet since Christ continues to direct her "by the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture" (WCF 1.10), we do well to hear what she has had to say. ☉

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² James Bruce, *Rights in the Law: The Importance of God's Free Choices in the Thought of Francis Turretin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

³ *Ibid.*

From Topic to Thesis

by Michael Kibbe

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Ryan M. McGraw

From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research, by Michael Kibbe. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016, 152 pages, \$12.00, paper.

Theological papers and sermons often share in common that they hover around a topic without a clear aim in view. Both theological students and pastors need to develop the skill to tell people what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they plan to do it. This easy to read book by Michael Kibbe gives theological students needed help to do just that. It is a must read for theological students and for those seeking to write and to teach more effectively in the church.

Kibbe places theological research on the right footing. He asserts that those doing theological research must confess their unworthiness to know God, trust in the Spirit to help their labors, rest in God's self-revelation in Christ, and submit to God's authority (27–28). He also exemplifies focused writing in the flow and structure of his book. He breaks down the task of theological research into finding direction, gathering sources, understanding issues, entering discussion, and establishing a position (43–44). He illustrates his principles helpfully in light of widely differing sample research projects related to the kingdom of God in Mark and the doctrine of divine accommodation in John Calvin (e.g., 50–52). The appendices, which treat a range of research-related issues, are invaluable. This is true particularly in the sections on ten things not to do in writing a theological paper and in his introduction to the indispensable Zotero bibliographic software. He furnishes readers with much

needed help to learn how to argue for positions rather than merely present information.

Kibbe overstates his case slightly at one point when he says that we must read the Bible as we do any other book and that one's view of the divine inspiration of Scripture has no bearing on hermeneutical methods (21). The primary difference that he overlooks is that, unlike human authors, the Lord is aware of every consequence of his words. While it is true that we should read the Bible grammatically and in its context, it is also true that we must piece together theological consequences from Scripture in order to conclude things such as God's Tri-unity and Christ's two natures. Such doctrines are revealed by God in Scripture as clearly as are express statements in particular texts, and they provide the backdrop without which the message of Scripture would unravel. While this principle does not allow for wild private interpretations of Scripture, it also distinguishes the Bible from any other book. While the methods of theological research overlap substantially with other disciplines, theology remains a unique discipline in these respects.

This book is precisely the tool that both seminary professors and students need to make the task of writing papers an exercise in developing a skill instead of completing an assignment. By teaching readers how to research and to write well, Kibbe teaches them how to think and to communicate better. The church needs men in the pulpit who are clear and interesting. While preaching sermons and writing papers are very different tasks, they are not unrelated, since they both require students to make a point clearly and persuasively. This reviewer hopes that this book will be useful to the church by teaching men how to think and to express themselves better in the seminary so that they might communicate more effectively in the pulpit. ©

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1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=563&issue_id=116.

Land of Sunlit Ice

by Larry Woiwode

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Land of Sunlit Ice, by Larry Woiwode. Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Press, 2016, 32 pages, \$17.50, paper.

Who am I to review the poetry of the poet laureate of North Dakota? Well, I know Larry Woiwode as a man who loves the place he is from. As a student in Paris, Czesław Miłosz was dismayed at his fellow students who disdained their homelands with cosmopolitan condescension. He determined to never disavow the Polish village that he called home. Woiwode’s prosodic engagement with his homeland is evocative of poetry’s best uses—lyric reflections on the pain and beauty of one’s home.

Woiwode is always aware that his Paradise is not located in North Dakota. But he pares this sensibility with a vision of the importance of this pilgrim life and the enchantment that still pervades his existence in his corner of God’s world. So the first of thirteen poems, “Prolegomena,” names the theme.

He covers the seasons of his life with the exquisite attention of a wordsmith in “Crystals,” weaving the specifics of his embodied life among descriptions of family and friends. Each line break falls in a rhythmic cadence that begs for them to be read aloud. “Horses” exemplifies a life embedded in North Dakota. “Deserted Barn” is a metaphor of the poet’s own experience:

I am a deserted barn,
My cattle robbed from me,
My horses gone,

Light leaking in my sides, sun piercing my tin
roof

Where it’s torn,
I am a deserted barn.

“Migration” lovingly depicts the wonderful birth of a daughter. “Mid-fall Song” laments the passing life of the poet, with which every aging man can identify.

The longest of the thirteen poems, in seven parts, “*Ars Poetica* Conference,” is like books-on-books for the book collector. It is a sage observation of the poet’s struggle, with a special reflection on the marginalized Christian poet. Literary allusions warrant two footnotes, but they do not explain much. The reader encounters the formative tensions of influence from art, music, and poetry. Parts three and four are in the shape of a percolator (a pattern poem)—coffee being the stimulator of the conference. The dizzying atmosphere of such a gathering is loaded with temptations that the committed—read married—poet resists.

“The Interview” reveals the poet’s love-hate relationship with the limelight, “A shrieking train articulates my state.” It reminded me of his poem, dedicated to his mentor *New Yorker* editor William Maxwell, in *Eventide* (No. 27).

Woiwode is, after all, a pilgrim, as revealed in “Dedication of Reiland Fine Arts Center.” Like Updike he is rooted in his place of origin, “the common / Act of art, an exercise in love, / Occurs.” And reminds us of his hope “of Calvary, Zion’s reign,” finishing in Psalm-like phrase, “His blessing here forever on this day.”

“Capitol-Crowned” celebrates Jan Webb, retiring executive director of the North Dakota Council on the Arts, for her advocacy for the native land and lore of the poet’s home. “Quasquicentennial” celebrates the land Woiwode loves best. How he adores that place and its first displaced inhabitants—“we with grace / That always should pertain ask forgiveness of you.”

The riches here before the rigs’ reality
Arrived. We are every day blessed with a host
Of transactions by endurance in a northland

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=564&issue_id=116.

That we cherish as generations cherished
It, it's rainbow grandeur and cloud-capped
grand
Range of rolling plains of greening wheat, its

Acres of azure flax, canola gold, white
Safflower stands, miles of east-leaning
Sunflower squares or blue-green oats right
At morning's start—food supply its meaning;

There is a strong lament “as horsepower lost
/ Its primacy and turned to fueled machines.” Yet,
with fracking's rich rewards, “The earth remains a
giving host that routes / Computer climate claims
in scents of sage;... Blaze, Spirit, blaze, and set our
hearts on fire.”

The final pattern poem, “Venerable Elm,”
shows the poet's descriptive expertise, describing
the lovely tree he is called to fell. “Hawk's Nest”
completes the poet's encomium of his beloved
land, passed on to generations:

All that remains here is Hawk's Nest
This ship of rest, its mast tips red, and Indian
lore
No longer lore nor believed in, Lorna, Les,
And this long hour of last light, Lord, and
goodbye.

I hope this is not Woiwode's last poem. But
North Dakota will be pleased with this tribute if it
is.

The four pattern poems in this brief collection
display the discipline of structure Woiwode has
mastered.

Woiwode's only other collection of poems,
Eventide, was published by Farrar, Straus, and
Giroux in 1977. The setting is the same in these
forty-nine poems, but the thirty-nine years inter-
vening show in maturity.

Land of Sunlit Ice is a slim, single signature
letterpress, hand-bound chapbook, printed on a
Chandler and Price press and sewn with a 1940's
stitcher. The evocative cover is individually
stenciled, with hand-set Garamond type printed
on the platen press located at the Hunter Times,
Bonanzaville. “The interior text—transferred to
magnesium and mounted on a wood base to create

sixteen wrong-reading engravings—is hand-letter
pressed and assembled by publishing interns at the
Braddock News Letterpress Museum, ND.” This
carefully executed craftsmanship exudes the local
care with which the poems themselves have been
created.

Dating each poem would have been illumi-
nating. But I can find no fault, only praise for this
compelling collection of Woiwode's late-in-life
poems. A larger point-sized type would have en-
hanced the volume.

Lovers of poetry, and the God who enables its
treasures, will find this a satisfying offering from
the laureate. ©

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Servant*.

What Is Marriage?

by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. An-
derson, and Robert P. George

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Joel Carini

What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense,
by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P.
George. New York: Encounter Books, 2012, xiv +
135 pages, \$15.99, paper.

By now, it is old news that the United States,
by judicial decree, defines marriage as a legal

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=570&issue_id=117.

union of two people, regardless of gender. Christians oppose this judgment because it is directly contrary to the biblical definition of marriage. We also presume that the redefinition of marriage will harm many people, not only by infringing on religious liberty, but by directly changing the very structure of families. But how are we to make this case in the public square? The authority of the Bible is not recognized by many Americans, and especially not by most of those on the other side of the debate. How can we persuade them that the traditional definition of marriage is not only correct but also good for society?

In *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George offer a cogent defense of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, by an argument that does not assume religious faith.² They begin by contrasting two views of marriage. The *revisionist* view of marriage is that marriage is an *emotional* union of two people, i.e., a relationship constituted by the emotions of the two people toward each other. The *conjugal* view of marriage is that marriage is a *comprehensive* union, i.e., a union at every level of a couple's being, consummated by the sexual act.

Both sides of the current debate on marriage agree that marriage is a relationship that requires legal recognition, that marriage has a connection to sex, and that marriage is monogamous, permanent, and exclusive. But, the authors ask in chapter 1, how do any of those norms follow from the revisionist view? In most relationships, the more intimate a relationship, the less likely it is that a relationship will require public, legal recognition. (Would anyone want the state governing our friendships?) If what is essential to marriage is emotional union, even sex is unnecessary to marriage because emotional union can be fostered by other joint activities. Since emotions are unstable and not limited to a single relationship, why should marriage, an emotional union, be

permanent and exclusive? In each case, the revisionist view of marriage cannot make sense of the very relationship for which it argues.

What is the alternative view of marriage that makes sense of these norms? In chapter 2, Girgis, Anderson, and George argue that these norms are accounted for by the conjugal view of marriage. On this view, marriage unites two people not only on the emotional and spiritual level, but even on a physical level. Just as the parts of a single body work together for a single biological end, life, so the bodies of a man and a woman can work together toward the biological end of new life. It is this physical union between a man and a woman that makes possible a unique comprehensive union of two people, marriage. Marriage is a *comprehensive union* of a man and a woman, a union on every level of their being.

The conjugal view of marriage makes sense of all the norms that the revisionist view could not explain. Permanence, exclusivity, and monogamy follow from the comprehensiveness of the marital union. Marriage's connection to sex, childbearing, and child rearing is obvious in the conjugal view. And the need for legal recognition follows from the objective structure and comprehensive nature of the marriage relationship.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Girgis, Anderson, and George explore the state's relationship to marriage, the harms of redefining marriage, objections to their case on the basis of justice and equality, and others on the basis of the needs and fulfillment of same-sex attracted people. In every case, they demonstrate the reasonableness of the conjugal view of marriage and the benefits that its recognition brings about.

The book's argument is compelling and exhaustive. The authors build a compelling case for the rationality of what is, in essence, the biblical definition of marriage, marriage as a one-flesh union of man and woman, built into the very design of our bodies by our creator. They deal with objections fairly and reasonably. Many Christians will ask whether this book capitulates to the secular worldview by making a purportedly secular argument. However, I would urge that readers

2 Justice Samuel Alito cited the book in his dissent from the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Windsor*, 133 S.Ct. 2675 (2013), which overturned the Defense of Marriage Act.

consider whether this book's argument is in fact an exploration of the very rationality of the biblical description of marriage.

Why should a pastor read this book? In a nation of genderless marriage, more and more pastors will have to labor to show their congregations and the world around them that the biblical definition of marriage makes sense and is good for society. *What Is Marriage?* helps uncover the worldview that underlies this new definition of marriage, and it shows the superiority of the biblical, conjugal view of marriage. The young people in our churches especially are bombarded with the propaganda of genderless marriage and need to understand why it falls so far short of the truth and the human good.

Furthermore, religious liberty challenges will continue in the coming months and years. Those who hold to the traditional definition of marriage and intend to live according to it may be able to achieve religious exemptions from recognition of and participation in same-sex marriages, but it will be an uneasy compromise. The worldview of personal autonomy and fulfillment that has driven the marriage revolution will eventually crush dissent in the United States (as has happened to some degree in Canada), unless traditionalists go beyond arguing that their private religious views be respected to arguing that the traditional definition of marriage is good for and necessary for the flourishing of society. ©

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Christian Dogmatics

*edited by Michael Allen and
Scott R. Swain*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
October 2016¹

by **John V. Fesko**

Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic, edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016, 408 pages, \$36.99, paper.

Michael Allen and Scott Swain, professors at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, have assembled an interesting book that reflects upon the key subjects of systematic theology with a view to renewal and retrieval. The editors highlight the fact that theology is ultimately a task that must derive its motivation and energy from the grace of God (3). They also argue that renewal must come through retrieval, that is, a theological engagement with our catholic heritage. In other words, as we study the Scriptures we do so in the classroom of the communion of the saints, where we learn from theologians throughout church history. The editors and authors press renewal and retrieval towards the goal of dogmatics, “the disciplined effort to have our eyes and mouths retrained by the gospel” (4). But they do this training with a healthy engagement of church tradition, which must “be shaped by the truth, goodness, and beauty of our heritage and not be drawn into a pathology of untruth, evil, and ugliness by our native resources” (5).

The editors have assembled a team of accomplished theologians who write sixteen chapters to cover key loci in systematic theology, including prolegomena (Allen), Scripture (Kevin Vanhoozer), the divine attributes (Allen), the Trinity

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=576&issue_id=118.

(Swain), covenant of redemption (Swain), creation *ex nihilo* (John Webster), providence (John Webster), anthropology (Kelly Kapic), sin (Oliver Crisp), incarnation (Daniel Treier), the work of Christ (Donald Macleod), redemption applied (Richard Gaffin), the law of God (Paul Nimmo), church (Michael Horton), sacraments (Todd Billings), and eschatology (Michael Horton). Most of the contributions share a number of positive common factors. The essays interact with key historic Reformed documents, which helps readers better understand the Reformed tradition. The essays engage a wide array of sources, patristic, medieval, Reformation, post-Reformation, and contemporary. The breadth of learning and knowledge in some of the contributions is impressive. The authors, however, do not merely flex their intellectual brawn but ultimately carry out the overall purpose of the book, which is to promote a Reformed catholicity. Third, the essays engage their subject in a thoughtful and learned manner. I personally benefited from many of the chapters and identified a number of sources for further reading.

More specifically, there are two noteworthy features that commend this book. Most of the essays offer a thoughtful engagement of patristic and medieval theology. Augustine, Boethius, John of Damascus, and Thomas Aquinas are a few of the names that appear throughout this book. For some, mention of the patristics is unproblematic, but the same might not be true of Aquinas. Many in Reformed churches assume that the Reformation was a clean break from all that went before and thus look upon medieval theologians with a degree of suspicion. Yet, open the pages of Calvin's *Institutes* and one finds multiple positive references to medieval theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux.² Or open the works of John Owen and explore the Thomistic elements of his theology.³ This pattern was not lost on Reformed theologians like Herman

Bavinck, who argued that the patristics, like Augustine, and medievals, like Aquinas, were a treasury of knowledge for Reformed Christians—they were not the exclusive property of Rome.⁴ While many believe there is a unique Reformed take on all theological matters, the truth is that the Reformation touched upon key issues and left others unaltered. It may be a slight over-generalization, but in his famous letter to Cardinal Sadoleto, Calvin characterized the Reformed dispute with Rome as a conflict over justification and worship (ecclesiology, sacraments, and polity), not as a wholesale rejection of everything Rome had to say.⁵ Strictly speaking, there is no unique Reformed doctrine of God, trinity, the person of Christ, or creation, for example. These catholic doctrines are common to Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Hence, this book is an excellent entry-point to key medieval sources and doctrines that are a part of our biblical and catholic heritage.

Another benefit of this book is its engagement with contemporary theology. Readers will note the names of Barth, Bonhoeffer, Jenson, Torrance, and Rahner, among many others. Some readers might find this off-putting, as these names are often associated with something less than pristine orthodoxy. But the virtue of this book is that the authors mine these sources for insights and, when necessary, offer careful critique. Some theologians might be more practical or useful for the pastor or ruling elder—I can more easily and quickly benefit from Calvin's *Institutes* than I can Barth's *Church Dogmatics* just given the massive difference in the size of the two works—two volumes vs. thirteen! Nevertheless, this book culls some of the best insights from contemporary sources, which makes it a valuable resource for the busy pastor. He can benefit from the spadework that these authors have performed.

2 See, e.g., A. N. S. Lane, *Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History, New Series (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996).

3 See, e.g., Christopher Cleveland, *Thomism in John Owen* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

4 Herman Bavinck, "Foreword to the First Edition (Volume 1) of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*," trans. John Bolt, *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 9–10.

5 John Calvin, "Reply by John Calvin to Letter by Cardinal Sadoleto to the Senate and People of Geneva," in *Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge, 7 vols. (1844; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 1:23–68.

There are a few weaknesses to this book. As to be expected, with a collection of essays there are some essays that are weaker than the others. Another shortcoming is that in one or two places the exegesis is either non-existent or very thin. Oliver Crisp's essay on sin, for example, has much to commend it. He thoughtfully engages the subject and challenges the common Reformed doctrine of immediate imputation for original sin. He promotes a Zwinglian realist view. At one level, this is fine. But when he rejects immediate imputation, he does so apart from any exegesis. To claim that immediate imputation promotes an arbitrary view of God or that no one ever authorized Adam to represent humanity are expected common objections, but to fail to provide substantive counter-exegesis to the exegetical support for immediate imputation renders the objections unconvincing. Another limitation of the book is that, given that each chapter covers an entire locus of theology, sometimes the essays feel a bit rushed.

These drawbacks aside, I encourage elders and pastors to buy a copy of this book, read, and study its contents. There is a wealth of information here that can enrich one's understanding of the key subjects of systematic theology. Allen and Swain continue to produce excellent resources for learning more about biblical doctrine, and this book certainly is a wonderful contribution to this end. ©

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Presbytopia: What It Means to Be Presbyterian

by Ken Golden

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by Allen C. Tomlinson

Presbytopia: What It Means to Be Presbyterian, by Ken Golden. Fearn, Ross-shire, United Kingdom: Christian Focus, 2016, viii + 135 pages, \$12.99, paper.

“**P**resbytopia” is an invented word by the author—who is the pastor at Sovereign Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Davenport, Iowa—a derivative of “utopia” (“no place”). Literally the word would mean “old place,” and the author suggests that we need to remember in these times in which “old things have fallen on hard times” that “old places have value” (2). Of course, since he is writing for Presbyterian Churches in particular, the particular “old place” is that kind of church, i.e., a classic Presbyterian church.

This short and well-written book is intended to introduce the faith and practice of a conservative Presbyterian Church to outsiders, and especially to those desiring to unite with a Presbyterian Church who are coming from another (or with no) ecclesiastical tradition. Golden has done a good job as far as his stated purpose goes. As one who came to the Reformed faith and into Presbyterianism from a Baptist tradition, this book would have been very handy for me when I switched traditions over thirty-five years ago.

Part One is entitled “Christian Essentials.” Here basic biblical doctrine is reviewed as the author examines briefly the Bible, God, man, sin,

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=577&issue_id=118.

Christ, and the Holy Spirit. He divides up what the Holy Spirit does, as far as the application of Christ's redemptive work, into one chapter on the Spirit as the agent bringing us to gospel faith (resulting in justification) and the next chapter on the Spirit enabling our Christian life (resulting in progressive sanctification).

Part Two is called "Reformed Distinctives." He distinguishes "Christian Essentials" as describing "the being of the church" from "Reformed Distinctives" as describing "the well-being of the church." Here is a chapter on the TULIP, followed by a chapter on polity ("Biblically Balanced"), and then a chapter on worship ("According to Scripture"). It probably would have been helpful to have added a chapter distinguishing covenant theology (in a very summary form) from dispensational theology, as part of "Reformed Distinctives."

Part Three is "Means of Grace." Chapters include "Preaching and Sacraments (The Primary Means)," "Baptism (The Gracious Entrance)," "Lord's Supper (Solemn Nurturing)," and "Prayer (Daily Conversation)." These chapters could prove very helpful to new believers especially, though even the most experienced Christians need to be reminded of the importance of these means periodically.

There is a very useful glossary defining terms and a sample liturgy, both of which could prove very helpful for those unfamiliar with this Presbyterian ground.

What are my criticisms of the book? The descriptions of the Bible books (pages 9–10) are too condensed in my opinion, leading to a misstatement on page 10 in which all the Epistles are described as "letters to churches." At least a few of the New Testament Epistles are addressed to individuals, though they are of value for all the churches. On page 55 Golden's explanation of the Sabbath is too brief and does not address the most often quoted text by broad evangelicalism in its dismissal of the Fourth Commandment for Christians, Colossians 3:16–17. While one can appreciate the intention of the book to be brief, still many coming from outside of a Reformed or Presbyterian background may need a little more

explanation regarding some of these matters, if they are to get started in "Presbytopia."

Chapters 11–12 also could use more elaboration as far as our distinct approach to baptism as Reformed churches. The last paragraph on page 97 could be read (and probably would be read by our Baptist friends) as affirming "believers only baptism," which is not what the chapter is teaching as a whole. I would suggest that another sentence or two to summarize our understanding of the relationship of personal faith to covenant baptism would prove helpful.

On page 86, as the author discusses the regulative principle of worship, he adds "forms" to "elements" and "circumstances." I am not convinced that this has been a separate category throughout Reformed and Presbyterian history, and I know that opinion concerning this is divided among my Reformed friends as to whether this should be seen as a separate category or not. Since the author evidently holds to this as a third term to be used to describe "Reformed Distinctives," I understand his use of the word for his own setting, but it might make the book a (very) little less useful for our churches at large, in light of disagreement.

I believe two words could be improved upon in the glossary of terms. First, "Incomprehensibility" is defined as God's "inability to be known apart from revelation." Much of my formal training took place in non-Reformed institutions, so perhaps I am the one out of sync here with the rest of the OPC, but my understanding of the "incomprehensibility of God" is that we can never know God exhaustively. Of course, all true knowledge we have of him must come about as a direct result of his making himself known both in general and (especially) special revelation. However, even then, his infinite being and infinite attributes can only be comprehended by finite creatures to a very limited degree. Also, under "Law" it would be helpful to use the Westminster Confession of Faith's threefold "moral," "ceremonial," and "judicial" (WCF 19) as a very useful tool for those coming out of broad evangelicalism, with its dispensational influence. Many have been taught that Old Testament saints were saved by Law-keeping, and New

Testament saints are saved by grace. A more nuanced explanation of the relationship between the Gospel and Law can be very helpful for aiding the inductee into Reformed circles in understanding better how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament. The threefold breakdown of the Law of Moses can prove very helpful for such a purpose.

In spite of these criticisms, I found that the book accomplished its stated purpose sufficiently. I am thinking about making use of it in the future for introducing new members or prospective members to our faith. Where the explanations have been a little too brief for my personal liking, any deficiency can be made up while teaching through the book in a new member class. Recommended. ☺

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God's Glory Alone

by *David VanDrunen*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* November 2016¹

by **David A. Booth**

God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life, by David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 186 pages, \$16.99, paper.

S*oli Deo Gloria* is, as Professor VanDrunen subtitles this volume, *The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life*. Indeed, “*Soli Deo Gloria* can be understood as the glue that holds the other

solas in place, or the center that draws the other *solas* into a grand, unified whole” (15). This clear, reliable, and insightful guide is intended to restore the pursuit of *the glory of God alone* to its rightful place in the faith and practice of Christians.

The book is organized into three sections for a total of eight chapters. The first section, “The Glory of God in Reformed Theology,” helpfully begins with an examination of Martin Luther on “A Theology of Glory versus a Theology of the Cross.” VanDrunen’s treatment of Luther warns readers against looking for the supreme manifestation of God’s glory elsewhere than in Jesus Christ and him crucified. This discussion is followed by an examination of how John Calvin corrects the common misunderstanding that glorifying God necessitates the demeaning of human beings. Calvin quite effectively shows that God glorifies himself (in part) through the glorification of his creation. Rather than the exaltation of God requiring that human beings be demeaned, it only requires that our pride be brought low while actually lifting up redeemed humanity to increasingly reflect God’s glory into this world. In the second chapter, VanDrunen focuses on the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. In particular, he focuses on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Edward Leigh, Jonathan Edwards, and Herman Bavinck. VanDrunen helpfully dispels the notion that the glory of God is primarily about what we do for God.

There seems to be something imbalanced about focusing the *solī Deo gloria* theme exclusively upon Christians acting for God’s glory. For one thing, it produces the awkward and ironic result that *solī Deo gloria* becomes centered on us: how we are to act and what end we should pursue.... When *solī Deo gloria* turns into a program for human cultural renewal, we may well suspect that what was meant to be a theocentric battle cry has been distorted by more than a little anthropocentric static. (26)

The second section of the book, “The Glory of God in Scripture,” begins with a careful examination of the Shekinah glory cloud in the Old

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=581&issue_id=119.

Testament which is a strikingly prominent feature of the Exodus narratives. The manifestation of the glory of God in this manner was both a blessing and a problem for a sinful people. As VanDrunen later asks:

Who can read this Old Testament history and not proclaim *solī Deo gloria*? Page after page shows that all glory belongs to God alone. Especially evident is that God glorifies himself through his judgment upon the unrighteous. Not so clear, however, is the Reformation's related claim that God glorifies himself in part by glorifying his people, such that *solī Deo gloria* becomes part of the good news of salvation. (64)

This challenge leads naturally to the book's chapters on "The Glory of God Incarnate" and "The Glory of Christ in the Glorification of His People." For it is only in Jesus Christ that the revelation of God's glory becomes good news for us.

Having laid the biblical and theological foundations in the first two sections, VanDrunen concludes with three chapters of application, which I consider to be the three most interesting chapters in the book: "Prayer and Worship in an Age of Distraction," "The Fear of the LORD in an Age of Narcissism," and "Glorifying God in an Age That is Passing." Each of these chapters could helpfully be taught in an adult Sunday school class. Professor VanDrunen ably explains media ecology in a manner that is scholarly, accessible to lay people, and immediately applicable to our lives. Pastors and elders should carefully consider whether or not we are providing sufficiently clear and forceful guidance to our congregations on how to navigate the distractions and temptations of the information age, and Professor VanDrunen is a superb guide along the way. While it is easy to talk about being hooked on perpetual distractedness as though this were a mild inconvenience, Professor VanDrunen clearly demonstrates that, for its many blessings, the information age directly assaults central aspects of our vocation as Christians, such as prayer and sustained meditation upon God's Word. Among other solutions, VanDrunen urges renewing

genuine Sabbath observance as an important aspect of recovering prayer in the midst of a culture that seems increasingly designed to displace the important, even the essential, with the tyranny of the urgent. Because few people think of themselves as narcissists, VanDrunen shows pastoral sensitivity by resurrecting an older term:

I will also refer to another term, vainglory (or vanity), that clarifies just how implicated we all are in the kinds of sin that narcissism involves. Christian moral theology has traditionally identified vainglory as one of the seven deadly vices. (132)

I have wrestled as a pastor with how best to deal with this kind of narcissism in the church and have found the research and application that VanDrunen presents to be quite helpful in my own thinking and ministry.

The only very minor drawback to this book is that it is written in a plain, logical style best suited for those who are already interested in the topic. It is easy to imagine that some of those people whom pastors would most want to engage with this material will stop reading before they are halfway through this otherwise commendable book. That is a shame because recovering our commitment to *Solī Deo Gloria* would bring great blessings both to individual Christians and to our local churches. Highly recommended for pastors, elders, deacons, and group study. ©

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Impossible People

by Os Guinness

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by William Edgar

Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016, 237 pages, \$20.00.

Os Guinness has declared ours to be a grand clarifying moment. But where is the clarity? True, a flurry of sermons, books, blogs, and publications are challenging Christians to “change the world” (James Davison Hunter), to “engage the culture” (Russell Moore), to “believe again” (Roger Lundin, quoting W. H. Auden). But which of these is authentic? So many tried and true remedies are put into question. Confident pluralism won’t work. Secularization must be reconsidered. Britons query the Continent. Americans have nominated a narcissist politician. Even Protestants are invited to discover the Benedictine option.

When America and much of the West are becoming more and more confused, and at a time when even the most optimistic person surely observes advancing darkness, what is called for is not retreat, but prophetic courage. *Impossible People* qualifies as one of the best guides to the prophetic stance I know. This latest book from Os Guinness is both anticipated and fresh. Anticipated, because we have gotten used to Guinness’s writings, with their biting critique of our times and their firmly biblical response, and are eager to hear more. Fresh, because Guinness brings bright, new insights into both the causes and cure for the malaise of our day. The book should be read slowly, and inwardly digested. It is dense with historical and biblical allusions. Creatively, he calls us to

recognize our “Samuel Moment” and our “Moses Moment.” Samuel called attention to Israel’s responsibility when it was losing ground and making wrong choices. Today’s Samuels must tell the West that it will have to live with its bad choices, but that, even so, it is not too late to turn back to God. Moses, faced with the unfaithfulness of the people asked God, not for judgment, but for the privilege of seeing his full glory. Though no one, including Moses, could withstand the full revelation of his presence, it was right to seek it and cultivate it. And so should we. Without it there is no reason to go on.

Accordingly, *Impossible People* contains an extraordinary dose of cultural analysis, accompanied by a constant plea to nurture the sense of the presence of God. Guinness the pedagogue likes to organize his teaching in threes. The future of the world in the next generations will be determined by answers to three great questions (38): (1) Will Islam modernize peacefully in the end? (2) Which faith or ideology will replace Marxism in China? (3) Will the Western world sever or recover its roots? (The present volume focuses on this third inquiry). Three grand global transformations characterize the present (46–60): (1) From “pyrotechnology” to “biotechnology,” that is, from the long presence of the power of fire, moving beyond muscle power, to contemporary engineering of life forms; (2) The shift from the industrial age to the information age. This includes the overwhelming effects of globalization; (3) We are bound and torn by time, particularly by the clock. We are liberated and enslaved at once by the internet, and by its constant presence we have become both more aware of, and numbed to, good and evil.

Modernity distorts us and lessens the impact of our faith in three ways (66–84): (1) It moves away from authority and toward (at times pathological) choice or preference; (2) Our faith (or any faith) becomes privately engaging but publicly irrelevant; (3) The supernatural has given way to the secular. A “trio of trends” has added to the challenge of modernity (84–88): (1) An exaggerated specialization leading to corruption; (2) Overreaction, such as pitting God’s Word against God’s Spirit; (3)

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=582&issue_id=119.

Movements of suppression of the supernatural. There are many more such triple trends.

Throughout the volume, these analytical trilogies come at us intensely, requiring the reader to slow down and think about each one. This is all the more true as Guinness marshals an astonishing array of quotes and citations, many of them solid as gold. Perhaps the greatest virtue of the book, though, is its careful balance between diagnosis and cure. More than in many of his writings, Guinness uses Scripture and spiritual reflections not only as antidotes, but as fundamentals for any age. He passionately presents the perennial value of the gospel. He argues that with the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost, the power of sin and evil have more than met their match (81ff.). He cares about the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next, as we are “notes in the grander melody and pages in the larger story” (192). He writes boldly about the benefits and rightness of traditional marriage (72). Jesus is present on nearly every page. Significantly, each chapter ends in a prayer, a magnificent crying out to the Lord. The prayer is followed by a few discussion questions that help access the thoughts in the book.

One of the most intriguing features of the book is its title. As Guinness explains, the term *impossible man* was used by Dante to describe the Benedictine reformer Peter Damian (c. 1007–73). He placed him in the highest circle of the *Paradiso*, right before Francis of Assisi. It was a period of time much like our own, with widespread dishonesty and false shepherds. Damian worked against all those evils, often at considerable cost to himself. But in facing these vices he was, to use George Orwell’s term, *unclubbable*, meaning he would not join the societies of evil in his day. The term *impossible* can be either a compliment or an insult, and in this case, is both. Os Guinness calls the church today to be like Damian. He invites believers to draw upon the great reforming power of God through Jesus Christ. We are in a clarifying moment. But are we clear about that? ©

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The Holy Spirit

by Christopher R. J. Holmes

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by John V. Fesko

The Holy Spirit, by Christopher R. J. Holmes, New Studies in Dogmatics, series edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 218 pages, \$24.99 paper.

Ever since the nineteenth century, theologians have been producing a steady stream of books on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Scottish theologians James Buchanan (1804–70) and George Smeaton (1814–89) wrote books on the Spirit in 1847 and 1882 respectively. Around the turn of the century, in 1904, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) produced his famous work on the Spirit. Kuyper’s concern was twofold: (1) G. W. F. Hegel’s influential philosophical doctrine of the Trinity, which posited the Spirit as an impersonal force that moved in and shaped history; and (2) Kuyper’s perception that the Reformed tradition had paid insufficient attention to the doctrine. These factors played a role in the American Presbyterian Church’s efforts to revise the Westminster Confession by adding a chapter on the Holy Spirit in 1903. Other theologians continued to write on

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=583&issue_id=119.

the subject, such as R. A. Torrey (1856–1928) with his 1910 work on the Spirit. This trend continues unabated in our own day with works by a wide cross-section of theologians, including Gordon Fee, Yves Congar, Michael Welker, Christopher J. H. Wright, David Coffey, Robert Peterson, John Levison, Jürgen Moltmann, Sergius Bulgakov, Anthony Thiselton, Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, Matthew Levering, and now, this most recent contribution from Christopher R. J. Holmes.

Holmes's book is part of a new series on dogmatics, edited by Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) Professors Michael Allen and Scott Swain. This new series follows in the tradition of G. C. Berkouwer, Reformed theologian and professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, and his multi-volume dogmatics on the chief loci of systematic theology. Notably, Berkouwer had no volume dedicated to the doctrine of the Spirit. In this respect, Holmes's volume is a welcome contribution to the growing field of pneumatology.

There are a number of strengths to this volume, first of which is its slender size. The chapters are relatively short, which makes it very readable. Second, Holmes does not follow common approaches to the doctrine by engaging first in exegesis and then theological reflection. Rather, he chooses three dialogue partners to explore the person and work of the Holy Spirit: St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth. Some have opined that this is a disadvantageous approach because there is no Reformed theologian. Yet, readers should not be too hasty in drawing this conclusion. Few, I suspect, in contemporary Reformed circles have given much consideration to the catholic roots of the Reformed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In one sense, most of the constituent elements of what one might identify as *Reformed* on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit are in fact *catholic*. In other words, the Protestant Reformation offered few modifications to the catholic understanding of doctrine of the Spirit. Some have argued, for example, that the Westminster Confession's chapter on Christ the Mediator (WCF 8), has unique and unprecedented pneumatological accents. Yet, in actuality, the Confession's pneumatology finds

precedent in the work of Augustine, Aquinas, and to a certain extent Peter Lombard (1100–1160). Given the catholic roots of the Confession's pneumatology, Holmes's treatment of Augustine and Aquinas is quite appreciated and warranted. Some might welcome treatments of Augustine and Aquinas, but draw the line at Barth. Despite the *orthodoxy* in his neo-orthodox theology, some believe there is too much that is *neo*, or new. Nevertheless, I find it a fruitful exercise to read theologians with whom I might not agree in order to challenge my own convictions and ensure that I have rightly understood the Scriptures. Too often we get locked into the echo chamber of our own theological circles and never ask critical questions.

Another benefit of this book is the manner in which Holmes has presented exegesis. Some might accuse him of offering no exegesis because he only engages the exegesis of Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth, and thus offers an admirable historical-theological treatment of the subject but far from an exegetical one. Once again, we should not be too hasty in drawing this conclusion. Whether a living person, such as Holmes, offers exegesis, or a dead person presents it makes little difference in my mind. My desire is to see someone, alive or dead, engage the biblical text. In this respect, the living do not have a monopoly on the ability to do exegesis. Instead, to borrow the title from John Thompson's recent book, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, we should consult the exegesis of theologians in the past so we can learn from them. Yes, Holmes's treatment falls under the discipline of historical theology, but it also captures exegesis. Exegesis and historical theology are not hermetically sealed-off from one another. Yes, Holmes focuses upon a very narrow swath of exegesis, particularly Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth's exegesis of John's gospel as it relates to the Spirit, but a narrow focus does not detract from the book's utility. Rather, it provides a window into how three theologians from different eras of church history have understood the doctrine of the Spirit through the exegesis of John's gospel, a canonical *locus classicus* for the doctrine.

These strengths make the book an interesting

and stimulating read, one worthy to provide grist for the mill in thinking through the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It also provides ample opportunity to reflect upon the gospel of John. To what end does Holmes write? He argues:

The Spirit does not detract from Christ, supersede Christ, or act as his substitute. As we will see, the Spirit is primarily at work in relation to the Word (incarnate, written, and proclaimed), strengthening baptized children of God to remain true to Christ. Indeed, the mission of the Holy Spirit is coextensive with the mission of the Word (the Lord Jesus Christ). (21)

Such a focus is most welcome, especially during a time when many theologians displace Christology with pneumatology, such as in the case of Thomas Weinandy and his Spirit-christology. Moreover, Holmes's Christ-centered pneumatology, especially through his treatment of Augustine and Aquinas, provides an excellent window to better understand the pneumatology of the Westminster Confession, particularly when the divines write, "The Lord Jesus ... was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit" (WCF 8.3).

Will readers find weaknesses in Holmes's book? Undoubtedly, yes. But do those weaknesses prevent one from reading his book with great profit? Not at all. As series editors, Allen and Swain have lined up a formidable roster of contributors for their New Studies in Dogmatics, and this first installment bodes well for the rest of the series. Readers will undoubtedly find themselves on new terrain at times, but unfamiliarity is the opportunity for learning, sharpening, and growing. ☺

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Encouragement for Today's Pastors

by *Joel R. Beeke* and
Terry D. Slachter

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
November 2016¹

by **Stephen A. Migotsky**

Encouragement for Today's Pastors: Help from the Puritans, by Joel R. Beeke and Terry D. Slachter. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2013, 211 pages, \$16.00, paper.

All Christians can become discouraged, and all Christians are to encourage one another. There are manifold examples and instructions of encouragement in the Bible (Acts 14:22, 15:32; Rom. 1:12; Col. 2:2, 4:8; 1 Thess. 2:12, 5:11; Heb. 10:25). This encouragement is often to be personal and face-to-face. Such encouragement is different from reading a book, but this book is designed to encourage pastors with Puritan wisdom.

You may compare yourself harshly to the best of the Puritans in this book and be discouraged. Reading about their lives and spiritual disciplines can feel like watching the Olympics and remembering your lack of athleticism. You don't perform anything like an Olympian, nor are you likely to perform like the best of the Puritans in this book. Yet, the encouragement in reading about these Puritans is to learn how they endured when they suffered, were discouraged, or saw little results from their work. They learned to focus on several important truths and disciplines in order to endure with hope.

This book includes instruction on Puritan piety, God's sovereignty, Puritan preaching, Puritan prayer, ministerial fellowship, pastoral calling,

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=584&issue_id=119.

heaven, and pride. In fact, those are roughly the topics covered in the book in that order. The authors present quotes from the Puritans on these topics and each chapter ends with practical applications. For example, chapter 4, “God Gives the Increase,” ends with this application: “Take responsibility only for yourself. Remind yourself daily that you are not the Savior but only His servant” (64).

The goal of the book is to use the Puritan writings and lives as instruction and encouragement for pastors. It is not an overview of the Puritans. For that you should read *Worldly Saints* by Leland Ryken.² Ryken’s book also has a healthy dose of what the Puritans did wrong in chapter 11, “Learning from Negative Example: Some Puritan Faults” (187–204). Ryken reminds us that one of their faults was they “were strict in lifestyle, and they also liked matters to be well-defined. These virtues, when carried to an extreme, produce a legalistic lifestyle that becomes stifling with too many rules” (191). Thankfully, *Encouragement for Today’s Pastors* acknowledges that some Puritans had serious weaknesses.

It should be acknowledged that a few Puritans fell into extremes, giving credence to the unattractive caricature that has attached itself to the movement as a whole.... The goal is adaptation, not imitation. It is not necessary to imitate the Puritans in order to profit from their faith, their example, and their writings. (13)

So, you don’t have to imitate Puritan piety, Puritan preaching, Puritan prayer, but modify it.

The book reminds us that faithful competent pastoral work may not yield results that we can see now. That is a healthy corrective if we or others judge our work harshly. Remember Paul does not care about how he is judged by others and does not even judge himself, but waits for the Lord to come to bring things now hidden to light (1 Cor. 4:1–5). This book disabuses us from judging ministerial work with any worldly, visible standard. That is a

worthwhile encouragement if you serve a small congregation or a troubled one. One related truth is that competent, ordinary pastoral work can be a powerful means of grace to congregations. There is dignity in pastoral work. “So lift up your heads, brothers. It is false humility to act as though the ministerial office has no dignity. The work of our office is a high calling” (170). Beeke and Slachter’s exposition of that truth is necessary and encouraging.

I have been encouraged significantly by participating in a fellowship of pastors who meet and pray for each other regularly. The Puritans did this, too. This is not the same as a session meeting, or a presbytery meeting. Chapter 10 explains the “mutual edification among ministers” (133):

Twenty-first century pastors should avail themselves of the blessings of interacting with fellow pastors who have fought some of the same battles, experienced many of the same heartaches, faced similar challenges, and are familiar with the conditions that lead to burn-out. It only makes sense to join with others for prayer and spiritual conference as often as possible, for this spiritual discipline will enrich your ministry and enable you to find strength in the Lord. (140)

The book’s epilogue contains wise counsel for pastors who are tempted to be workaholics and perfectionistic in the work. You may have an invisible master leading you to despair:

This tyrannical enemy is *Pride*, which can be a terrible slave master for pastors.... The key of humility unlocks the door and frees us from the giant *Pride*, and the key of promise frees us from the giant *Despair* through encouragement. Christ is our ultimate encouragement. Dear pastor, your comfort and courage must be Christ, for in Him we find a glory that makes us press on to know Him better (Phil. 3:7–14). (210, italics theirs)

For additional encouragement and as a complement to this book, read Spurgeon’s “The

2 Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

Minister's Fainting Fits" (167–79).³ For example, Spurgeon encourages pastors to get out of the study and enjoy God's creation, or "he will make his study a prison, . . . while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy" (172). So, pastor, read this book and, finishing it, go for a walk to enjoy God's beautiful and joyful creation. ☺

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ESV Reader's Bible, Six-Volume Set

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2016⁴

by **Arthur J. Fox**

ESV Reader's Bible, Six-Volume Set, English Standard Version (ESV 2001), Six-Volumes Permanent Text Edition. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016, \$199 cloth, \$499 cowhide.

This is not a review of the Bible, but of a magnificent edition of the Bible. Crossway has taken us back centuries to enable us to read the Bible, albeit in English, as it was read long ago. According to scholars, the chapter divisions we are accustomed to were developed by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury who published around AD 1227. The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 was the first Bible to use this chapter pattern. Since then, nearly all Bible translations have used Langton's chapter divisions. The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by a Jewish rabbi by

the name of Nathan in AD 1448. Robert Stephanus was the first to divide the New Testament into standard numbered verses in 1555. He also used Nathan's verse divisions for the Old Testament. When the Geneva Bible adopted Stephanus's divisions, it began a pattern followed to this day.

But there is a problem. Many Christians are unaware that the chapter divisions are not inspired. One unintended result is that inspired thoughts are divided mid-thought in many places. Read Romans chapters 10–11 and you will find that Paul had one fluid thought from 10:1–11:12, and perhaps beyond that. But many believers reading a chapter a day will miss the whole thought and think he is saying two unrelated things in the two chapters. Examples of this could be multiplied many times over in both testaments. The result is a poverty of theological and devotional thinking because readers will read only part of an argument or narrative in one sitting.

Now comes the *ESV Reader's Bible*. Using the English Standard Version text, it is made up of six well constructed and beautifully bound volumes (Pentateuch, Historical Books, Poetry, Prophets, Gospels and Acts, Epistles and Revelation) that simply present the text of Scripture without chapter or verses marked out, and with minimal section headings to indicate the flow of a book of Scripture. The reader is thus reading the Bible as he or she would any other book, and, because there is just the text without division, may well get caught up in the story of redemption and the fullness of redemptive history along with the application of it. Imagine getting lost in the drama of Jeremiah's prophecy or the story of Esther and wanting to read just a bit more in order to know how it ends. One is then reading Scripture, if I may say so, the way it was designed to be read! Yes, you will need to use your normal Bible to follow a Bible study or a sermon, or for detailed study. But such studies will be enhanced if you know the full context of the portion being studied.

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3 Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).

4 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=589&issue_id=120.

sive), and are least expensive when purchased from someone other than the publisher. The paper is sturdy and much thicker than those of most Bibles, so the pages will not tear so easily. Crossway has done a craftsman-like job with this publication. Many Christian booksellers are already discounting them. Either way it is worth the investment to give more undistracted attention to God's Word.

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The Epistle to the Romans

by *Richard N. Longenecker*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2016¹

by **Jeffrey C. Waddington**

The Epistle to the Romans, The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series, by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, 1140 pages, \$80.00.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=590&issue_id=120.

This is a commentary long in the making and many of us have waited long in eager anticipation. Ever since the New International Greek Testament series was launched in the late 1970s, it has increasingly established itself as a standard commentary set among broadly conservative evangelical scholars and pastors. Not only has the prestige of the series increased over the years, so, too, has the average size of each volume. One thinks of Greg Beale's volume on Revelation or Anthony Thiselton's on 1 Corinthians. The new volume on Romans is no lightweight volume in either page length or substance.

Richard Longenecker, professor emeritus of New Testament at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, comes as no stranger to Pauline studies with *The Epistle to the Romans*. This commentary was preceded by his *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Eerdmans, 2011) in which he laid out the various critical questions that Romans scholars have wrestled with over the last century and more and in which he offers his own take on such issues as the new perspective(s) on Paul, the proper understanding and role of justification in Paul's theology, the ethnic constitution of the Roman church(es), the nature of Romans (a letter or a theological treatise?), and the rationale for the letter. Longenecker tackles these issues and more in the earlier introduction, which he summarizes in *Romans* (1–39).

Longenecker divides Romans into three sections that he describes as the body opening (1:13–15), the body middle (with four subsections: 1:16–4:25, 5:1–8:39, 9:1–11:36, and 12:1–15:13), and the body closing (15:14–16:27). The author argues that in the first section of the body middle (1:16–4:25), Paul offers an account of the gospel that he preached in terms he and the Romans would agree on. In other words, regardless of how the interpretation of this portion of Romans has played out in subsequent church history (i.e., the Reformation), for Paul, and presumably for the saints at Rome, there is *nothing* controversial about justification as Paul lays it out here (186–88). Longenecker sees the *fulcrum* of Paul's letter in the second subsection of the body middle (5:1–8:39).

Here Paul contextualizes the gospel for a Gentile audience unfamiliar with the history of God's dealings with Israel and equally unfamiliar with the Scriptures of the Old Testament (547).

It is not possible to deal with all of the author's treatment of the contentious issues in Romans in a brief review. For instance, the author's treatment of Romans 1:3–4 (63–77) in the body opening shows no familiarity with the difference between the traditional reading in which Paul is understood to be discussing the *two natures* of the one person of Jesus Christ (supported by Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield) and the redemptive historical reading which sees Paul referencing the *two estates* of Christ in terms of humiliation and exaltation (supported by Geerhardus Vos and John Murray).

While there is much of tremendous value in this substantial commentary, on the whole it is disappointing. Longenecker's assumption that the first subsection of the body middle (1:16–4:25) deals with uncontroversial material is based on, among other things, his belief that the Roman saints, while predominantly Gentile, were Jerusalem oriented, and Paul is offering there an account of the gospel that he knew he and they would share. The saints at Rome were exposed to and familiar with the OT Scriptures.

Conversely, the second subsection of the body middle (5:1–8:39) deals with a contextualization of the same gospel for Gentiles who would not recognize Scripture or grant it any authority. This fails to adequately deal with chapter 5 as a hinge connecting Paul's discussion of justification and sanctification. Longenecker treats the first two subsections of the body middle as *two versions of the same thing*, or seemingly so. But this fails to guard the distinction between justification and sanctification. While Calvin is surely correct that justification and sanctification are a twofold blessing which we receive when we are united to Christ by faith, this does *not* obliterate the distinction. Calvin's Chalcedonian dictum ("distinct, yet inseparable") is relevant here. Justification is not sanctification, nor is sanctification justification. Longenecker erroneously appears to equate union

with Christ with sanctification (a view shared with such critical scholars as Albert Schweitzer). This failure to guard the deposit of the faith and the gains of the Reformation is regrettable.

Related to the above is Longenecker's description of Paul's contextualization of the gospel as accounting for the great difference in OT citation between the first and second subsections of the body middle. The author states that Paul could not have demonstrated the truthfulness of his exposition from the OT (547), nor was it necessary that he do so since his Gentile audience would not have appreciated the authority of the Scriptures had they been cited to the extent done in the first subsection. Besides, Paul based his gospel on his encounter with the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus and on his ongoing spiritual relationship with the living Christ. This pitting of Scripture against experience is unfortunate. The truth be told, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ was revelation itself. It wasn't just the apostle's private spiritual experience. It was such a pivotal revelation that account of it is given three times in Acts. It was a further unfolding of God's redemptive plan. That Paul could not justify or provide warrant for his gospel in its contextualized form from the OT is problematic to say the least. We cannot consider all the facets of this problem. But one appears to be the relativizing of biblical authority.

This volume, with all its shortcomings, will be a must-read for those who want to keep abreast of Romans scholarship. I should note that it is available in the Logos electronic library which makes it easily searchable. Richard Longenecker is an accomplished NT scholar. While this is not a Reformed commentary in any meaningful sense, it has the merit of being nearly encyclopedic. As ministers we should read widely, wisely, and well. All three adverbs should apply to our studies and to our digestion of this commentary in particular. ©

Jeffrey C. Waddington is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and serves as stated supply of Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. 2015, 218 pages, \$24.99 paper.

✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

Preaching to the New Athenians

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
January 2016¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism, by Timothy Keller. New York: Viking, 2015, 309 pages, \$19.95.

Keller's introduction begins by discussing three levels of the ministry of the Word. This made me wonder what I was in for, since I do have a few problems with some aspects of Keller's ecclesiology. Level one is one-on-one, every member Word ministry. Level two includes various teaching ministries in the church. Level three is the formal matter of "public preaching" (2). Immediately after this brief section Keller expands on "The Irreplaceability of Preaching," and this is what the vast majority of the book really covers. He clearly understands that the authority inherent in preaching is offensive to modern sensibilities and wisely states:

We live in a time when many are resistant to any hint of authority in pronouncements; so the culture's allergy to truth and the great skill that is required mean the church loses its

grasp on the crucial nature of preaching for the ministry of the gospel. (5–6)

I was enthusiastic about reading the book due to the promise in the subtitle, "Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism," of adding something to the homiletical conversation. I was not disappointed.

The book is divided into three parts: 1) "Serving the Word," 2) "Reaching the People," 3) "In Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power."

Keller does not pick up on Duane Litfin's² distinction in first-century rhetoric between persuasion and proclamation (the latter is Paul's choice in opposition to the Corinthian church's worldly expectations), but makes it clear that the use of the rhetorical arts will only result in spiritual eloquence if that use arises "out of the preacher's almost desperate love for the gospel truth itself and the people for whom accepting the truth is a matter of life and death" (14). His plea for preaching Christ as the "main theme and substance of the Bible's message" (15) is rooted in the main pericope for Litfin's thesis, 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5. This emphasis in turn is the impetus for preaching to the "cultural heart" (18–20), by identifying idolatrous aspirations and demonstrating how all good aspirations rooted in the *imago dei* are fulfilled in Christ. Relevance is not the aim of preaching because preaching must lay "bare the listener's life foundations" (21).

Keller contends for both topical and expository preaching, but recommends expository preaching as the best regular practice. But he also warns us that spending too much time on a particular book in a mobile society may actually rob people of the Bible's rich variety. Thus, he advocates using shorter books from a wider variety of genres (39–41). However, this is not the case in more rural settings where the population is far less transient than in Keller's New York City environment.

One of Keller's strongest and most helpful themes in this book is the centrality of preach-

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=531&issue_id=111.

2 Former seventh president of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

ing the gospel in every sermon. Chapter Two, “Preaching the Gospel Every Time,” is eloquent on this topic. He makes a careful and important distinction between law and gospel, and pleads for understanding their proper relationship so as to avoid both legalism and antinomianism (48–52). Both are enemies of God and undermine God’s grace and its holy purposes. “God’s costly love in Jesus Christ—who fulfilled God’s righteous law in his life and death—must be lifted up and grasped in order to combat the toxic untruths of our souls” (55). Keller is skilled at showing how redemptive history centered on Christ avoids moralism (61).

Chapter Three continues to unpack the theme “Preaching Christ from All of Scripture,” picking up on several contemporary works of biblical theology from Motyer, Dillard and Longman, and Clowney (71). There is a lot of very helpful advice here, illustrated with many specific examples, to show how we must preach Christ from every genre, theme, figure, image, and deliverance story. The book is very helpful in describing how to develop sermons. The appendix, “Writing an Expository Message,” is exemplary in this regard. Keller harkens back to many excellent traditional sources of homiletical wisdom, such as William Perkins (*The Art of Prophesying*, 1592), John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Robert Murray McCheyne, as well as a host of modern luminaries.

One area where Keller clearly adds to the homiletical conversation is in addressing modern urbanites. This is homiletics for contemporary urban ministry with a strong flavor of apologetics for postmodern people (what Keller prefers to call “late” moderns). The first two chapters of Part Two address preaching Christ to the culture and the late modern mind. Keller contends that, due to the “new situation” of secularism (94), the preacher must not assume much knowledge of Christianity. While the form of the sermon is not dead, the content must change to accommodate the late modern mind (95). We must confront the world in terms that it understands. Here Keller relies on P. T. Forsyth’s superb book *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907). Forsyth insists that the church

did not lead the world, nor echo it; she confronted it.... The Christian preacher is not the successor to the Greek orator, but of the Hebrew prophet.... The orator stirs men to [action], *the preacher invites them to be redeemed.* (96)

The early church confronted a radically secular culture through expository preaching because the Bible diagnoses human problems and needs. The preacher needs to adapt to the culture by addressing it with concepts and language that it understands as John did with his use of *logos*, “a philosophically and culturally freighted word in that society” (97).

The early Christian communicators knew the culture intimately and spoke in terms that were never incomprehensible, no matter how startling. They reframed the culture’s questions, reshaped its concerns, and redirected its hopes.

The concept of contextualizing always raises concerns for Reformed preachers.

Keller seeks to put our concerns to rest:

It means to resonate with yet defy the culture around you. It means to antagonize a society’s idols while showing respect for its people and many of its hopes and aspirations. (99)

Paul’s ministry in Athens is a model of this method. In order to implement this, Keller offers six practices: 1) Use accessible or well explained vocabulary; 2) Employ respected authorities to strengthen your theses; 3) Demonstrate an understanding of doubts and objections; 4) Affirm in order to challenge baseline cultural narratives; 5) Make gospel offers that push on the culture’s pressure points; 6) Call for gospel motivation. On this latter point Keller responds to the objection that he is giving too much attention to the nonbeliever by asserting: “It is a mistake to think that faithful believers in our time are not profoundly shaped by the narratives of modernity” (118). The gospel is always essential to the Christian life.

When preachers solve Christians' problems with the gospel—not by calling them to try harder but by pointing them to deeper faith in Christ's salvation—then believers are being edified and nonbelievers are hearing the gospel all at the same time. (120)

Keller comes to the heart of his subtitle in Chapter Five, "Preaching and the (Late) Modern Mind." Keller has clearly thought deeply about this topic. He understands that modernity in its late modern manifestation is not to be sharply distinguished from postmodernity, "which is less reversal of modernity than an intensification of its deepest patterns" (123). Both modernity and its later expressions have human autonomy in common.

The entire chapter is a great summary of what constitutes the late modern mind. Keller relies heavily on the works of philosopher Charles Taylor, whose monumental analysis of modernity, *A Secular Age* (2007), along with *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), and *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991), offers some profound insight.

"In order to preach to the secular person, we must resist secularity's own self-understanding" (126). Keller then analyzes the narratives of late modernity. The "rationality narrative" claims that "the natural world is the *only* reality" (129–30). The "history narrative" claims that humanity is making progress, and thus the "new is automatically better" (130). The "society narrative" encourages radical individualism in which "choice becomes the only sacred value and discrimination the only moral evil" (131). The "morality or justice narrative" believes in universal benevolence based on humanly determined norms (131–32). The "identity narrative" seeks worth in self-created and self-evaluated identity (132–33).

The rest of the chapter explains how to engage the "sovereign self" in each of these narratives (133–56). The question of identity must be altered to ask not "who am I?" but "whose am I?" (138). The idea of unbridled freedom leads to raw selfishness, but is in itself an illusion (143). The aspiration of love is contrary to this secular sacred notion

and makes marriage and all human relations impossible (145). Rebellion against God is the ultimate bondage, and only Jesus Christ can liberate us from such bondage and sin itself (145).

Modernity's quest for social justice should be engaged with a question: if we cannot ground morality in some external, objective source, why should we seek to reform the world? (146). Three problems arise in the areas of: moral motivation, obligation, and foundation. Unlike the Christian who is motivated by love for God and neighbor, the secularist is motivated by feelings of "satisfaction and superiority" and anger (147). While there are clearly moral nonbelievers, locating moral obligation without God is impossible (148–49). Which brings Keller to the third problem of asserting moral standards without reason. What Taylor calls "the extraordinary inarticulacy ... of modern culture" (150) is simply suppression of the source of many of our culture's better moral instincts: Christianity (151).

Keller engages the history and rationality narratives in terms of "science as the secular hope" (153). The presence of unfounded optimism in the progress of science and technology together with numerous dystopian cultural expressions show that the world is in desperate need of the hope that only the resurrection can offer (154).

The final chapter in this section deals with preaching to the heart. Keller relies on a biblical understanding of the heart that thinks and wills, "fundamentally, the heart puts its trust in things" (158). He launches into several sections based on Jonathan Edwards's understanding of the affections. Rejecting the opposition of head and heart, Keller opts for "logic on fire" (163, 165). He goes on to show preachers *how* to preach to the heart: affectionately, imaginatively, wondrously, memorably, Christocentrically, and practically.

Finally, Keller suggests tools for the preacher to stay fresh in his preaching. First, converse with a diverse group of people so that you are challenged to read beyond those with whom you agree (180–82). Second, consider the variety of possible hearers as exemplified in the parable of the soils in Mark 4 (182–83). Here Keller offers an invaluable

extended footnote (183n20, which should have been placed in the text in my opinion). Third, “weave application throughout the sermon” (183–85). Fourth, use variety in application, asking direct questions, suggesting tests for self-examination, and using a biblical variety of applications (185–86). Fifth, “be emotionally aware” by taking advantage of teachable moments and being “affectionate as well as forceful” (187).

The final part of the book has only one chapter, and it discusses the importance of the presence of the Spirit in preaching. This is an excellent corrective in the “age of technique” (195). Keller also focuses on the importance of the preacher’s own spiritual life, locating it in terms of three texts: the biblical text, the context of the worshippers, and the subtext of his own heart (200). He analyzes the latter in terms of several categories of preacher motivation, concluding with the only one that should count: the wonder of Christ. “The temptation will be to let the pulpit drive you to the Word, but instead you must let the Word drive you to the pulpit. Prepare the preacher more than you prepare the sermon” (205).

Keller has been dealing with what he calls “late modern” people in the intensely secular urban environment of New York City for a quarter of a century. He has sought to answer the question: How do we engage late moderns with the gospel without compromising Scripture? He points to Paul’s approach in Athens, where he notices that they have a religious instinct, but it is misdirected (Acts 17:22–31). He quotes the Greek philosophers Epimenides and Aratus who say, “In him we live and move and have our being,” and “For we are indeed his offspring” (Acts 17:28). He proposes the pattern of looking for the reflection of God’s image in the idolater’s thinking, then showing how Christianity challenges that thinking, and finally bringing the good news of the gospel as the perfect answer. We might summarize this so: Yes/No/Good News.

Here is a simple example: You believe that humanity can be perfected with artificial intelligence and/or robotics. I could agree with you that, yes, humanity is imperfect and in need of perfecting.

However, the Bible shows that your solution will fail, since it is not according to the image of God. Robots at best cannot replace humans and will only reflect our imperfections. We need a model of true humanity from outside of the human condition. You fail to take into account that the historic fall of mankind in Adam and Eve is the reason for our imperfection. Jesus Christ is the perfect model of a new humanity. The good news is that Jesus Christ came to save us from our imperfection. His substitutionary death pleases our perfect Creator and thus, when we turn from our sins, our imperfections, and trust Christ’s righteous substitutionary sacrifice, which enables us to have a living relationship with him, we can know true perfection.

This book is full of enormously helpful advice. A recent book critiquing Keller’s theology has contended that there is a lack of the doctrine of sin as lawlessness that offends God in Keller’s published works.³ Iain Campbell maintains that Keller’s use of idolatry as the root of all sin is inadequate because idolatry is only one way in which sin is expressed. I would contend that Keller is correct when he says that idolatry is the root of all sin. I would also insist that we preach about specific sins and show how they relate to idolatry. I cannot comment on what Keller says on this topic in his other works. But, at least in this book, *Preaching*, while the offense that idolatry, and the specific sins that emanate from it, cause God, is not explicitly mentioned, Keller does speak of the importance of the “examination of inner motivations and desires” (134); putting off the old self and putting on the new self in Christ (139); and quotes D. A. Carson favorably when he says:

The ultimate bondage is ... rebellion against the God who has made us. The despotic master is not Caesar, but shameful self-centeredness, an evil and enslaving devotion to created things at the expense of worship of the creator. (145)

³ Iain D. Campbell and William M. Schweitzer, *Engaging with Keller: Thinking through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2013).

Keller goes on to refer to biblical passages that deal with freedom from sin. Elsewhere he emphasizes the moral importance of Judgment Day “when all wrongs will be put right” (152). Finally Keller points to Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” to show that our good works cannot keep us out of hell (170).

I have one major formatting complaint: there are seventy pages of endnotes. This is excessive, especially when they are located so inaccessibly—at the end and without page ranges. At least some of this material should have been part of the main text, but at least making it accessible at the bottom of each page would help immensely. To make matters worse, there is no index, so Keller’s numerous references, and extended bibliographical notes, lie buried in the end notes. Penguin should know better.

There are many traditional emphases in this book, such as preaching to the heart and the Holy Spirit in preaching. But they are all aimed at ministry to late modern urbanites. Keller emphasizes faithfulness to the Word, preaching Christ from all of Scripture, and intelligent compassion for urban late modern people. This does not mean that the book will not be helpful to those in smaller rural and suburban settings, since the electronic media have spread the secular mindset everywhere.

One need not agree with Keller at every point either here or in his other books to benefit greatly from this book. I highly recommend it. ©

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Westminster Theology

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by **Jeffrey C. Waddington**

The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights, by J. V. Fesko. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014, 441 pages, \$28.00, paper.

It is a good time to live and be a student of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The outstanding work of Chad Van Dixhoorn and associates has greatly added to our understanding of the political and religious contexts for the calling and operation of the Westminster Assembly (the “synod of London,” as it is also known). Van Dixhoorn’s high level of scholarship is beginning to filter down to the pews. John Fesko, academic dean and professor of systematic and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, has provided the church with a fine study of our secondary standards with his *Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights*.

Fesko’s study is appropriately titled since he provides helpful and fascinating background detail, opening up for the reader broader vistas of understanding. The author does not merely provide background information of the political circumstances that gave rise to the assembly’s work (i.e., the English Civil War and the rise of antinomianism in the greater London metropolitan area), he explains the issues that mattered to the assembly divines and concepts and methods that were perhaps second nature to the divines but are no longer so for us. We think we know the standards, but Fesko sheds warm light on the chapters of the confession and the questions and answers of the catechisms. Once we have read this volume, we will not want to read the standards in an ahistorical sense ever again.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=529&issue_id=111.

The book is made up of thirteen chapters preceded by a preface, acknowledgements, and table of abbreviations and followed by a select annotated bibliography and three indices. Unfortunately, we can only give a passing sense of the book here. In the introductory chapter (23–31) Dr. Fesko outlines the present circumstances that have given rise to the writing of this study. The author explains the importance of being familiar with the original historical context of our doctrinal standards, of reading the confession and catechisms as highly nuanced consensus documents, of emphasizing primary over secondary sources, and he explains the plan of the book. All of this is helpful to let the reader know what he is in for.

In the second chapter Fesko gives a brief but clear overview of the historical and theological setting of the assembly (33–63). As many of our readers no doubt already know, in the Reformation politics and religion were intimately and inextricably intertwined. This was still the case more than a century after the commencement of the English Reformation under Henry VIII. What may surprise us is the highly charged eschatological atmosphere of the assembly. Many thought the Reformation would usher in the end of the world. Additionally, theological pluralism was the rule of the day. The divines were widely read in these theologies and were intimately familiar with errors and heresies. Many of these are targeted without being explicitly named in the standards. Finally, the assembly is understood rightly as a Reformed assembly that sought to be a functioning part of the larger continental Reformed community. Fesko points out that Calvin was one among a multitude of significant theological voices but by no means the only or even most important voice.

Chapters 3 through 12 cover the thirty-three chapters of the confession and the multitude of questions and answers in the two catechisms. Fesko expositions the doctrine of Scripture (65–93), God and the decrees (95–124), covenant and creation (125–167), the doctrine of Christ (169–205), justification (207–238), sanctification (239–266), the Law of God and the Christian life (267–297), the church (299–334), worship (335–362), and

eschatology (363–394) all with historical sensitivity and added light that makes studying the standards seem like an exciting new adventure even for those of us who have known them for many years. The conclusion (395–397) provides a concise wrap-up of the study, briefly hitting on salient points.

Before concluding, I need to offer a few criticisms and observations. I confess up front that I do not write as an expert on the historical background of the Westminster Standards but as a minister who has subscribed to them *ex animo*. First, I make the general observation that the author builds upon the groundbreaking scholarship of Richard Muller and his school. This makes perfect sense as Muller and his associates have done a yeoman's service to the church and the academy by correcting multiple misunderstandings of the Reformed Scholastic tradition especially as it relates to the work of John Calvin. Muller has been right in challenging the so-called "Calvin versus the Calvinists" school of thought where Calvin is seen as the gold standard and all others in the Scholastic tradition as defectors from that high point.

The Westminster Assembly has been understood in that light as an egregious example of departure from Calvin at significant points. Fesko properly reminds us that Calvin was a brilliant theologian in his day, but he was one among many giants. We should not confuse Calvin's profound contemporary influence with his having the same standing in his own day or at the time of the assembly. Point well taken. However, the author makes this point on multiple occasions. One gets the impression that Fesko is not only trying to correct a misapprehension about Calvin's standing and influence in his own day but that he is also trying to diminish Calvin's position in our day. There is a reason why Calvin is a classic. This is a theological verdict and not merely a historical one. Perhaps Calvin has had an outsized influence upon Reformed theology because he is theologically significant. On the other hand, it may simply be a matter of happenstance and what books have been translated out of Latin. Having said all this, it is undoubtedly correct that we ought to refer to ourselves as Reformed rather than Calvinistic since

Calvin is one among a constellation of excellent and learned theologians within our heritage.

Second, Dr. Fesko offers a fascinating discussion of hypothetical universalism (187–205). It is a fact that there were members present in the assembly who held this view, and the author notes the complexity of the matter and the various views that fall under the label of hypothetical universalism. My concern is not with the details of the discussion. Muller has brought this issue to our attention as well so we are familiar with it. My concern is theological more than historical. As I have already noted, it is a fact that members of the assembly held to a variety of views that can be classified as forms of hypothetical universalism.

However, beyond reminding us that at the time of the assembly hypothetical universalism was a live option, one senses that there is also at work here a theological agenda. The contemporary view is too narrow perhaps. Church history hopefully involves an increasingly more precise and improved understanding of the Scriptures and theology. In other words, should we try to turn back the clock and broaden our confessional views on this? Maybe so. Maybe not. That is a matter for exegetical, biblical, and systematic theology. Historical theology has reminded us that at one point hypothetical universalism, at least in some of its variations, was acceptable. We can't un-ring the bell as they say. We know that there were pre-Nicene forms of Trinitarian theology and views of our Lord's hypostatic union that predate Chalcedon. Does that mean we want to resurrect them to offer them as legitimate alternatives to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and Chalcedonian Formula? We recognize that there is development in theology and that we need to be historically sensitive to this. Would it be right to judge earlier formulations by later standards? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that if a later development actually is an improvement, refinement and correction to earlier views, we would not want to revert to the earlier formulations. No, in the sense that we will recognize earlier formulations as defective but not necessarily erroneous or heretical.

Third, and finally, Fesko discusses the putative

influence of the theology of Jonathan Edwards on the typical understanding of God's decree and the relation of God's sovereignty and human responsibility (97–99). Fesko affirms that Edwards denies contingency and secondary causality in creation which are in fact affirmed in the confession.² Fesko builds on a lecture recently given by Richard Muller at the Jonathan Edwards Center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and later published in the online journal *Jonathan Edwards Studies*.³ As an Edwards scholar myself, I remember listening to the Muller lecture and not being quite satisfied with its accuracy. More recently it has been demonstrated that Edwards, in fact, did hold to both contingency and secondary causality.⁴ This is a minor point in the argument of the chapter, but since we are aiming for historical and theological contextual sensitivity, more work should be undertaken in this area including a reading of a broader swath of Edwards's literary corpus.

None of my criticisms vitiates the book's excellence as a whole. I recommend John Fesko's work to church officers and congregants as well. Fesko's work now joins Van Dixhoorn and Letham on my bookshelf providing a historically and theologically sensitive study of the Westminster Standards. ©

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2 I am indebted to the work of Scott Doherty and Michael Preciado for insights into the issue. Doherty has written an excellent as of yet unpublished analysis of Richard Muller and Paul Helm on Edwards's lack of agreement with the confession at this point. See his "Edwards Unflattened: The Rich Landscape of Causality in Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of Will: A response to Muller and Helm on Jonathan Edwards' View of Free Will." Preciado is currently working on a Ph.D. dissertation on the subject as well.

3 Richard A. Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice: A Parting of the Ways in the Reformed Tradition," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 1, no.1 (2012), cited in Fesko, 98n6.

4 Related to this is undoubtedly Edwards's purported embrace of the doctrines of continuous creation and occasionalism. Continuous creationism is the idea that the universe is created anew every moment so that the standard distinction between creation and providence appears to be denied. Occasionalism is the view that God is the only causal agent at work in the universe. If this is so, then secondary causality is denied. These two distinct doctrines are often fused together in the secondary literature.

Testing Faith

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by **Sherif Gendy**

The Testing of God's Sons: The Refining of Faith as a Biblical Theme, by Gregory S. Smith. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2014, 240 pages, \$24.99, paper.

In this book, Gregory S. Smith explores the theological theme of testing the faith, which emerges in the Old Testament and stretches across the New Testament. Written with a pastoral voice, yet in a scholarly manner, this book deals with tests of faith involving suffering and hardship for the sake of refinement. Smith encourages believers who experience suffering to embrace the testing of their faith. He rightly recognizes the covenantal function of testing since it reveals God's concern for the faith of his saints, and through it God responds to the rebellion of his people. This book is divided into five chapters followed by a helpful bibliography. Here is a summary with assessment for each chapter.

1. The Language of Testing

In this chapter, Smith focuses on the language of testing and explores its semantic range, drawing from both the biblical context and the world of the ancient Near East. He examines three primary biblical terms: נִסָּה (*nasah*) for testing as revealing, בִּחָן (*bohan*) for testing as authentication, and צָרַח (*saraph*) for testing as refining. These terms share a range of meaning that includes test, try, prove, examine, and scrutinize. Smith shows how the biblical idea of testing stems from a metallurgical background in relation to the use of the ancient touchstone for the examination of the quality of precious metals like gold. As such, testing ranges in degrees of intensity from mild, to medium, to hot.

Smith engages the concept of testing in the ancient world through some Akkadian texts. He observes a variety of categories for testing including testing by examination, verification, lifting one's head, and refinement. In the ancient world, testing was primarily for the judgment of angry gods. Thus, the biblical portrayal remains unique as Yahweh acts as a covenant suzerain to call for and cultivate the faith and fidelity of his people.

Smith demonstrates that testing has pastoral implications since the Lord is obligated by covenant relationship to test his people. The intersection of covenant relationship with a fallen world demands it to be so. While the notion of covenant testing is comforting, one wonders how it relates to the idea of temptation. Except for a footnote in the book's introduction, Smith does not elaborate on the concept of tempting and its relation to testing.

2. Testing in the Joseph Narrative

Here Smith focuses on the Joseph narrative and its unique contribution to the theology of testing and Israel's understanding of her experience of testing that is presented throughout the rest of the Pentateuch. Smith discusses the works of some scholars, including Hermann Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad, regarding their treatment of the meaning of the fear of God and its relation to testing. He notes that the intent of Joseph's testing was to illustrate the quality of faith and loyalty that would have been vital for success in the Promised Land. This intention is realized when Joseph recognizes that the testing he endured was meant by God for his good and for the good of his family. Smith reads Joseph's experience, which anticipates Israel's wilderness experience, in parallel with Abraham's testing in Genesis 22, since both model covenant fidelity for Israel. Although Smith is open to reading Joseph's narrative as a model for Israel and a type for their wilderness experience, he does not discuss its relation to Christ's suffering and his enduring of hardship.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=528&issue_id=111.

3. Testing as a Unified Pentateuchal Theological Theme

Smith examines the Pentateuch's presentation of testing, which involves two kinds of testing. First, aural tests authenticate and check for faith as in the experiences of Abraham, the Israelite midwives, Moses, and Israel at Sinai. Second, experiential tests refine and enhance faith as seen at Shur and Sin, Massah, the wilderness wanderings, and the events noted in the book of Deuteronomy. Smith argues that the Pentateuch as a whole shares an internal consistency with regard to its presentation of this significant biblical theme as a basis for Israel to remember the covenant relationship she has with Yahweh. This relationship requires faith and loyalty and therefore necessitates testing as a means for quality check and quality improvement. Smith highlights the significance of Abraham's experience for Israel by showing how Abraham functions as a model of covenant obedience who fulfills the necessary mediatorial role in Israel's history.

Smith rightly highlights the consistency of Yahweh's fidelity despite the inconsistency and repeated failure of his covenant people. He notices the relationship between fear and testing that occurs in testing contexts.

4. Testing of God's Sons

This chapter demonstrates that God tests his sons—Adam, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, Israel, Jesus, and the church. Starting with Adam, Smith shows how testing has been an element of God's interaction with his creation from the very beginning. The connections Smith makes between Adam and Israel's testing and refinement of their own loyalty and fidelity to God's commands are significant. Smith rightly describes God's activity in Genesis as a suzerain who commands and creates a world where covenant relationship is the desired outcome. Adam's violation of his relational status with God activates the terms that require exile in a world subjected to futility. Adam's shattered image works with this futility as the means to further amplify humanity's experience of

refinement. Israel's long covenant history illustrates how God works through this futility to refine the faith and fidelity of his people. It is through the experience of God's tested sons that the church is invited to more fully and deeply understand her own experience of testing. Through testing we learn that God demands the exclusive loyalty, dependence, faith, and obedience of his people.

A discussion of how testing works in the life and ministry of Israel's prophets is missing in this chapter. Another discussion on the testing of the disciples and apostles would have been helpful. Smith's treatment of Christ's testing is very brief, and he limits it to the wilderness account in Matthew 4. Moreover, while Smith makes the connection between Christ's testing and Israel's in the wilderness, he does not relate the testing of Christ to that of Adam.

5. Conclusion

Here Smith summarizes his study of the biblical theme of testing, highlighting his conclusions. The two categories Smith suggests for understanding testing in its biblical context are the aural test (quality check) and the test of experience (quality improvement). His investigation of the Joseph narrative, through these categories of meaning, leads him to recognize the retrospective and prospective theological vantage point for Israel. For Smith, Joseph's testing functions as a theological link between the patriarchal narratives and the rest of the Pentateuch. The individual testing of the patriarchs functions as an example for the corporate experience of Israel's testing as a nation. By looking at Christ's testing through suffering, Smith is able to articulate the value of God's love established through the suffering of the saints and authenticated through testing.

Smith provides two appendices to his book. The first appendix, "Testing as Touchstone," provides further discussion on the relationship of the Hebrew term *bohan* (בְּחָן) and its basic meaning of "touchstone." Based on this comparison study, Smith sees a link between the stages of authentication and refining in the ancient processing of gold

and the early meaning of בֹּהַן (*bohan*). The second appendix, “Covenant Good as Functional Good,” explains how the creation terms בָּרָא (*bara*) and טָב (*tub*) work together in covenant context to emphasize the functionality of the created order.

This book attempts to develop a biblical theology of testing. It shows how God, in the context of a fallen world, is primarily concerned with the refining and authenticating of his people’s faith. Smith limits the intent of the testing narratives in the lives of Adam, Abraham, and Joseph to providing Israel with a window of understanding and insight into her own experience. While this might be true, it is not the full and complete purpose and intent of such narratives. The canon provides the context for such narratives to be understood. In canonical hermeneutics, the narratives’ intent is not bound up with what the original audience might have understood—something that always renders speculations. Rather, the intent lies within the canonical presentation as the narratives take their final shape within the canon. For this reason, testing in the lives of these biblical characters serves a larger, theological purpose that is accessible when one considers the whole counsel of God in the Scriptures as it reaches its climax in the person and work of Christ.

From a pastoral perspective, proper understanding of testing helps us see how hardships, difficulties, and sufferings are necessary means by which God refines the believer’s faith. Smith reminds us that through suffering we share in the suffering of Christ and will ultimately share in his glory in eternity. As the perfect high priest, Christ identifies with the suffering of his people to assist those enduring testing through suffering. He offers mercy, grace, and help in the believer’s time of greatest need.

This biblical understanding of testing offers a theological basis for encouragement and hope to the faithful who struggle—even suffer—in their demonstration of fidelity both to God and to others in the community of faith. James exhorts us to consider it all joy when we encounter testing (1:2). Testing through suffering is an essential part of God’s obligation to keep his covenant promises.

The sufferings we endure are part of our redemption as they serve our Spirit-wrought sanctification in our lives. ☺

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Preacher, Take Aim!

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by **A. Craig Troxel**

The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text, by Murray Capill. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014, 258 pages, \$16.99, paper.

Imagine an older minister whimsically telling a newly ordained man, “You will always need more of books on preaching.” This may be your reaction to yet another book on preaching (it is often mine). And then there’s the sub-title on something you’ve never thought about: *application* in preaching. Okay, so you have thought about that and the debate is closed. Those reasons alone may dissuade you from ever cracking open this book or any other new book on preaching. Or perhaps your preference is to “dust off” that older, much-loved volume—surely a proper instinct (after sampling the old, few desire the new, because they say “the old is good”). Much of what Mr. Capill opens for us is rather vintage, even if it is under a new label.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=534&issue_id=112.

So whether your school is redemptive-historical or puritanical, topical or expository, you should give this book a try and see if there is something here that would benefit your preaching—assuming of course that it needs improvement.

Developing a spiritual gift is not possible if we're not open to growth, or if we're too quick to dismiss anything alien to our beloved paradigm on preaching. Or both. When I was in my first pastorate, an older minister told me that he did not care for expository preaching because it was boring. I knew immediately that what he said could not possibly be true, because I was an expository preacher! (The memory of my thoughts still makes me shudder.) My perspective has since changed; not in my convictions about expositing Scripture, but in my desire to become proficient in this craft sometime before I die. I have also come to appreciate what Geoffrey Thomas once quipped, that so much of what takes place in evangelical pulpits is really nothing more than a glorified Bible study, which gets at the concern of this book. Capill rejoices in the revival of expository preaching, but he would much prefer a revival of *compelling* expositional preaching. Preaching calls for more than undiluted exegesis that is dumped upon kindly congregations, who know what longsuffering is on a weekly basis. More is required. Application is required. And Murray Capill deserves a respectful read, given his several pastorates in New Zealand and Australia, and his teaching on pastoral ministry and preaching at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Australia.

Capill's basic premise is that "effective expository preaching takes place when biblical faithfulness and insightful application are inextricably bound together" (14). Nothing revolutionary there. But understanding how the two work together is the challenge. And our deficiencies prove it, whether they stem from flawed views of preaching and application or from deficits in training and gifts. Nevertheless the task remains, taking what Scripture teaches and getting it to "stick" or apply to our listeners. That's what biblical preaching is, applying gospel truth to the heart (56). And it must be holistic application—applying all of God's

Word to all of a person's life. There are three stages in this process of preaching application.

The first stage is to appreciate the purpose of God's Word. Capill makes his case chiefly from 2 Timothy 3:16 and argues that the Word has four main purposes: 1) to teach the truth and rebuke false doctrine; 2) to train in godliness and correct wrong-doing; 3) to test the heart and bring conviction; and, 4) to encourage and exhort. Each of these purposes are detailed and then illustrated from Scripture. Some will say that he has been somewhat arbitrary in the categories he uses, but none could fault them for their propriety. Personally, I think he has unnecessarily restricted the vocabulary's range of meaning and significance in 2 Timothy 3:16 (e.g., "rebuke" pertains to life as much as it does to doctrine).

The second stage is to make sure that the preacher's "reservoir" remains full. The reservoir is "all that lives within a preacher" (81). As any preacher knows, just as he pours himself into the sermon, so also the sermon comes through him, if not sucking life out of him—as Ian MacPherson wrote, "every real sermon that a man preaches appreciably shortens his days."² In the preacher's preparation the biblical text has already begun to stir in him, move him, and connect itself to much of what he has previously read, thought, lived, and known—it is expanding him. And he must continue to fill the reservoir through his walk with God, in prayer, through his theological knowledge, and by keenly experiencing and observing the fullness of life. If he does not, then the reservoir will run dry, and it will eventually become evident in his preaching—to the spiritual detriment of those he serves.

The third stage in the process of preaching application is hitting the target—the heart. Since the "end goal of preaching is to draw people to love God with all their heart," we must know something about the heart, the core that defines who we are (97). Capill explains that the faculties of the human heart are the *mind* (the rational center of our

2 Ian MacPherson, *The Burden of the Lord* (London: Epworth, 1955), 47.

being), the *conscience* (the warning system), the *will* (what determines choices and actions), and the *passions* (what we desire and feel); all which work in conjunction, not independently. The task then is to preach the text so that it finds its mark by impacting the whole heart.

Effective application will aim for a change of heart. This inevitably entails confronting the idols of the heart with skill and grace, as well as with an appreciation for the diversity of those who hear the Word. The diversity Capill has in view is the spiritual condition of each and every soul. Most Reformed pastoral theologies offer similar taxonomies (e.g., Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*). Capill offers as simple a grid as you will ever find, but it is useful. He states that for some people things are going well, and for others things are not; some know it and some do not. Whatever grid a sensitive pastor uses, he lovingly thinks of his people as his sermon simmers in his own heart, and he remembers how they are spread across the spectrum of spiritual maturity, mood, and discernment.

With these ideas in mind and with the biblical text in hand, the preacher must “state it, ground it, impress it, and apply it” (151). To do this he has several arrows in his quiver to ensure that he hits his mark: He appeals to sound judgment, he anticipates objections, he offers incentives, and he speaks directly and passionately, using illustrations that clarify and words that are vivid.

With a book that emphasizes the heart, it would be tempting to stereotype his approach as partial to pietism. However, Capill provides a chapter on the importance of “preaching the kingdom,” by which he means preaching about the Christian’s responsibility and calling in society. On this point, some will not favor the concerted transformational bent of his comments; but post-millennial brethren will rejoice! Nor will all agree with his comment that we should consider “the whole of life as the setting for true worship” (183). Nevertheless, his larger point should be heard and granted: True piety is *firstly* of the heart, but not *only* of the heart (177). We must not neglect empowering our people’s confidence in their

vocation, namely that God has called them to be salt, light, and leaven in the world.

Capill also dedicates chapters to preaching application from the narrative sections of Scripture and applying the indicative and imperative moods of Scriptural teaching (interestingly he lists subjunctives as a separate category). Last of all he speaks of our holistic preparation for this task and gives practical advice.

So what are the strengths and weaknesses of this book?

One general strength of this book lies in its canvassing the overall task of preparing a sermon, from beginning to end. It is always profitable to reflect upon the process of preaching, especially if we can do it living in the mind of someone more experienced. Moreover, when we are forced to view preaching from another preacher’s perspective, it can bring more clarity and depth, and if we’re open to it, more width. The preacher who is dedicated to expositional preaching will find a ready ally and “Barnabas” in Murray Capill. If you have already decided that you disagree with him on application (even though you have not yet read his book!), you may want to risk it anyway. There is the possibility that you can learn something to make your preaching more interesting, assuming of course that it needs improvement in that way.

As for content, the book’s leading strength is its explanation of the heart. Too many books assume that we all know what is meant by the heart. Not true. Although he makes no such claim, Capill’s model, more or less, mirrors the Puritans’ understanding of the heart. I observe this to his credit, especially since his burden is to prove his view from Scripture, not from history. In this area, the Puritans are at their best and the modern preacher will find more depth if he can replicate (not imitate!) their skill in speaking to the heart. I would diverge slightly from Capill’s model. My studies of the heart have convinced me that Scripture gives us three (not four) faculties of the heart: the mind, the will, and the desires (or what the Puritans called the “affections”). Contrary to Capill, I believe “conscience” is a term running parallel to other biblical vocabulary that describe the inner

person (e.g., “soul,” “spirit”). It is not a distinct faculty of the heart. John Owen usually leaned toward the threefold grid, but on occasion he did include the conscience like our author. So Mr. Capill is in handsome company and my quibble is inconsequential for his thesis. The principal issue is that he works from a robust Reformed anthropology with consistency and complements it with a clear grasp of God’s grace in Christ. One senses that it would be a privilege to sit under this man’s preaching and hear sermons saturated with a “gospel tone”—to use Robert L. Dabney’s language.

I do have a question about how he integrates the faculties of the heart and how they work together. He states that the mind “is at the top” of the heart and is “the entrance point of the soul,” and that “the mind comes first” and is the “entrance point to the other faculties of the heart” (103, 105). Whereas the passions reside at the bottom of the heart, representing the deepest and most powerful forces of the heart (103, 119). He sees a pecking order here in preaching. We must appeal to the mind first and then work our way “down” through the conscience and will and last of all affecting the passions. He does not defend this order from Scripture. I think that would be difficult. It would be better to communicate how all the faculties are constantly and mutually influencing one another. But I hesitate to critique him too briskly on this point for two reasons. First of all, Jerry Bridges and Sinclair Ferguson say something similar to Capill and those are two names not to reckon with flippantly. Secondly, it is easy to see his point: preaching that aims for the heart cannot, and must not bypass the mind. On that we can all agree. Besides such an emphasis provides a refreshing antidote to the sooty post-modern air many are breathing these days, wittingly or not.

This book is a welcomed encouragement to every preacher who earnestly desires to be faithful to the text he preaches and in the task of preaching, namely, to target the hearts of the members of his flock. Murray Capill has thought carefully and extensively about this task. He can help us to improve in the unspeakable privilege we have to proclaim the one who has graciously and eternally

taken up his lordly residence in our hearts. ©

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Old Testament Theology

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by **Sherif Gendy**

Old Testament Theology, Volume One: Israel’s Gospel, by John Goldingay. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015, 940 pages, \$45.00, paper.

This is the first of a three-volume Old Testament theology in which John Goldingay, professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, attempts to formulate the theology of the Old Testament without looking at it through a Christian or even New Testament lens, as he admits. In this volume, Goldingay treats the Old Testament as the story of God’s relationship with the world and with Israel. Goldingay’s approach is that of a narrative theology, highlighting how the Old Testament gospel comes in the shape of a narrative that tells Israel’s story and God’s involvement in a particular sequence of events in the world. Goldingay tells the story of Israel’s gospel as a series of divine acts. These acts form ten chapters that are preceded by an introduction, and followed by a postscript.

From the outset, Goldingay lays out his goal to discuss the Old Testament’s own theological

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=535&issue_id=112.

content and implications. He states that he does not focus on the Old Testament as witness to Christ, pointing to Christ, or as prophesying or predicting Christ. He does not talk in terms of that which is concealed in the old and is revealed in the new. Goldingay does not consider the Old Testament as foreshadowing the New Testament nor does he see it as law succeeded by the gospel. Rather, he examines the biblical order of God's creation and interactions with the world and Israel. Throughout the chapters, Goldingay uses "First Testament" to refer to the Old Testament and "Yhwh" to refer to Israel's God.

Ignoring the activity of Christ in the Old Testament presents a theological pitfall and goes against the essence of the Old Testament's ontological claims about the oneness of God's being. The apostolic confession that *Jesus is one with the God of Israel who sent him* is a theological judgment made necessary by claims about the oneness of God's being inherent in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4). The Father and the Son are one in their being, and the incarnation of Christ reveals his relationship with the Father—a relationship that *did not begin to be true* at the incarnation, rather, it has always been true from eternity. Therefore, if Christ's claim to be the revealer of the Father is true (Matt. 11:27), then Christ *has always been* the revealer of the Father from eternity. Because this ontological reality about the incarnate Jesus holds true for both testaments, it ultimately establishes the ontological preconditions for the Christological witness inherent in the Old Testament. Thus, it is simply mistaken to suggest that reading the Old Testament in its own terms does not allow for a Christological witness.

Following the introduction, Goldingay discusses in chapter 1 God's act of creation in terms of God's adventure and working with "Ms. Insight" who was there at the beginning with God (Prov. 8). Goldingay speaks of God's activities at creation where God thought, spoke, birthed, prevailed, created, built, arranged, shaped, delegated, planted, and relaxed. According to Goldingay, God prevailed in creation by defeating other dynamic forces and bringing order and structure. Worthy

of note here is Goldingay's take on the Hebrew verb בָּרָא (*bara*) in Genesis 1:1. He argues that it does not refer to creating out of nothing, or the beginning of things. Rather, its emphasis is on the sovereignty of what God achieves. In doing so, Goldingay reads the creation account against the Babylonian story, *Enuma Elish*, and argues that the narrative of Genesis 1 presupposes the existence of matter, or raw material, for God to use. The creation of man and woman in God's image reflects, according to Goldingay, their commission to master the world as God delegated his authority to them over the rest of the animate world. While Goldingay brings new and insightful nuances to the creation account, he presents some challenges for many well-established biblical notions like creation *ex nihilo*—from nothing. Aside from the Babylonian story, it is difficult to justify exegetically from Genesis 1 the existence of raw material that God used for creation. Creation *ex nihilo* is the precise conclusion to which one arrives through responsible hermeneutics and careful exegesis of Genesis 1.

In chapter 2, Goldingay explores the different aspects of the Fall of man and the consequences of that fall, covering the events from Eden to Babel (Gen. 1–11). One of the results of the fall, according to Goldingay, is the patriarchy that ruled between Adam and Eve, which is indicated in Adam's naming of Eve in Genesis 3:20. Goldingay argues that Genesis 1–2 shows that its society was able to portray egalitarianism. He does not explain, however, how Adam's naming of Eve is an indication of patriarchy or how before the fall egalitarianism was in view.

In discussing Adam and Eve's action in Genesis 3, Goldingay prefers to call it "failure" and "loss" over "sin" or "fall," claiming that the Bible's two Testaments do not speak of this event as "sin." This is not true since Romans 5:12, and 15–17 are among the biblical passages that clearly speak of what happened in Genesis 3 as sin. Goldingay also suggests that the creation's groaning in Romans 8 did not necessarily begin after the fall. He argues that the world by its nature is subject to decay and death from the beginning. A close reading

of Romans 8, however, reveals that just as the creation has been groaning (v. 2), believers also groan as they wait eagerly for adoption, which is the redemption of their bodies (v. 23). Thus, both the creation and the humans' groaning have to do with the fall and the state of misery, which only consummated redemption will reverse.

Chapters 4–6 focus on God's promise to Israel's ancestors through his commitment to Abraham (chap. 4), his delivering of Israel through Moses in the exodus (chap. 5), and God's speaking at Sinai and disciplining through the wilderness (chap. 6). In discussing Yhwh's covenant promise to Abraham, Goldingay argues that throughout Israel's history Yhwh often takes the risk of serious self-binding where there is no way out of fulfilling the commitment. This is true as far as one considers the true recipient of God's promises who perfectly obeys him. Paul tells us that Christ is the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), and as such, all the promises were given to him and fulfilled in him (Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20). Therefore, because Christ's loyalty and perfect obedience are sure, Yhwh's promises are truly self-binding and he ultimately fulfills what he promises. However, to Abraham and his descendants according to the flesh, Yhwh's covenant promises are contingent upon Israel's loyalty or lack thereof. Israel's loyalty, in the form of obedience, is met with covenant blessings (Deut. 28:1–14), and Israel's disloyalty, in the form of disobedience, is met with covenant curses (Deut. 28:15–68).

Yhwh's promise to Abraham has three elements: gaining land, becoming a people, and becoming a blessing. These elements find partial fulfillment and are also imperiled. Goldingay masterfully unfolds the details of how these elements play out in the history of Israel's ancestors. In describing God's act as a king in the exodus, Goldingay speaks of the God who delivers his people, remembers, rescues, and acts forcefully through signs and wonders. Through the exodus, Yhwh shows his insistence to reclaim his son and reveals himself and his name. Following the exodus, Goldingay speaks of Yhwh's sealing his covenant at Sinai, which involved his requirement of Israel

to be committed to the covenant by obeying its stipulations. Yhwh's meeting with Israel in Sinai reveals his splendor, goodness, and grace, which necessitates sacramental cleansing. Moreover, at Sinai, Yhwh is setting up models for Israel. There are the models of servanthood where Moses is portrayed as a prophet, priest, teacher, and leader. There are also models of peoplehood where Israel is to be a family, assembly, organization, army, congregation, hierocracy, cult, whole, movement, and settlement.

Chapters 7–9 cover the God who gave the land, accommodated from Joshua to Solomon, and wrestled from Solomon to the exile. Here Goldingay continues to lay out the main events in the wilderness and Israel's experiences with God. He highlights the people's protest and rebellion on the journey and Yhwh's reaction. The pattern set in the wilderness is repeated in the people's subsequent life in the land. Goldingay rightly identifies the correlation between Israel's experience and the church's; the church needs to consider its destiny in light of Israel, being both holy and sinful, thus continually needing repentance and reform. This correlation is only possible and meaningful, however, through the work of Christ, which Goldingay fails to admit.

In discussing Israel's wars as the means of receiving God's gift, Goldingay suggests four models working together as follows: 1) military campaign where Israel came from outside and the process was abrupt; 2) migration where Israel came from outside and the process was gradual; 3) social revolution where Israel came from inside and the process was abrupt; and 4) cultural differentiation where Israel came from inside and the process was gradual. Goldingay's textual justification for these models is not convincing and lacks a coherent presentation.

Moving from Joshua to Solomon, Goldingay explains the stories of Israel's life in the land, showing us the tragic dimension to human experience. According to Goldingay, these stories offer a series of studies of men doing what they have to do and portraits of women living in a man's world. These stories give men raw material for reflection on their

masculinity and give women pictures of what they need to know about men. Likewise, these stories manifest further variety in the way Yhwh's activity interacts with human experience and decision making. However, reducing the theological implications of these stories to such socio-economic interests and concerns misplaces their significance in redemptive history.

Goldingay describes the history from Solomon to the exile as the history of God's disappointments. Since Yhwh alone is the God of Israel and ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations, he expects Israel to give him an exclusive commitment by wholeheartedly relying on him and maintaining proper worship in the temple. Israel's failure, however, provoked Yhwh's reactions of anger, rejection tempered by grace, pity, long-temperedness, and mercy that eventually runs out. Goldingay shows how Yhwh works by using natural and human processes, taking initiatives behind the scenes, sending prophets with bewildering commissions, using chance and the inexplicable, and through supernatural and natural force and violence.

Goldingay refers to the prophets as men with mysterious power whom God sends to take initiatives as humans who embody the divine. For Goldingay, the prophets are seers and sentinels who announce Yhwh's intention although they are unreliable since their words do not always come true. Rather than describing the prophets as unreliable, it is better to speak of historical contingencies intervening between the prophets' predictions and their fulfillments. These contingencies arise when certain events, which take place after the prophetic words, direct the course of history in ways not anticipated by prophetic announcements.²

Chapter 10 concerns God preserving Israel through the exile and restoration. In the exile Yhwh abandoned his people, and in the restoration he returned to them. Goldingay argues that the biblical texts portray Israel after the return from

the exile as a community that is restored, worshipping, listening to Moses's teaching, distinct from the Gentiles, and subservient. In the context of the exile and the restoration, the First Testament presents Ezra as a priest and theologian, Nehemiah as a man who prays and builds walls, Daniel as a wise politician, and Esther as an intrepid woman.

The last chapter is about God sending Jesus. Goldingay speaks of Jesus as a herald of God's reign, prophet and teacher, the man anointed as king, word embodied, divine surrender, and light of the world.

In the postscript, Goldingay discusses the relationship of Old Testament theology to history. He asserts that the Old Testament narratives were written in familiar ancient genres, corresponding to the nature of history writing in that ancient world. Therefore, biblical authors did not confine themselves to factual material in their narrative writing, that is to say, they did not intend to communicate facts or factual history. Using the story of the conquest of Jericho as an illustration, Goldingay refers to the archeological evidence that Jericho was unoccupied in Joshua's day. Thus, the biblical story does not have the form of a factual narrative. He also asserts that Old Testament writers used their inspired creativity as they used their imaginations in composing speeches, conversations, sermons, and prayers that were not in fact uttered by the people to whom they are attributed. Goldingay believes that Genesis 1 and 2 are imaginative parables about the way God created the world.

One wonders how Goldingay's views on history and biblical narratives could be consistent with his claims of believing in the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament narrative. Old Testament narratives present themselves as factual history and later Old Testament writers, inspired by the same God, understood them and used these narratives in their writings as factual history. In similar ways, Jesus and the apostles treated these narratives as an accurate representation of true history. Biblical writers did not doubt the historicity of such narratives when they built their writings on what God has done in the history of Israel as faithfully recorded in Israel's Scriptures. Redemption is

² See Richard L. Pratt, "Historical Contingences and Biblical Predictions: An Inaugural Address Presented to the Faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary," http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/th.pratt.historical_contingencies.pdf.

rooted in history and unfolds in historical realities.

Although this volume is full of subheadings, there is no conclusion at the end of each chapter, and so it is hard at times to follow Goldingay's main points and identify his arguments. He admits his weakness in finding it difficult to write a conclusion. He does so because, according to Goldingay, the Bible story has no conclusion. This assessment is inaccurate since the biblical story does, in fact, have a conclusion in the finished work of Christ. The redemptive plan of God reaches its goal in the inauguration of God's kingdom through Christ's first advent, continuation of this kingdom through the work of his Spirit in the church, and consummation of the kingdom at Christ's second coming. ©

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Some Pluralisms Are More Inclusive Than Others

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief, by George M. Marsden. New York: Basic Books, 2015, xxxix + 219 pages, \$26.99.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=543&issue_id=113.

George M. Marsden once laughed when I suggested, almost twenty years ago, that he write a memoir. He did not think his experience was worthy of the genre. With *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, Marsden comes the closest yet in his many thoughtful historical inquiries to reflections on his own past. Granted, it is a window with a small opening—the mid-twentieth-century decades of his youth. But the book's introduction has the ring of nostalgia for an America that has now been lost:

I remember well how, in the spring of 1949, when I was ten years old, the fields near my home where we used to roam were suddenly marked off with patterns of stakes. A building project was launched with some fanfare.... By the next spring, our town had a full-fledged suburb, where I would soon be delivering newspapers. In such places, more and more young families could participate in the American dream of owning their own homes endowed with up-to-date modern conveniences. (ix)

In those new suburbs, father went to work, mothers reared children, children rode bikes, families watched television and went to church on Sundays. "There was little reason not to believe that," Marsden recalls, "if peace could be maintained, progress would continue."

That sense of optimism and how it failed is the subject of Marsden's book. In it he analyzes the assumptions of mainstream American culture in the 1950s, the ones that tempted Americans like Marsden to think peace and prosperity might be the wave of the future, where religion figured in those assumptions, and what the collapse of the post-war consensus meant for Christianity in America.

The 1950s recipe for the consensus that Marsden explores was two cups Enlightenment and two tablespoons liberal Protestantism. The origins of this concoction went back to the American founding and the belief that reason was an adequate basis for fair government and individual rights, along with a recognition that a free society

depended on virtuous citizens who needed religion to underwrite a sense of moral duty. Americans in the 1950s could read lots of public intellectuals who worried about the fragility of this consensus. Some, like the literary critic Dwight MacDonald, lamented the effects of mass culture (television, radio, and other such middle-brow expressions) on American character. Some, like the op-ed writer and political advisor Walter Lippmann, feared that the American consensus lacked an adequate philosophical basis. Others, like the sociologist William Whyte, fretted that the application of science to the nation's organizations was destroying both American individualism and the ideal of personal autonomy. Even so, Americans were still united in defending individual freedom, free speech, civil rights, equality before the law, due process, economic opportunities, and civic-mindedness.

Marsden does not observe that most if not all of these ideals are still in full force though applied differently. What he does point out, which may explain the differences between the 1950s and today, is that the consensus after World War II rarely included minorities and women. American attachment to political liberty also assumed sexual restraint and the value of families as part of the social order. The sexual experimentation that surfaced in the 1960s seriously undermined that part of the 1950s consensus. Another segment of the American population that mainstream society in the 1950s neglected were religious conservatives—fundamentalists, evangelicals, and Roman Catholics. These believers did not necessarily experience discrimination, but they were clearly outside the American consensus. The Protestantism of the mainline denominations enjoyed a place at the table, whether the moralistic optimism of *Time* magazine's Henry Luce, who promoted an American exceptionalism rooted in belief in God, or the haunting pessimism of Reinhold Niebuhr, who reminded Americans of the selfishness that afflicted all humans due to original sin. Even so, the mainline churches achieved their centrist status by avoiding statements and actions that might look dogmatic or intolerant.

The 1960s witnessed the collapse of this

consensus and in response the rise of a militant Christianity to clean up the debris. With only a pragmatic justification for political liberty and reliance on science, the Christian Right tried to fill the vacuum that the sexual revolution, civil rights movement, and anti-war protests exposed. Marsden detects in much of the Christian Right's agenda nostalgia for the pro-family and patriotic 1950s. With Francis Schaeffer, evangelicals were reading a leader who sought to supply America with an adequate foundation—a Christian one. But Marsden faults Schaeffer for offering a Christian outlook that fundamentally was divisive and partisan. It alienated and threatened non-Christians and failed to provide an inclusive pluralism.

That phrase, “inclusive pluralism,” is in fact the point of Marsden's narrative. It is the subject of his last chapter and even the last two words of the book. Unlike the 1950s synthesis of the Enlightenment and liberal Protestantism or the Christian Right's blend of fundamentalism and partisan Republican politics, Marsden regards Dutch Calvinism as a better alternative. How different that alternative is, is not immediately apparent by the time that Marsden explains what a genuinely pluralistic society looks like. Post-World War II American liberals, according to Marsden, were “passionately committed to principles such as individual freedom, free speech, human decency, justice, civil rights, community responsibilities, equality before the law, due process, balance of powers, economic opportunity” (57). Their problem though was their naive optimism about human nature and neglect of an adequate philosophical or religious foundation for such ideals. Marsden also faults these liberals for failing to see that their “universal” values were the product of a “particular” social setting—white, middle-class, suburban, university-trained men. The same problem afflicts contemporary secularists who aspire for the same ideals but sound just like the 1950s consensus.

Yet, when Marsden himself argues for the kind of pluralistic society that he believes will emerge from a proper theological basis, it sounds remarkably similar to the 1950s liberal project he critiques:

The primary function of government is to promote justice and to act as a sort of referee, . . . patrolling the boundaries among the spheres of society, protecting the sovereignty due within each sphere, adjudicating conflicts, and ensuring equal rights and equal protections for confessional groups. (169)

This vision of liberal society seems similar to what 1950s liberals wanted. Is the difference that Marsden arrives at his social order because he has the correct theology? If so, then how will Reformed or evangelical Protestantism provide an adequate basis for a society in which spiritual descendants of the Protestant Reformation are a minority?

Maybe the difference is that Marsden is recommending a pluralism that flourished in the Netherlands during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, one that derived from policies conceived and implemented by Abraham Kuyper during his political career from 1880 to 1915. What distinguished Kuyper's project from other efforts to accommodate modern society's diversity was a commitment to principled pluralism, one that did not treat science as objective or neutral, but that made it a legitimate competitor of other outlooks, including religious ones. According to Marsden, Kuyper's "richly pluralistic society" protects Christian groups by guaranteeing equal rights for such institutions. But these protections were also in place in 1950s America. The OPC, for instance, had certain legal protections during the heady days of the American Enlightenment even if the pluralism of the 1950s meant not being "too dogmatic" and being "open to other points of view" (124). Protestant denominations might not be open to other ideas within their own structures and membership, but they had to be open to the possibility of people outside their fellowship holding positions of power in the wider society.

Marsden may be right to think that Kuyper had a better account of pluralism than America's liberal establishment did. Even so, Kuyper's theory of pluralism was not a requirement for obtaining legal protections in the Netherlands. In other words, Kuyper did not supply a foundation to

eradicate the differences among Roman Catholics, Protestants, and secularists. His theory merely provided a platform by which these groups could live together, and in that sense the American liberal consensus of the 1950s was equally pluralistic and inclusive. The limits of that inclusive pluralism are now obvious, but they came with benefits such as marshaling national resources to oppose the spread of Communism and eradicating prejudices that subjected African-Americans to legal discrimination. If the Netherlands had emerged from World War II as the West's super power and if it had needed to address racial segregation in one of its provinces, does Marsden think Kuyper's principled pluralism would have succeeded?

In fact, the example of New School Presbyterianism, the topic of Marsden's first book, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (1970) might suggest why Kuyper's proposal for pluralism was out of sync with the American religious mainstream. As Marsden well demonstrated, New School Presbyterians, the ones who favored the Second Great Awakening and supported the parachurch cooperative endeavors (the ones that led Old School Presbyterians to defend confessional standards and Presbyterian polity), those pro-revival Presbyterians rallied around evangelistic, moralistic, and nationalistic aims. For New Schoolers, along with Congregationalists who supplied the leadership and financial backing for a host of religious voluntary societies (Bible, tract, Sunday school), the health of the United States depended on extending Protestantism from the East Coast to the frontier. Without a Christian influence, morality would deteriorate and social order would disappear. The ideal was for a unified political, economic, religious, and educational order that reflected Protestant (but only generically so) standards. Societal evils such as slavery and alcohol were roadblocks to a Christian America, as were religious and cultural outsiders like Roman Catholics and Mormons.

The sort of cooperation Protestants exhibited before the Civil War in attempting to fashion a Christian society was all the more prominent after the war. When Old School and New School

Presbyterians in the North reunited in 1869, their merger prompted cooperative efforts among Protestants on an even larger scale. Presbyterians took the lead in interdenominational agencies that culminated in the 1908 formation of the Federal Council of Churches. That body's first official act was to ratify a "Social Creed for the Churches," a Protestant version of the sort of political reforms associated with the Progressive Party. It was also a classic statement of the major concerns of the Social Gospel. Its aim was to establish a society with the justice and equality only Christian ideals could supply. And while Protestants continued to hope for greater church union—they tried and failed in 1920 to form the United Protestant Church of America—those from Anglo-American backgrounds (Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Disciples, even Unitarian)—also supported increased centralization of the nation's political and economic structures. Coordinating industry and transportation, along with supplying the manpower, for the United States' intervention in World War I was a major component of such centralization of the nation's major institutions. Loyalty to the cause for which the United States fought was another ingredient in what J. Gresham Machen lamented as the creation of America as "one huge 'Main Street.'"²

However widespread the factors, the United States was, during the very same years when Kuyper was operating at peak levels, moving in an opposite direction from the Netherlands. In fact, Protestants of British descent would have had trouble swallowing the sort of pluralism that Kuyper proposed and eventually introduced among the Dutch. Early in his career, Kuyper spoke out vigorously against the sort of cultural uniformity that characterized modern liberal politics (and the centralized state building that went with it). In his 1869 address, "Uniformity: the Curse of Modern Life" (1869), Kuyper saw that even if political uniformity ended in disappointment, the more dangerous strategy of liberalism was to rob people

2 Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 15.

groups of "their characteristic genius" and render them "homogenous." The result, he feared, would be a "false unity ... celebrated on the ruins of what land and folk, race and nation" had contributed to social variety. "Cries for brotherhood and love of fellow-man," Kuyper added, prevented an appreciation for "the distinctive features of the face of humanity" and ground away "with a coarse hand all the divinely engraved marking on the copper plate of life."³ To remedy the standardization of life that modern politics nurtured through invocations of universal, abstract rights, Kuyper led in the "pillarization" of Dutch society. As James Bratt explains in his authoritative biography, Kuyper advocated a social system (one that dominated the Netherlands until the 1960s) that included a "complete array of associations in which the various religious or ideological groups—Calvinists, Catholics, and Labor, with liberal humanists carried along by default—could live their separate lives from cradle to grave." Bratt calls this a "clannish division of public space."⁴ Kuyper's counterparts in the United States resisted such clannishness by using public schools to assimilate immigrants into the "American way." The one trace of clannishness that persisted in the United States was race-based segregation. But that also became questionable due in part to the barriers that came down thanks to white and black soldiers fighting a common enemy during World War II.

One notable exception to the claim that mainline Protestants in the United States opposed the sort of pluralism that Kuyper advocated was J. Gresham Machen. His reasons for resisting centralization in American life were partly political. As a Marylander with deep sympathy for the tradition of States' Rights, Machen was predisposed to resent the federal government's expansion of power and influence. His testimony before Congress in opposing a proposal for a Federal Department of

3 Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 24–25.

4 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 343.

Education was one such instance of resistance. Like Kuyper, Machen also defended the rights of families and local communities to regulate their own lives. And as a confessional Presbyterian, Machen opposed cooperative plans that brought his denomination into closer ties with non-Presbyterians because he believed such endeavors typically reduced the unique claims of Reformed theology to vacuous ideals of spiritual uplift and moral suasion. In effect, though with different influences at play, Machen was as alarmed by cultural homogeneity as Kuyper. His decision in 1929 to form Westminster and his inclusion of Dutch-American Calvinists on the faculty (Van Til, Stonehouse, and Kuiper) was an American Presbyterian version of Kuyper's pillarization on a much more modest scale—one that had no support from taxpayers and very little cultural cache in wider intellectual circles.

When Marsden wrote about Machen for a talk delivered at Princeton Seminary almost twenty-five years ago, he chose to view the original Orthodox Presbyterian through the lens of the South and its racist and secessionist legacy. To be sure, Marsden believed that Machen could teach mainline Protestants lessons about the value of education and ideas since Marsden was then working on a project on the secularization of American universities. But Marsden did not notice a connection or affinity to Kuyper's point about pluralism. Of course, the South itself, even if for nefarious reasons, objected to the growth of the federal government's power and control of a broad range of American activities. But Marsden noted Machen's defense of the Confederacy, his lingering racism, and his "radical libertarianism."⁵ In fact, Marsden thought it plausible to interpret Machen's departure from the PCUSA in 1936 as the ecclesiastical equivalent of the Confederacy's secession from the United States. Had Marsden looked at Machen's affinities with Kuyper in resisting cultural and political centralization, and in leaving the mainline or

established church, he might have recognized within the OPC's founder an American Presbyterian version of Dutch Calvinism's pillarization.

That older perspective on Machen, not the cultural pluralist but the rebellious southerner, may account for Marsden's silence in *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment* about the communion in which he grew up, the OPC. Marsden's experience of 1950s America and its enlightened progressivism did come, after all, in the context of worshipping at an OPC congregation and being a member of a household where Machen's name was highly regarded. Yet, Machen's ideas about religious and ethnic diversity, civil liberty, and the spirituality of the church make nary a dent on Marsden's reflections on American society since World War II. Machen's ideas about civil liberty showed remarkable toleration for diverse groups; a life-long Democrat, Machen defended the rights of Communists, Roman Catholics, and fundamentalists at a time when the ties between the Enlightenment and liberal Protestantism were solidifying. At the same time, Machen's idea for a church set apart to pursue not public or civil but spiritual ends with spiritual means provided a way for confessional groups to retain theological fidelity without having to compromise religious convictions for political purposes. It was also a version of principled pluralism that emerges directly from the American Presbyterian experience and so has the advantage of not requiring the United States or its Protestants to reinvent themselves as belonging to a small, intriguing, and substantially homogenous country like the Netherlands. Had Marsden proposed Machen instead of Kuyper, his critique of the thinness of the 1950s consensus may not have been substantially different. But his proposal for a remedy might have connected his reflections on 1950s intellectuals with his own experience as a teenager who heard as many Orthodox Presbyterian sermons as he did platitudes about national greatness. ©

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5 Marsden, "Understanding J. Gresham Machen," in *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 196.

Kuyper on Politics and Religion

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by Douglas A. Felch

Abraham Kuyper, Conservatism, and Church and State, by Mark J. Larson. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015, xii + 111 pages, \$15.00, paper.

Interest in Abraham Kuyper is growing rapidly, and rightly so. Kuyper was a significant Christian political thinker, who established an influential Christian political party and served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901–5). Now, just in time to stimulate our thinking during this 2016 election year, comes a notable contribution to Kuyperian scholarship by OPC minister Mark Larson. In his book, Larson connects Kuyper with traditional political conservatism.

Larson maintains that Kuyper provides a body of thought “of enduring value for the political engagement of the Christian community in our time” (xii). His introductory chapter (“Conservatism”) sets forth the intriguing and provocative thesis that Kuyper stands “in the trajectory of core conservative principles affirmed by Edmund Burke and more recently by Ronald Reagan” (2–3). Kuyper does so by affirming three foundational biblical principles that reflect “fundamental concerns of conservatism” (3–4, 12): the reality of natural law, the need for limited government, and the importance of personal freedom.

Larson begins chapter 2 (“God and Humanity”) by arguing that American conservatism emphasizes natural law as an enduring and objective moral order, ultimately grounded in belief in God, that maintains an essential role for religion in civil society (13). In a parallel fashion, Kuyper maintained that “the imprinting of this eternal law upon

the mind of man” was necessary in the political life of the nation (16).

However, the reality of flawed humanity leads to a second core principle of conservatism, “the necessity of limited government due to the deep distrust of human nature” (17). Kuyper’s Calvinistic political philosophy rests not on some sense of human greatness, but on the reality of sin. Government restrains sin’s destructive power in the world (18–19), but the same sin that necessitates the formation of government also requires limiting it. Simply put, “Government is necessary because men are not angels, but men who are not angels run government” (20).

This leads Larson in his third chapter (“Limited Government”) to explore the need for governments to be constitutionally restrained. While both liberalism and socialism assume that the state is able to solve many if not most problems, conservatives stress that government, operated as it is by morally flawed individuals, must be restrained by limiting its role in society and by the application of constitutional safeguards.

Kuyper concurs. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper affirms his commitment to “a just constitution that restrains abuse of authority, sets limits, and offers the people a natural protection against lust for power and arbitrariness” (26). Kuyper’s affinity with the Tenth Amendment of the US Constitution can be noted in Article 10 of his Antirevolutionary Party platform of 1879, which affirmed the importance of a decentralized government (29).

Such decentralization is reinforced by Kuyper’s concept of sphere sovereignty.

While insisting that final authority rests firmly in God, Kuyper argues that the Lord has delegated authority to semi-autonomous societal spheres (such as family, business, church, science, art, agriculture, industry, education, journalism, labor, and government). The plurality of spheres resists any tendency of government to usurp all authority to itself. As Kuyper notes, “The state cannot legitimately assert its authority over against the father, nor a prince over against the rights of other governing bodies and the people within their spheres of

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=545&issue_id=113.

competence” (31).

Sphere sovereignty, for Kuyper, also helps to protect religious liberty, a topic Larson addresses in chapter 4 (“Church and State”). Kuyper attempts to ground his commitment to religious liberty and church disestablishment in the writings of Calvin himself. Larson rightly points out that drawing a straight line of connection is problematic and argues for a stronger continuity between Kuyper and the thought of James Madison, the principal architect of the First Amendment and the American constitutional tradition (45), “despite an element of continuity with Calvin’s teaching” (43).

In his fifth chapter (“Madisonian”), Larson outlines the shared principles between Kuyper and Madison on religion and politics, beginning with freedom of worship. Both men affirmed an “unalienable right” for every man to worship according to his own conscience. This distinguishes both Kuyper and Madison from Calvin, who asserted that government had an obligation to preserve and protect true religion (50). Kuyper and Madison also believed that all citizens should be treated equally before the law with regard to religion (50) since the state lacks jurisdiction in that area (51, 53). Kuyper insists the weapons waged against false religions by the church must be spiritual, not governmental (51), because “the government lacks the data of judgment” in matters of religious conviction (54). Indeed, the assumption of such jurisdiction by the state should be interpreted as despotism (54).

The two men also agree on disestablishment. Madison presented two arguments against establishment: First, the church did not need to be supported by taxes and actually prospered more when it received no government support (57). Kuyper agrees: “Churches flourish most richly when the government allows them to live from their own strength on the voluntary principle” (57). Second, says Madison, establishment tends to have a negative effect on the integrity of the church and its clergy and would likely encourage or require conformity (57–58). Kuyper concurs: “The separation of church and state ... proceeds from ... the realization that the well-being of the

church and progress of Christianity demand it” (58). Larson finds it remarkable “that the head of a political party in another country appeals to the First Amendment of the American Constitution in support of his own program” (58).

Larson’s analysis that Kuyper’s political principles parallel those of traditional conservatism and that his position on religious liberty and disestablishment are rooted more in Madison than in Calvin are worth the price of the book.

However, in his last two chapters, Larson charts a different course. He wants to show that Kuyper’s “perspective on the church and social reformation stands in continuity with the Calvinist tradition” (59). In doing so, he moves from analysis to targeted application. He is concerned to criticize the judicial tyranny of the US Supreme Court and to consider how the church ought to engage in resistance and reform in opposition to it.

Thus, in chapter six (“Tyranny”) Larson largely shifts his discussion from Calvin and Kuyper to the contemporary scene. Somewhat surprisingly (given his concern about establishment), Larson laments the Supreme Court’s erosion of the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment by removing prayer, Bible reading, and the Ten Commandments from public schools (68). Unsurprisingly (given his concern about judicial activism), Larson also decries the rejection of strict constructionism and the setting aside of the Constitution in contemporary constitutional law, as in the egregious *Roe v. Wade* decision (69).

In mustering Calvinian forces against judicial activism, Larson cites Calvin’s powerful opposition to abortion, and records Calvin, Bullinger, and Bucer’s criticisms of incompetent or corrupt judges. However, it remains unclear how these critiques relate directly to current judicial activism, which is itself the misdirection of a constitutional form of government unknown to the magisterial Reformers. Allusions to Kuyper and Machen are closer to the mark, but even they could not have foreseen these developments. Larson’s concern is real enough, but his argument that opposition to judicial activism can be derived directly from Calvin and Kuyper needs strengthening.

Similarly, it is difficult to root Larson's call in chapter 7 ("Resistance and Reform") directly in the Calvinian tradition. Both Calvin and Kuyper saw the church's response to tyranny as twofold: it should offer "an annihilating critique of sin in the state" and "instruct and exhort the state in the way of righteousness" (75). Further, Larson cites with approval John Murray's caution that the church should not engage in politics but that church members must do so as citizens of the state (77), although there are times when the church has the obligation to condemn the failure of the civil magistrate to "exercise his God-given authority in the protection and promotion of the obligations, rights, and liberties" of its citizens (78). As an example of the latter, Larson applauds the efforts of the D. James Kennedy Center for Christian Statesmanship (78). Yet Larson's discussion lacks specifics as to how ordinary Christians ought to be engaged in the labor of resistance and reform in the face of judicial activism beyond prayer, godly example, and voting (84–85).

Finally it is important to note that Kuyper's Christian thought and activism defy easy categorization or labeling. Kuyper not only organized a Christian political party, he also advocated for Christian labor unions to address the plight of the worker. Furthermore, he established two Christian newspapers to champion a Christian worldview in all areas of life, in addition to politics. It would be interesting to explore the relationship of these other activities to Kuyper's political conservatism.

These last three paragraphs are not meant as criticisms, but simply suggestions for future research. In the present, Mark Larson has made a valuable contribution to Kuyperian scholarship by uncovering significant conservative roots to Kuyper's political thought. ☉

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Faith, Politics, and the Fall in Thatcher's Britain

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by **Diane L. Olinger**

God and Mrs. Thatcher: The Battle for Britain's Soul, by Eliza Filby. London: Biteback, 2015, xxiii + 432 pages, \$39.95 cover price, available on Amazon.com for \$24.90.

For the sake of full disclosure, you should know that my nineteen-year-old cat's name is Thatcher. We used to have another cat. We lost her twelve years ago. Her name was Maggie. I'm not sure that Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, would've have considered this an homage, but it was meant to be so. As a fan of the Iron Lady's, I was pleased to find a book that promised to delve into her faith and its effect on her politics. However, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* does much more than that, presenting an analysis that goes beyond Mrs. Thatcher to the British nation as a whole. Margaret Thatcher was the "hinge" in the conflict between the Conservative Party and the Church of England. During the 1980s, Thatcher and her followers "sought inspiration (and legitimization) from the Gospel for their political ideas and policies"; at the same time, the Established Church began to view "engagement in [increasingly liberal and socialist] politics as part of its spiritual mission" (xvii).

The author, Eliza Filby, is currently a lecturer in modern British history at King's College London. Although *God and Mrs. Thatcher* is the outworking of her doctoral thesis, it avoids academic jargon and is a good read. It is well researched, with a bibliography that will be enticing to anyone with an interest in church-state issues. Even more importantly, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* is about

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=548&issue_id=114.

as close to an objective analysis as one can find these days, with Filby acknowledging Thatcher's achievements (or at least her good intentions) as well as her failures. Filby writes to counter what she sees as a weakness in most analyses of Thatcher, "the secular mindset of most historians of contemporary Britain" (xii). This mindset leads historians to focus on Britain's withdrawal from empire and decline as a global economic superpower, but miss the collapse of Christianity as another major change with a dramatic effect on Britain's political culture (xiii).

Filby begins her story in Margaret Thatcher's birthplace, Grantham, a small town in the East Midlands section of England. Inter-war Grantham had a population of about twenty thousand. It was run by a local borough council in the hands of small businessmen and shopkeepers, like Alfred Roberts, Margaret's father, who served as an alderman. Alfred Roberts rose from a mere grocer's apprentice to be the owner of two shops and the mayor of the town. In addition to his service on the borough council, Roberts served his community as a lay-preacher at Finkin Street Methodist Church, a trustee of the Grantham bank, a governor at the local school, and president of the Chamber of Trade and Rotary Club. Margaret was born above the grocery shop in 1925. During her childhood, Margaret had "little privilege," mainly due to her parents' thriftiness rather than a lack of money. Her father, like most Methodists of his time, was very wary of debt, viewing credit as being just as corrupting as alcohol and gambling. A collection of Margaret's father's sermon notes show that he emphasized individual salvation ("The Kingdom of God is within you!") and the Protestant work ethic ("It is the responsibility of man ordained by the creator that he shall labor for the means of his existence") (21).

In the Roberts's home, board games, sewing, and newspapers were forbidden on the Sabbath. The family attended chapel for both Sunday morning and evening services, while Margaret and her sister, Muriel, also attended Sunday school. Margaret played the piano for the younger children's classes. During the week, the Roberts sisters

attended Methodist Youth Guild, while their parents attended other mid-week social functions and prayer meetings. Margaret's childhood catechism book has been preserved and her notes and underlining show the young scholar's interest in sin and service (14–15).

Politically, the Roberts were "old-fashioned Liberals" who switched their allegiance to the Conservatives in the 1930s (24). Ten-year-old Margaret's first taste of politics came in 1935 as a polling day runner for the local Conservatives. In the Roberts's political journey "we find one of the important shifts in twentieth-century British politics: the movement of lower middle class Nonconformists [non-Anglicans] from the Liberals to the Conservatives" (24). Shopkeepers and managers, like Alfred Roberts, "now defined themselves not against the landed Tory squires, but the unionized working class" (28). They brought with them a libertarian streak to the Conservative Party that would later clash with the traditional paternalism of the Tories.

A diligent student, Margaret arrived at Oxford University in 1943 while Britain was still engaged in World War II. She became a committed member of the Wesleyan Society, attending its study groups and preaching in nearby chapels (the Wesleyan Methodists opened their pulpits to women in 1918 the same year the nation extended the franchise to them). By her third year at Oxford, the constraints of war had been loosened, the campus was buzzing again, and Margaret became increasingly involved in the Oxford University Conservative Association, and less active in the Wesleyan Society. "The boundless energy she had channeled into preaching the Word was now redirected into rallying the Tory troops" (47).

Leaving Oxford in 1946, Margaret found a position using her Chemistry degree, but her heart was set on pursuing a political career. In 1952, after two hard-fought, but unsuccessful attempts to unseat a Labor MP in a solid union constituency, she married Denis Thatcher, a millionaire who was a "default Anglican," but not an active believer. "He was worldly, she was provincial; he was establishment, she was Nonconformist; he was rich,

she was not” (61). The marriage was definitely a break from her Grantham roots. Margaret moved away from Methodism and became an Anglican. Justifying the move, she said that she longed for more formality in religion and “given that John Wesley had always regarded himself as a member of the Church of England, she did not feel that a great theological divide had been crossed” (67). The move was politically expedient as well: Conservative leaders were expected to be Anglicans. When Margaret and Denis had children, they did not insist on the children’s attendance at church, to the consternation of Margaret’s mother (67). In 1959 Margaret finally became a Conservative MP for Finchley.

It seemed that Margaret Thatcher had completely severed her ties with Grantham, and all it stood for. But the rise of the New Right political movement in the 1970s matched up well with her Nonconformist roots.

The economic arguments against excessive state spending suited her inclination towards thrift; theoretical notions of state interference went hand in hand with her understanding on the foundations of individual liberty, while the desire for moral and economic restraint fed into her innate Puritanism. This was self-conscious but it was not entirely self-constructed. Her upbringing had instilled a class and religious identity that was to be reawakened in the mid-1970s. (109)

From the time Thatcher sought and won the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1975, she presented herself as the candidate who was in harmony with disaffected middle class voters because of her Grantham roots (108). In a radio interview, before the first ballot, she stated: “All my ideas about life, about individual responsibility, about looking after your neighbor, about patriotism, about self-discipline, about law and order, were all formed right in a small town in the Midlands” (2). All this could be dismissed as political spin, rebranding the millionaire’s wife as a small town girl with small town values. But Filby maintains that Thatcher’s portrayal of Grantham was “not too

distant from the reality” and that “understanding Grantham ... is key to understanding Thatcher; not only the religious and political values to which she subscribed but also crucial to explaining some of the naivety and short-sightedness in her political thinking” (3). Margaret Thatcher wanted to revive Grantham values on a national level. She sought to decrease taxes and de-regulate businesses in order to free up individuals and businesses; she valued local autonomy over centralized decision-making and private charity over government redistribution; she wanted to rein in powerful trade unions; she promoted free markets; she believed, unapologetically, in a strong national defense.

As Thatcher’s critics see it, the problem with Thatcherism was that Grantham values did not work on a national level. Thatcherites did not properly appreciate the differences between the Grantham of Thatcher’s childhood and modern Britain.

Thatcher’s portrait of capitalism was often one where companies were small, privately owned and operated along much the same lines as the grocer’s shop in which she had served as a child. Alfred Roberts behind the counter rather than the yuppie on the trading floor was always the predominant image of market transactions in her mind. There was little reference to, let alone justification for, the system that her government created and would later become the norm. A situation where the nation’s homes and household budgets were intertwined with a global financial services sector that made up an ever-growing percentage of Britain’s GDP, but which was increasingly internationally owned and in the hands of speculators, who were chiefly concerned with short-term gain and distant from the deals and lives they were gambling on. (335)

Putting her Conservative agenda into action, Thatcher encountered stiff opposition from the Established Church, though both claimed to be moved by biblical principles. Their contrasting conceptions of Christianity (and of the individual and the state) can be seen in their interpretations

of the Good Samaritan parable. For Margaret Thatcher, the story “demonstrated the supremacy of individual charitable virtue over enforced state taxation.... In her uncompromising words, ‘No one would remember the Good Samaritan if he’d only had good intentions; he had money as well’ ” (xviii). For the Anglican leadership, the story meant something quite different, namely the “scriptural justification of the indiscriminate redistribution of wealth” (xviii). As one Anglican Bishop pointed out, “The point of the story is not that [the Good Samaritan] had some money but that the others passed by on the other side” (xviii).

In 1988, Thatcher addressed Scottish church leaders, giving her theological defense of Thatcherism. She emphasized the biblical foundations and temporal applications of the sanctity of the individual, God-given liberty, and the Protestant work ethic. She quoted St. Paul: “If a man will not work he shall not eat,” and distinguished between wealth creation (good) and the worship of money (bad) (239). She praised individual acts of charity and condemned state enforced redistribution. In a clear rebuke, Thatcher stated that “Christianity is about spiritual redemption, not social reform” (239).

Thatcher’s words incensed church leaders, who emphasized society over the individual. They viewed competition, profit, and interest as “dirty words ... encouraging human sin, possessive individualism and debasing relationships and values in society” (244–45). In contrast to Thatcher, the Anglican Bishops went so far as to speak of individual acts of charity pejoratively, proclaiming the spiritual superiority of progressive taxation and government redistribution (244). As Bishop David Sheppard put it, “‘Charity’ ... is discriminate and dictated by preferences or prejudices, whereas indiscriminate contribution through taxation is a greater example of collective giving and ‘belonging to one body’ ” (244). For the Church, social reform was the essence of Christianity.

Hearing this, Thatcher and the Conservatives concluded that the Church leaders were advocating a different gospel. As for the increasingly liberal Church leaders, they were skeptical of the

Conservatives’ claims to be motivated by biblical imperatives at all—it seemed to them that the Conservatives were prompted by greed and animus toward the poor.

In the last chapter of *God and Mrs. Thatcher*, entitled “Reap What You Sow,” Filby evaluates Thatcherism. Since Thatcher once said that “Marxism should be judged by its fruits,” Filby feels justified in judging Thatcherism by its fruits as well, meaning that her analysis doesn’t stop at the prosperity of the 1980s but looks ahead to the later recession of the 1990s and financial crisis in 2008. Though living standards rose in the 1980s, the rise was funded in large part by the expansion of personal debt. Though more and more people became investors in the market with opportunities for great gain, their wealth, savings, and homes were now linked to the volatile global financial market. Bankers may have been partially to blame for the economic downturn, but Filby says it can also be seen as “a crisis in individual morality and the public’s own fiscal irresponsibility” (344). The prosperity generated by Thatcherism resulted in a British society that was consumerist, not conservative; secular, not Christian (349).

Filby argues that Margaret Thatcher’s “conviction politics” were unsuccessful in the “battle for Britain’s soul.” In the early years of Thatcher’s premiership, the priority was getting a grip on the economy, but for Thatcher this was only one aspect of a much larger goal of restoring self-reliance as the basis of personal responsibility and national success. “Economics is the method, the object is to change the soul,” she said (133). In Thatcher’s view, the excesses of the modern welfare state had broken down the fundamental relationship between effort and reward, weakening the economy as well as personal morality. Her reforms—privatizing industry, decreasing market regulation, reining in unions, and increasing market participation by individuals—were aimed at restoring this relationship and were built upon her view of the gospel. According to Filby, “by destroying paternalism, Thatcher succeeded in making Britain more egalitarian in an American sense, but she also created a nation more sharply divided into winners and

losers” (310). In a perfect world, the pain of losing would be cushioned by the winners’ acts of charity. But this isn’t a perfect world. When asked what her greatest regret in office was, Thatcher reportedly replied, “I cut taxes and I thought we would get a giving society and we haven’t” (348). Filby concludes: “The flaw in Margaret Thatcher’s theology was not that she did not believe in society, as many criticized, but that she had too much faith in man. She had forgotten the essence of Conservative philosophy: the Fall” (348).

And this is the “takeaway” from *God and Mrs. Thatcher*, remembering the Fall. If we, like Thatcher, are champions of individual liberty and opportunity, we should remember that sinful man will never care for the poor as he should, and sinful decisions will cause corruption in our markets and institutions, just as it does in our hearts. If we, like Thatcher’s opponents, insist on the priority of society and promote state-enforced social reform, we should remember that the poor will always be with us—and so will sin. No program and no amount of money will fix problems endemic to this fallen world. This should not justify inaction, but it should prompt all Christian citizens to be humble in debate, realistic in expectations, and marked by a longing for the New Heavens and the New Earth.

If you are looking for a biography of Margaret Thatcher, with all the facts, figures, people, and places important to her life, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* isn’t the book for you. Try Charles Moore’s highly acclaimed authorized biography (Volume 1: *From Grantham to the Falklands* (2013), Volume 2: *At Her Zenith: In Washington, London and Moscow* (2016), with a third volume anticipated) or Thatcher’s own memoirs, *The Downing Street Years* (1993). Although it includes biographical detail, Filby’s book isn’t so much biography, but an analysis focusing on the role of faith in Margaret Thatcher’s life and politics, and at this it is a success. ©

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A Helpful Little Primer on Eschatology?

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by Jeffrey C. Waddington

As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on the Last Things, edited by Theodore G. Van Raalte. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016, ix + 169 pages, \$21.00, paper.

As *As You See the Day Approaching* is the fruit of the January 2015 conference held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton, Ontario. Theodore Van Raalte, professor of ecclesiology at CRTS, has ably edited a fine collection of essays focusing on eschatology. Each of the essays shares the admirable trait of being crystal clear so that the argumentation can be followed without the hindrance of poor writing.

Van Raalte contributes two chapters. In the first (1–19) he lays out the contours of the doctrine of eschatology or last things. The author notes three usages of the term “eschatology” which entered the English lexicon in 1841, following its introduction in German theological terminology. The doctrine refers to last things or those events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the ages. This is what Van Raalte refers to as the “traditional” usage. The second usage is associated with a more philosophically driven use tied to theologians, such as Karl Barth. The third usage is also orthodox and is associated with Geerhardus Vos; and in this case eschatology is short form for redemptive historical (2). The author then develops discussion of the three uses (and connects them to Barth and Wolfgang Pannenberg on the one hand and Vos, Herman Ridderbos, and Richard Gaffin on the other) of the term eschatology and notes that the first and third will appear

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=549&issue_id=114.

throughout this volume. The remainder of the chapter is then devoted to providing brief descriptions of the remaining chapters.

The second chapter is penned by the OPC's own Lane G. Tipton (20–35), who looks at Paul's comparison of the eschatological blessings of union with Christ with pre-fall Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 and post-fall Moses in 2 Corinthians 3:6–18. Tipton argues via in-depth exegesis that in both instances Paul makes a comparative argument using absolute categories. Compared to the blessings that have come with the person and work of Jesus Christ in functional identity with the Holy Spirit, the pre-fall Adam and the post-fall covenant of grace Mosaic administration were as dead. The beauty of this essay is that the author is able to do equal justice to the covenant of works and the continuity/discontinuity of the covenant of grace in two of its varied administrations.

Jannes Smith provides us with a fascinating exploration seeking to find eschatology within the Psalter (36–53). Smith intends to be sensitive to the expanding contexts of the Psalms: original setting of each Psalm, the context of a psalm within the psalter as a whole, and finally within the canon as a whole. Related to these three contexts the author seeks to set out the “explicit teaching” of the psalms, the “implications,” and the “direct application” to our own lives (37). Smith recognizes that these distinctions are not hermetically sealed compartments. It is a way for the pastor-scholar or layperson to be self-conscious in his reading of the Psalms with a view to seeing the eschatology of the book. This is a thought-provoking chapter and is useful in raising the right issues.

In “Working Politically and Socially in Anticipation of Christ's Coming,” Cornelis Van Dam presents his case for a chastened transformation of culture by Christian disciples (54–69). He is seeking to recognize both the cultural imperative (Gen. 1:26–28) and the eschatological reality of the “already/not yet.” Van Dam draws upon Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (Jer. 29:5–7) about seeking the welfare of the city to which they have been exiled despite knowing that after seventy years or so God will bring his people back to their homeland,

renewed and ready to serve him. The example of Daniel is also considered as well as NT examples like John the Baptist. Undoubtedly, this will be one of two provocative chapters, challenging the hegemony of the popular Two-Kingdoms theology.

Theodore Van Raalte's second essay addresses the intermediate state and the existence of the human soul (70–111). By far the longest essay in the book, it repays repeated readings. What is the intermediate state? It is the state of the saints in heaven with the Lord between their deaths and the resurrection at the end of the age. It is a vast improvement on living in this beautiful but fallen world, but it is not yet the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth. Saints live in a disembodied state and so the discussion about the nature and existence of the human soul. Van Raalte properly takes aim at the problem of physicalism (that every process of thinking or feeling, choosing, or willing is a chemical reaction or is an epiphenomenon). Physicalism, if true, would require a major (indeed impossible) reworking of the system of Christian doctrine. Van Raalte notes that some Christian theologians have bought into physicalism, namely Joel Green and N. T. Wright (75).

The author then delves into some close exegesis of various OT and NT passages, including those where Paul notes that he longs to depart to be with Jesus and yet knows that it would be better for the church if he stays in his body on earth. The author concludes his study with a consideration of which understanding of the body-soul distinction best comports with Scripture. Van Raalte eventually concludes that the Aristotelian-Thomist model is most amenable to the biblical data on the body-soul relation (99–102). The Aristotelian-Thomist model is one model not two, at least from this side of philosophical-theological development. I think that Van Raalte has made his case.

In his chapter (112–133) Jason Van Vliet asks, “Is hell obsolete?” The author's concern is with the falling off of the proper preaching of the doctrine of hell enunciated in Scripture. Van Vliet notes that, in the last several decades, a few notable evangelicals have come out against the traditional doctrine of hell as eternal punishment of the

wicked. He notes especially the examples of British scholars John Wenham and John Stott. With the mention of Stott's name, we are presented with the problem of conditional immortality or annihilationism. Before we get there, the author recognizes that there are three basic views about the fate of the unsaved: exclusivism, universalism, and inclusivism. Van Vliet seeks to address a properly balanced handling of the doctrine of hell through asking and answering four questions: (1) How do we handle the passages that seem to suggest that God wants everyone to be saved? (2) If God is perfectly compassionate, how could he condemn anyone to eternal torment? (3) If God is perfectly just, why would he give an infinite punishment to humans who have committed a finite number of sins? (4) When the Word of God speaks about the destruction of the wicked, does that mean that they will cease to exist? In answering these questions, Van Vliet affirms a proper biblically balanced preaching of the doctrine of hell following the example of our Lord Jesus himself.

In the seventh chapter of this book (134–142) Gerhard Visscher deals with the nature of the new earth. Visscher seeks to defend and unfold the earthiness of the new earth, i.e., that it will indeed be a physical new heavens as well as new earth. The author's concern is that for many Christians, their view of the new earth is an eternalizing of the intermediate state. Visscher is correct to emphasize the importance of the resurrection of the body for Christian doctrine and experience. He wants to make sure we understand that there will be a physical new earth on which we can plant the feet of our resurrected bodies! But the author wants to argue for more than the reality of the resurrected bodies of saints and a physical new earth. He wants to include within his discussion the idea that the old earth will not so much be destroyed as purified and that we will bring (unspecified) human artifacts with us into the new heavens and new earth. Visscher will need to deal with 2 Peter 3, which is the strongest passage apparently countering his position. However, he raises a good point: Did the Noachian flood waters obliterate the pre-diluvian earth or did it purify it? God did not obliterate and

recreate. He renewed the pre-diluvian earth. Peter notes that God will do with fire in the future what he did with water in the days of Noah.

To bolster a biblical case of human artifacts being brought with us into the new earth, Visscher turns to Revelation 21 and the reference (drawing upon the insights of Isaiah 60:6) to kings bringing into the New Jerusalem the glory and honor of their nations. The author does not think this means that the kings will be personally saved but that the various cultures of the world will be brought into the New Jerusalem. At the end of the day, the author has presented a plausible analysis of Scripture. However, what the human artifacts might be, that we bring with us into the new heavens and new earth, remains vague. Given the contentious nature of this chapter's subject matter (it argues against views advocated by some two kingdoms theologians), there should be further shoring up of its biblical foundations.

Arjan de Visser offers the final chapter, in which he examines the eschatological thrust of Reformed liturgy (144–158). Each aspect of Reformed worship is considered in terms of what kind of eschatological thrust it has. The author discusses the necessity of the minister being eschatologically concerned so that the people of God will have set before them week in and week out the return of Christ and our consequent holy living. Visser looks at the preaching in a Reformed service as well as the celebration of the sacraments as eschatologically colored when fully understood. For instance, the Lord's Supper is a displaying of our Lord's death until he returns, and it is a present feeding on Christ by faith, which anticipates the marriage supper of the Lamb in the new heavens and new earth. These and other elements of Reformed worship are shown to have a proper and irreducible eschatological thrust when consistently and creatively set before the people of God.

As You See the Day Approaching provides us with a delightful consideration of the Dutch Reformed contribution to the worldwide Reformed communion. I recommend it highly. It can be read and digested in just a few sittings. ©

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How Vosian Is Van Til?

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by Danny E. Olinger

In Defense of the Eschaton: Essays in Reformed Apologetics, by William D. Dennison, edited by James D. Baird. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015, xxviii + 197 pages, \$27.00, paper.

In his 1985 book, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics*,² William Dennison argued that the apostle Paul used a two-age construction for the starting point of a Christian apologetic. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 1–3 that the church defends the wisdom of the age to come against the wisdom of the present evil age. Dennison then argued that Cornelius Van Til's Reformed apologetic corresponded to this Pauline structure and imperative. For Van Til, apologetics was the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life (the wisdom of the age to come) against non-Christian philosophies of life (the wisdom of the present evil age).

During the thirty years that have followed, Dennison, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Covenant College in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has filled out this thesis with articles and reviews. These writings have been collected and edited

by James Baird in the anthology *In Defense of the Eschaton: Essays in Reformed Apologetics*.

Dennison understands that Van Til put forth his apologetic within the traditional rubric of systematic theology. Dennison embraces that apologetic, but seeks to show that historical and eschatological elements were also foundational for Van Til's system. Namely, he argues that Van Til followed after his teacher Geerhardus Vos and grounded his apologetic in the history of redemption as revealed in Holy Scripture.

This redemptive-historical emphasis put Dennison at odds with two other leading Van Tilian proponents, John Frame and the late Greg Bahnsen. Dennison interacted with Frame in a 1995 essay marking the one hundredth birthday of Van Til, "Analytic Philosophy and Van Til's Epistemology" (9–35), and with Bahnsen in his 2004 review of Bahnsen's *Van Til's Apologetic*.³

In the former, Dennison praises Frame for acknowledging that Van Til presented a holistic biblical system. Frame rightly refers to the first principles of Van Til's thought, the theological introduction that lies behind the theological system. Where Frame falls short is that he focuses primarily upon analytic philosophy and modern language theory when dealing with Van Til. Van Til used the language of idealism, but the entrance into Van Til's methodology is not idealism, but history. Dennison writes, "According to Van Til, his epistemology is built upon the foundation of a philosophy of history. It is within this context that Van Til developed his famous Creator-creature distinction and the other aspects of his epistemology. To my knowledge, Frame's writings have not noted this key point" (21). Dennison continues:

In the broad context of analytic philosophy, [Frame] rejects (or at least has the tendency to overlook) a sole Archimedean point that explains the whole picture of an individual's thought. Hence, his Van Tilian epistemology is formulated within the context of a

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=554&issue_id=115.

2 William D. Dennison, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

3 Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic, Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998).

perspectival conception of knowledge, whereas the main rubric of Van Til's epistemology—the philosophy of history—is not even investigated or presented. (21)

Frame for his part does not recognize himself in the critique. In his endorsement of *In Defense of the Eschaton*, Frame writes, "Professor Dennison and I have not seen eye-to-eye with regard to Van Til, and after twenty years I am still bewildered by his critique of my approach (chapter 2 of this book)." He then graciously adds, "But Dennison and I both seek to honor Jesus Christ and to recognize his claims on human thought, and I honor him for that."

Dennison praises Bahnsen even more than he does Frame, but ends up with the same criticism. Bahnsen's *Van Til's Apologetic* is a "welcome addition" (155). Bahnsen "provides insightful commentary as he maps out the position of Van Til's opponents while providing further analysis into Van Til's own position" (156). Dennison concludes, "Bahnsen's work may be the finest and fairest encapsulation of Van Til's apologetic system to appear in print" (158), but he adds that it has a flaw. In Dennison's judgment, "it fails to grasp the control that biblical progressive revelation had upon Van Til's apologetic" (158).

To prove his point, Dennison interacts with Bahnsen's discussion of Van Til's view of logic. Bahnsen rightly quoted Van Til as saying, "Human logic agrees with the story, because it derives its meaning from the story" (158). Rather than Bahnsen penetrating why Van Til declared this, Dennison notes that Bahnsen turned to a discussion of the laws of logic. Dennison writes:

Ironically, as a Van Tilian, Bahnsen fails to apply Van Til's transcendental analysis upon Van Til. In other words, he fails to grasp the transcendental starting point of Van Til's view of logic and how Van Til applied his starting point to the philosophical issues dealing with the "laws of logic." In more than one place in his writings, Van Til was clear that "logic" and "facts" only have meaning in the context of the "story." For Van Til, the "story"

is the "Christian story"—meaning the story of redemption unfolding progressively upon the pages of Scripture. Specifically, logic and facts have no meaning outside the redemptive-historical revelation of Christ. (158)

In Dennison's judgment, the area where Frame and Bahnsen struggled in their analysis is the place where John Muether succeeded in his biography, *Cornelius Van Til*. In his glowing review of the book, Dennison writes:

Muether has correctly understood that the history of redemption, conditioned by God's covenant, grounds Van Til's view of antithesis. On this exact point, he has correctly assessed the influence of Vos upon Van Til's apologetic—often missed by others. (161)

This thesis, that the history of redemption grounds the antithesis in Van Til's apologetic, is a thread that runs through the chapters of *In Defense of the Eschaton*, even though Part 1 (chapters 1–5) is labeled "Van Til Studies," and Part 2 (chapters 6–8) is labeled "Redemptive History and Apologetics." The trump card that Dennison smartly plays in multiple essays is illustrating Van Til's doctrine of common grace. Dennison contends that Vos's redemptive-historical teaching was foundational to Van Til's reassessment of this doctrine.

This comes out clearly in Dennison's 1993 essay, "Van Til and Common Grace." According to Dennison, Van Til appreciated the traditional Reformed position on common grace, that God restrained man's sinful state through history, and God enabled man to express gifts as an image-bearer through history. But, Van Til also believed that common grace had to be understood eschatologically. He believed common grace dealt with the question, "What do entities which will one day be wholly different from one another have in common before the final stage of separation is reached?" (48).

The example that Dennison supplies to explain Van Til's position is that of a Christian and a non-Christian fishing. One catches a bass. They measure it and agree that it is sixteen inches long.

However, they disagree on how the bass came to be. The Christian believes God created it. The non-Christian believes it the chance product of evolution. Apparently, the result is a commonness of description but a difference in explanation. Dennison opines that most Christians would rest content with that explanation, but not Van Til. Dennison writes, “Van Til maintained that every description is an explanation of a fact—the description of a fact is not a neutral category that exists irrespective of God” (46).

Van Til did not accept the dichotomy between description and explanation because he believed that definition and description belong to God alone. The believer is self-conscious of his dependence upon God to describe and explain the facts. The non-believer is self-conscious of his rejection of God to describe and explain the facts.

This is why Van believed that Christian and non-Christian cannot have any fact in common. They stand opposed in their epistemological self-consciousness. At the same time, the two stand together in that they are both created in the image of God and living in the same universe. This is why the two can agree that the bass is sixteen inches long.

In coming to this conclusion, Van Til appealed to a right understanding of pre-redemptive revelation, which Vos had laid out in *The Biblical Theology*.⁴ In the garden, Adam, created upright, fellowshiped with God. Furthermore, Adam’s relationship to God was covenantal at every point. There was no interpretation of what was before Adam in the garden apart from God. Adam was in an environment where natural and special revelation were not separated. Dennison remarks:

For Van Til, herein lies the notion of common grace. In this pre-redemption state, all men in Adam (the elect and reprobate) have a unified understanding and interpretation of the revelation of God and his creation. God’s revelation is everywhere; all men have a consciousness

within them that God created them in his image and all men have a testimony of God that he is the Creator and sustains all things. In this condition, all men have a common ethical reaction of goodness to the common mandate of God (which some refer to as the cultural mandate); according to Van Til, “they are all mandate-hearers and mandate-keepers.” God has the *same* favorable attitude to all. Being in union with Adam’s original status, mankind has a holistic consciousness of pre-redemptive revelation within them and the testimony of a holistic pre-redemptive revelation to them that continues throughout all the stages of history, even to the final consummation. Van Til calls the continuation of this original status common grace. (50)

In his 2011 article “Antithesis, Common Grace, and Plato’s View of the Soul” (55–80), Dennison revisited Van Til’s conception of common grace to help examine Christian education. He observed that many historic Reformed institutions of higher learning had become secularized. In asking why, he concludes that Christian scholars too often invoked the doctrine of common grace and allowed natural and general revelation to become a shared point of integration with non-Christian scholars. The result was the loss of antithesis at the institutions.

According to Dennison, Van Til had predicted this decline and urged Christian scholars to proceed with the understanding that antithesis must precede common grace. A particular element in the non-Christian’s system may be a common grace insight, one shared by both Christian and non-Christian. But, it is only a common grace insight if it is in compliance with the truth of God’s Word.

As an example, Dennison turns to an analysis of Plato’s teaching that the soul is immortal. Is Plato’s teaching the same as Scripture’s teaching? Plato’s conception demands a belief in reincarnation and the existence of a Form world at the top of a chain of being. Dennison writes:

Simply put, the interrelationship between

4 Geerhardus Vos, *The Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 19–44.

the Form world and the immortal soul is not the Archimedean point on which the Bible predicates the immortality of the soul. For this reason, Plato's holistic construct of the immortality of the soul is antithetical to the holistic teaching of the immortality of the soul found in Holy Scripture. (73)

The Bible teaches that God created man after his own image with an immortal soul, which distinguished human beings from brutes.

After showing the difference that exists, Dennison challenges scholars to prove that the decline of once outstanding Christian institutions is the result of stressing the antithesis between Christian thought and non-Christian thought too much. He declares,

The secularization of any such institution occurs because the epistemological, metaphysical, ontological, and ethical truth of the integrative and progressive infallible revelation of the triune God of the Bible has been compromised under what Reformed thought refers to as common grace. (77)

In his 2011 essay "Van Til and Classical Christian Education" (81–103), Dennison questions whether Christians should be enthusiastically embracing the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) in educating their children. Van Til pointed out that the Greeks thought that it was reasonable to ask what the facts are before they asked where the facts come from. If God himself followed this method of the Greeks, then God could deny his own being in order to gain knowledge and interpretation of the facts. When Christians adopt the Greek model in education, human reason enters into a partnership with God with a goal of producing a moral life. But, there is nothing inherent in the *trivium* to bring about the ethical transformation of a person in the biblical sense. Dennison writes:

Human beings have no release from the bondage of sin and corresponding freedom unto eternal life without Christ's central redemptive-historical work. Life in Christ through

his Spirit is absolutely and solely the gift of grace; our reconciliation comes solely from the power of Christ's death and resurrection. Can the Christian find such a truth in classical pagan literature? No—nor can it be found in any construct of the *trivium* in classical education. (99)

The opening two essays in Part 2 of *In Defense of the Eschaton*, "The Christian Apologist in the Present State of Redemptive History" (105–17) and "The Eschatological Implications of Genesis 2:15 for Apologetics" (118–31), share the same thesis. The believer, united by faith to Christ in the heavenly places, is called to defend the holy presence of Christ from every evil advance against Christ and his kingdom.

In the "The Christian Apologist," Dennison contends that Christians and non-Christians do not share in a common cognitive process of reasoning and experiencing. The non-Christian binds reason and experience to an earthly existence. The Christian binds reason and experience to being joined to Christ in the heavenly places. This contrast is why the apologist must not make a neutral appeal to reason (logic) or temporal experience (empirical data). The believer, through Christ's Spirit, is already draped in the glorious atmosphere of Christ's presence in heaven. Hence, the apologist's task is a defense of the final state of heavenly life, or as the title of the anthology proclaims, a defense of the eschaton.

In "The Eschatological Implications," Dennison appeals to Genesis 2:15 ("The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it") to explain the relationship between eschatology and apologetics. Following the exegetical insights of Gregory Beale and Meredith Kline, Dennison sees Adam as a priest, and the garden as a creational representation of the heavenly temple of the Lord. Adam is placed immediately in God's presence to guard the garden-sanctuary. In that defense, Adam does not begin with natural revelation and then move to special revelation. Rather, God condescends and reveals himself to Adam. Dennison writes:

According to Genesis 2:15, Adam is to perform his apologetic task by defending and serving the Lord and his Word; he is to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. The eschatological dimension of God's revelation determines the method of the apologetic task: He must start with God, and he must end with God; or it can be said that he must start with God's Word, and he must end with God's Word. (125)

The last essay in the book, "A Reassessment of Natural and Special Revelation" (132–53), holds personal meaning for Dennison as he acknowledges a dependence in writing it upon the insights of his older brother Rev. Charles G. Dennison (1945–1999). It is apparent that William enjoyed a great period of creativity/productivity when Charles was living, and the two could bounce redemptive-historical conclusions off each other, and this essay seven years after Charles's death is a fine tribute.

In the essay, Dennison challenges the traditional Reformed reading of Psalm 19:4 as belonging to the category of natural revelation in light of Paul's use of Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18. Dennison believes that Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 in regard to the gospel, that is, in regard to special revelation. He writes, "Paul tells us by quoting Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18 that the heavens have witnessed the supernatural activity of God upon the plane of the natural creation, and furthermore, that the creation proclaims that testimony every single day to all men" (145). Although there are two forms of revelation, natural and special, the biblical teaching is that they are inseparable. He explains:

The creation (natural revelation) declares the supernatural deeds/acts of the Lord (special revelation). This observation does not mean that the creation (natural revelation) tells us that the death of Christ will be on Calvary, or that Christ's resurrection will occur in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38). Even so, the creation witnesses that Christ died on the cross, and the creation witnesses that the resurrected Christ broke

the bonds of the tomb (Matt. 27:45, 50–54; 28:2–3). The creation has witnessed the entire story of redemption and testifies to that entire story by virtue of its pattern of existence—suffering waiting for the exaltation of Christ and the church! Within the fabric of natural revelation lies the essential blueprint (pattern) of special revelation. (144)

In many way, reading Dennison is like reading Van Til. Both are unashamed about being militantly Reformed, that is, standing fully behind the divinely inspired Word of God, the Reformed confessions, and ecumenical creeds. Both are criticized for not understanding properly those with whom they disagree. Both tend to make their case more easily in the negative, showing the inconsistencies of Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and liberal Protestantism. When stated positively, their arguments can at times sound like abstractions.

Where they differ is often not in content, but in the exegetical emphasis that Dennison adds. Van Til allowed Vos, and his colleagues at Westminster Theological Seminary, John Murray, Ned B. Stonehouse, and Edward J. Young, to provide the exegetical arguments. Van Til was focused more on running with that exegesis in a systematic fashion. Dennison is more focused on running with the same exegesis in a redemptive-historical direction.

Consequently, it is not without significance that Dennison dedicates the book to Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Gaffin self-consciously endeavored to unite Vos and Van Til in theology. Dennison, as Gaffin's student, has self-consciously endeavored to unite Van Til and Vos in apologetics. In a sentence that could serve as a summary statement of what unites Van Til and Vos, Dennison writes:

What belongs to believers in Christ's redemption is grounded in one's state of existence prior to the fall, and what was designed in the pre-fall state was predicated upon the final eschatological existence in Christ's total redemption for all believers of Christ's bride. (77)

The centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the significance of believer's union with the risen Christ take center stage. When you are standing in the presence of God in Christ, 1 Corinthians 2, you are not dependent upon rational proofs.

In Defense of the Eschaton is attractively laid out, and Baird is to be commended for his efforts in convincing Dennison to go along with the project. Yet, certain editorial decisions are puzzling. Baird changes the wording of the original article titles for many of the chapters. The omission of Dennison's article "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation"⁵ was a missed opportunity to explore how Dennison does not agree with certain elements of Neo-Calvinist activism, even though Abraham Kuyper influenced Van Til greatly. The nineteen endorsements, "Forward," "Preface," "Acknowledgments," and two-tiered "Introduction" that covered nearly forty pages left this reviewer wondering what could be added in a review article even before reading page one of the first essay.

Those are minor quibbles compared to what Baird does well in his systematic ordering of the articles chosen. Baird allows Dennison to build his case for a right understanding of Van Til's apologetic and Vos's biblical theology in a manner that benefits both layman and scholar. ©

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5 William D. Dennison, "Dutch Neo-Calvinism and the Roots for Transformation," *JETS* 42, no. 2 (June 1999): 271–91.

Reflections on Biblical Counseling

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2016¹

by **Andrew H. Selle**

Developments in Biblical Counseling, by J. Cameron Fraser. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015, 144 pages, \$12.00, paper.

In 1973, as a naive young Christian fresh out of college, I landed my first real job—a live-in counselor in a halfway house for troubled teens. Their parents were either independently wealthy, in the military, or from Massachusetts (presumably the only state willing to pay the big money for treatment). This was a seriously high-end clinical treatment facility, well-regarded in professional circles. I was shocked by what went on there. Psychologists (in crisp fifty-minute sessions) recommended all manner of immorality as therapeutic. Psychiatrists experimented with various drugs (legal and otherwise) to treat their "mentally ill" patients. Practical consequences for behavior (either good or bad) seemed non-existent. After three months I either quit or got fired—and I'm a bit vague about which. In God's providence, about that time a landmark book by Jay Adams' landed in my hands. *Competent to Counsel*² lobbed hard-hitting criticism at the whole institution of secular counseling.³ His desire to reclaim the counseling field for Christ and his high view of the church resonated deeply with me. Two years later I sat in Adams's classes at Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS).

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=555&issue_id=115.

2 Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970).

3 With adversarial chapter titles such as "Freud: An Enemy, not a Friend" and "Mental Illness: A Misnomer," we can understand the controversies that ensued.

Read the Book

Cameron Fraser was one of my classmates there, so I was delighted to read his superbly distilled book about the modern biblical counseling movement. He is knowledgeable and fair in assessing the various actors, sympathetic with their concerns, while identifying weaknesses, and remarkably comprehensive in observing the multiple strands of the movement since Adams. His quotations and bibliography alone would be a rich source for further study. Fraser, who grew up in the Scottish Highlands, brings an important contribution by citing sources, including European ones, unfamiliar to most North Americans. He also uncovers the deeper historical roots of true Christian counseling in a provocative final chapter, “Biblical and Puritan Counseling.” My only criticism is the omission of one important figure, who is mentioned below—C. John Miller. This review will complement Fraser’s work, at some points overlapping with his observations, but mainly adding my own reflections—with the goal of affirming the good work that has been accomplished and encouraging us toward that which is yet to be done. Regarding terminology, instead of repeating the term “biblical counseling” or “biblical counseling movement” I will use “Private Ministry of the Word,” abbreviated “PMW” throughout.⁴

Foundational Consensus

Fundamentally, Adams charged that the “psychotherapeutic professions were a false pastorate, interlopers on tasks that properly belonged to pastors,”⁵ and he wanted to train ministers to use

4 “Private” in contrast to public ministry through preaching and teaching—“publicly and house to house” (Acts 20:20).

5 This description is by David Powlison in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), xvii. This volume, a recast of his doctoral dissertation, is the most thorough treatment of PMW and an important source for Fraser’s book. The glaring weakness of Powlison’s work is the omission of his own absolutely crucial role—which is typical of David’s humility. If Adams was the Luther of the movement, swinging ax to root, Powlison is a Calvin, skillfully using a surgeon’s tools with care and precision. He is brilliant and thorough and without peer as a theologian of PMW. Another recent critique from within the movement came from Powlison’s

the Word of God with authority, both publically through preaching and privately through counseling. The context of the two is different, but the content identical. That message of PMW resonated not only among conservative Presbyterians but across a broad swath of Evangelicalism, creating a curious ecumenism between groups of believers who did not share Adams’s Reformed convictions.⁶ Yet the founders and developers of the movement were confessionally Reformed and primarily Presbyterian.

Before delving into differences that arose between biblical counseling proponents, we consider the areas of agreement among them.

1. Biblical Inerrancy and Authority: Plenary inspiration means that although God progressively revealed his Word over millennia, and it bears the stamp of multiple cultural contexts, yet the whole of it is “breathed out” by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is, therefore, as trustworthy and authoritative as God himself, our final rule for faith and practice. We do not need to update it to adapt its teachings to enlightened modern or post-modern sensibilities. Quite true, this immutable Word speaks to vastly different people who live in fluid and ever-changing situations; good counselors seek to know both the persons and their situations when they are mucking through life’s morasses with no solid path out. At those times we are to walk by faith not by sight, knowing (sometimes just hoping) that bedrock is somewhere beneath us. God is there. His Word is true. He controls our every situation. Jesus loves us. This we know.

2. Biblical Sufficiency: “Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life.”⁷ Our standards declare,

The whole counsel of God concerning all

student: Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

6 I don’t know if this is typical of other practices, but the pastors who most enthusiastically refer people to me often are Reformed Baptists, independent fundamentalists, and mainstream charismatics. They typically are leaders with a deep love for God and his Word and appreciative of a Reformed worldview.

7 John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 618.

things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added. (WCF 1.6)

We must state clearly what this means and does not mean for PMW.

Obviously, Scripture does not provide exhaustive information about everything; for instance, it does not tell you how to get rid of cancer. It does, however, tell us everything we need when we face cancer.⁸ We trust him in our trials, and learn holiness through them. God created our bodies, and therefore he wants us to take care of them with appropriate medical treatment. We are not alone because God placed us in the church family, so we humbly receive the prayers and assistance of others. He loves us and hears the cry of the needy, so we pour out our hearts to him when we are at our lowest. He answers prayer and heals the sick, so we earnestly ask him for life. He redeemed our bodies and someday will raise them up again to live forever, and therefore, we do not fret death. The Bible is sufficient in the sense that “there is no situation in which we are placed, no demand that arises, for which Scripture as the deposit of the manifold wisdom of God is not adequate and sufficient.”⁹

Adams correctly grasped the profound implications of this doctrine for PMW. The “integrationist”¹⁰ approach at its best uses Scripture as a filter that sifts out the bad stuff so Christians can “plunder the Egyptians” of all their wonderful psychological insights. We concede (thankfully) that many who are in that camp are dedicated and wise believers who do, in fact, attempt to re-interpret secular approaches in biblical ways. At its

8 See <http://www.ccef.org/dont-waste-your-cancer> for a moving personal testimony by John Piper and David Powlison.

9 John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 3:261, commenting upon 1 Timothy 3:16–17.

10 I think Adams invented this term of disdain, meaning the mixing of both worldly and biblical ideas in counseling theory or praxis.

worst, however, the failure to appreciate biblical sufficiency sanitizes Word ministry right out of the counseling field. We might leave room for pastoral labors within narrow areas, but then insist that to *really* understand people and help them we must employ the methods practiced by mental health care professionals, trained psychologists, and psychiatrists. Thus we capitulate to a cadre of secular prophets and high priests whose unspoken declaration is, “This work is *way* too complicated for you preacher-boys to grasp, so you should leave it to us pros and mind your own business. Just talk about spiritual things, and say nice things to people to make them feel better. We’ll do the real psychotherapy.” (Forgive me if my sarcasm is too sharp. I’ve been rehearsing it since 1973.)

3. Presuppositional Apologetics: Certainly, Adams and the major figures of the movement—John Bettler, Wayne Mack, Edward Welch,¹¹ Paul Tripp, David Powlison, and other counselors and authors at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) all drank from the same streams at WTS where Cornelius Van Til’s portrait still hangs prominently in Machen Hall. One’s worldview, Christian or non-Christian, becomes the crucible into which all perceptions are poured, and out of which flows all of life—including counseling. Correctly understood, presuppositionalism is “evidential” in the highest sense. *Everything in creation* proclaims the glory of God. The problem is with sinners who have no eyes to comprehend it. Only by God’s prevenient grace do we see; “by faith we understand.” On this solid foundation we have tremendous freedom to use the tools of science without wringing our hands about the faith (or lack thereof) of the scientist. We only must remember that all information gathered by “common grace” must be radically re-cast into a biblical, Christ-centered worldview that informs all counseling theory and praxis.

11 Of these figures, only Ed Welch does not have a degree from WTS. He studied at Biblical Theological Seminary and the University of Utah, and is professor of practical theology at WTS. He has become a prolific and gifted author for PMW in many areas.

Needless Tensions Develop

Given the remarkable consensus in these very specific doctrinal commitments, we might wonder what is left to fight about. Fraser's careful study demonstrates an essential unity, yet some significant tensions arose after Adams left CCEF. His sharp-edged polemic was understandable and perhaps necessary at the time, in view of the church's abdication of its pastoral responsibilities. However, if he agreed at all with the essentially positive Reformed view of science and culture, it was not well-expressed in his writings. As David Powlison stated, "The relationship of presuppositionally consistent Christianity to secular culture is not simply one of rejection."¹² It would take a great mind like Powlison's to expand the horizons of PMW and pay attention to the nuances and complexities of the field. One important implication of that complexity: we must admit the advantage of specialized training, sometimes in quite narrow sub-areas of PMW and related fields.¹³

The most significant area of tension within the movement arose from the growing interest in the role of *motivation* in human problems and counseling.¹⁴ John Bettler, Adams's protégé and the second director of CCEF, led the way, and Powlison's penetrating writings grounded our understanding of the inner life upon sound biblical exposition. Their work was needed. Adams had emphasized the replacement principle—putting off the works of the "old man" and putting on the "new man" in concrete and measurable ways.¹⁵

12 Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 255.

13 Adams's contention that counseling is the responsibility of elders is based on the premise that it is Word ministry for the conversion of sinners and sanctification of the church. Yet even if we grant that narrow definition, we should not exclude other gifted and trained counselors, both men and women, from serving with their gifts. This takes us into ecclesiology and church polity, well beyond the scope of this review.

14 Some of this tension could be felt between CCEF and the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC). NANC more recently changed its name to The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, and the former tensions appear absent.

15 Adams gives an example, which I've repeated many times since: if a kleptomaniac stops stealing but is still not working and giving, he has not really changed (Eph. 4:28). He is just an "off-duty thief."

Not surprisingly, Adams's detractors criticized him as merely offering a behavioristic approach with a Christian veneer. That assessment is too severe, yet it is fair to say Adams's attention to the inner aspects of PMW was undeniably weak. At this point Powlison picked up the challenge and developed a comprehensive anthropology and a praxis for PMW that encompasses both the inner ("heart," "root") and the outer ("walk," "fruit") perspectives. The data for both is replete in Scripture, and any biblical counseling worthy of the name must address both. We want to understand *what* you are doing and *why* you are doing it—and especially which God (or gods) you are serving.

Meanwhile, during all this ferment at CCEF, outside its ivy-covered walls a reinvigorated integrationist movement grew. It attacked Adams's "nouthetic counseling"¹⁶ as little more than a poor man's cognitive-behavioral therapy, sprinkled with holy water, but without the academic rigor of solid research and the professionalism of mental health care experts. Some regarded him as a "crypto-disciple"¹⁷ of his secular mentor, O. Hobart Mowrer. It's hard to imagine a more devastating critique of Adams and his work.

Adams paid scant attention to those critics, but he most certainly cared about the direction of CCEF and respected those who served there. He feared that all this talk about "heart" issues would lead to morbid navel-gazing—or worse, intense witch hunts by counselors desperately trying to expose all those hellish motives that *must* be lurking under even the most godly-looking behavior. "Don't you know, 'The heart is deceitful

16 Adams chose this term from the Greek word and its cognates, meaning "change through confrontation out of concern," from *Ready to Restore: The Layman's Guide to Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981), 9, also cited by Fraser. The clear implication of this definition: biblical counseling in the narrow sense can only be given to believers, since its goal is sanctification. I disagree with Adams at this point on the grounds of common grace, by which we certainly may offer a "cup of cold water in Jesus's name" and give practical biblical counsel to anyone. "If you conduct your marriage in this way, you will have a great marriage. It won't save you, but you'll have a great marriage."

17 Fraser's apt description of their charge, 51. Mowrer was a psychologist with whom Adams briefly studied.

above all things.’ We need to expose the hypocrisy of the flesh so you can *really* repent.” As a result, that strong and clear put-off/put-on dynamic of sanctification would be undermined by a pietistic obsession with the inner life. Fraser’s view, and mine, is that extreme criticisms from both sides are simply unfair and fail to do justice to the whole system taught by their opponents. No doubt we have different emphases and plenty of blind spots, but in this case we really *are* climbing the same mountain.

Puritans Old and New

Fraser’s last chapter recognizes that CCEF’s emphasis on motivation finds deep roots in the old Puritans—men such as Richard Baxter,¹⁸ Thomas Brookes, John Bunyan, John Flavel, and the late American Puritan, Jonathan Edwards. They cared much about the “affections of the heart.” As Timothy Keller put it, “The Puritans looked not just at behavior but at underlying root motives and desires. Man is a worshipper; all problems grow out of ‘sinful imagination’ or idol manufacturing.”¹⁹ Making a similar point, Powlison comments about a common Evangelical catchphrase.

Usually “trust in the Lord” is vague and ineffectual because it is tossed like some season-all into the stew of a person’s life. Counselees in effect trust the Lord to give them their ruling desires, without ever repenting in depth of those desires. But “trust the Lord *instead of* trusting in . . .” does work because it is biblical. It has the concrete two-sidedness of biblical repentance and mind renewal.²⁰

To conclude, it is important to highlight a significant figure Fraser neglected to mention. C. John (“Jack”) Miller founded and pastored New Life Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown,

18 Fraser did much research on Baxter’s work under the supervision of J. I. Packer, whose 1954 doctoral dissertation was about Baxter’s approach to redemption and restoration.

19 Timothy J. Keller, “Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (1988). Fraser quotes extensively from this article.

20 Powlison, *Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*, 246.

Pennsylvania,²¹ and spearheaded a revival movement with a far-reaching legacy that remains to this day.²² He also taught practical theology at WTS—at the same time as Jay Adams!²³ But unlike Adams, who was not enthralled with the Puritans, Miller closely identified with the New Light side of the Great Awakening, particularly Jonathan Edwards. Gospel-centered Christian living means daily repentance from heart-level idols, daily returning to our foundation in justification and adoption,²⁴ daily trusting in a fresh empowering of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is always “faith working by love.”²⁵ Miller had a low view of externalism and never hesitated to preach the gospel even to professing Christians. More than one seminary student was known to publicly declare his recent conversion. That raised some eyebrows.

21 An OPC (now PCA) church plant that began with an evangelism class Miller taught at WTS and then burgeoned into a thriving network with an impact far beyond confessional Presbyterian circles. He was pastor there from 1974 to 1990. World Harvest Mission™ (now Serge™) traces its origins to the short-term missions of this one congregation on three continents.

22 Timothy Keller and John Frame both acknowledge Jack Miller as a major influence upon them. Regarding Keller, I have vivid memories of visiting his first church in Virginia for a week-long ministry led by Miller. This is before Keller’s stint at WTS and his move to NYC to plant the Redeemer Presbyterian Church network. Frame (who I regard as the finest systematic theologian alive today) taught at WTS Philadelphia until 1982, and claims that Miller influenced him profoundly. Tongue in cheek, he writes, “I suppose that Jack’s greatest influence on me was to make me willing to endure the scorn of traditionalists in the church” (“Backgrounds to my Thought” at <http://frame-poythress.org/about/john-frame-full-bio/>). After moving to Westminster Seminary in California, Frame, who was the associate pastor, became the elder in charge of worship at New Life Presbyterian Church in Escondido, CA.

23 Edmund P. Clowney was the third practical theology professor. What an honor it was to sit under the teaching of these three men of God, so vastly different yet so influential in the worldwide church.

24 His “Sonship” discipleship program began with a handful of seminary students meeting in his garage, was packaged and well organized by his son, Paul, and still used by Serge (nee World Harvest Mission).

25 Gal. 5:6. On-going faith is the “man-ward” side of our union with Christ. This is no charismatic innovation, but simply the doctrine of vital union with Christ, which Miller wanted the church to reclaim as an overwhelming and experiential mindset. Of course, vital union comes together with a personal grasp of our federal union with Christ, and justification/adoption not as a doctrinal appendage but the very ground we stand on. Miller loved the introduction to Luther’s commentary on Galatians.

It also led to suspicion, even opposition from some quarters, including from Adams. Meanwhile, both Powlison and Edward Welch served as elders at New Life—while they evolved the new CCEF, and PMW, in a distinctly Puritan direction.

Conclusion

Today's CCEF affirms the strengths of Adams's work while balancing and correcting its deficiencies—and avoiding those pitfalls he feared. A steady stream of outstanding counselors, pastors, authors, and professionals from a wide-range of fields are developing a robust PMW with a level of excellence and practicality never seen before.²⁶ Powlison still serves as the movement's premier theologian and editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*. In the end, we have to be impressed not only with the women and men behind this true revival of biblical counseling over several decades, but with the Lord of the church who continually drives us all back to his Word and opens the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:18). We always build on the work of those who went before us, others taught by God. We can thank Cameron Fraser for his fine research, thoroughly yet succinctly presented. May it give us a long view of the Holy Spirit's work of illuminating the Word of God to the people of God over the course of many human lifetimes. ☺

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²⁶ Among many others, besides David Powlison and Edward Welch, we could include Paul Tripp, Tim Lane, Diane Langberg, and Wayne Mack.

Sexuality These Days

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
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by **Stephen J. Tracey**

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, edited by Michael LeFebvre. Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant and the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 2012, 67 pages, \$6.00, paper.

Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ, by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2015, 206 pages, \$7.00, paper. (Also available in Kindle.)

We use the word “sex” in two ways. The first, and usual, meaning refers to sexual activity. We also use the word to refer to gender: “the male sex” and “the female sex.” Many Christians are still bewildered over the recent decision of the Supreme Court regarding same-sex marriage and in response are trying to defend the fundamental principles of marriage in terms of one man and one woman. Meanwhile, social discourse has moved further along the LGBT alphabet, seeking to abolish any male/female distinction, and arguing for gender fluidity. The fundamental distinction of male and female has come under attack; the debate has shifted to sex in terms of gender and the abolition of the dimorphic order. While Christians are still thinking about how to respond to the question of homosexual marriage, society is struggling to understand issues of transgender, or gender fluidity.

Sex as Sexual Activity

A few years ago I had the privilege of being involved in campus outreach to Bowdoin College,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=569&issue_id=117.

Brunswick, Maine. The college is proud of many things, one of which is the Bowdoin Orient, “The Nation’s Oldest Continuously Published College Weekly.” On February 19, 2010, an article appeared chronicling the work of *Bowdoin Christian Fellowship*, stating not only that the fellowship has been “exceptionally active on campus this semester,” but also that the group is “experiencing a marked growth in membership.” However, a few pages into the newspaper, one is greeted with the following headline: “Let’s talk sex, baby: Top 10 reasons to do the deed,” by Natalia Richey, Columnist.

Richey’s view is that since we are all different, we therefore approach sex in different ways. She then says, “I often receive strange, and surprised stares when I make this claim, especially from those who have decided that sex comes with a rule book about when, why, where, with who and for what reasons we should have it.”²

And there you have it, sex these days—there are no rules. There are no rules about when you have sex, why you have sex, where you have sex, or with whom you have sex. There are not even any rules about reasons you have sex. Anything goes. It is my body, and I’ll do what I want—I’ll do what I like. Life is all about me, what I want, what pleases me. This view of sex treats other people as objects. Ironically sex without rules may appear to be about freedom, but it can very quickly descend to abuse. The word “abuse” is a powerful word in our culture. The power of that word reflects the fact that for many people sex is contaminated; they have been violated. Their sexuality has been misshapen, misdirected, and harmed by others. Sex has become a complex darkness. Here is what David Powlison says:

Sex can become very distasteful. Pawing, seduction, bullying, predation, attack, betrayal, and abandonment are among the many ways that sex becomes stained by sufferings at the hands of others. When you’ve been treated

² Natalia Richey, “Let’s Talk Sex, Baby: Top 10 Reasons to Do the Deed,” *The Bowdoin Orient* 139, no. 16 (February 19, 2010): 7.

like an object, the mere thought of the act can produce tense torment. Sexual darkness is not always lust; sometimes it is fear, pain, haunting memories. If immoral fantasies bring one poison into sex, then nightmarish memories infiltrate a different poison. The arena for trusting friendship can become a prison of mistrust. The experience of violation can leave the victim self-labeled as “damaged goods.” Sex becomes intrinsically dirty, shameful, dangerous. Even in marriage, it can become an unpleasant duty, a necessary evil, not the delightful convergence of duty and desire.³

Sex as Gender and Identity

What about the other idea of sex and of sexuality, that of identity? Princeton Theological Seminary recently hosted a conference entitled “Gender Benders: Theology and Gender Fluidity” to explore so called “gender fluidity” and how people are “forging new gender identities,” outside the norms of male and female. One of the organizers, Jacqueline Lapsley, said, “Gender identity is a topic of great interest today, especially for young people. They are questioning the gender binaries—male and female—and some are forging new gender identities in accordance with their self-understanding.”⁴

And there you have it, sex these days—gender identity is my own choice. In a recent blog post entitled *Your Soul for—A Pronoun?* Dr. Peter Jones said, “The new Western progressive view of sexuality claims that there are no given sexual identities.” Individuals create their own sexual self-definition. He then gave several examples of recent sexual self-determination:

A 60-something Bruce Jenner, one of the

³ David Powlison, “Making All Things New: Restoring Pure Joy to the Sexually Broken,” *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 71.

⁴ Michael Gryboski, “Princeton Theological Seminary’s ‘Gender Bender’ Conference Goes against God’s Design Says Former Graduate,” *Christian Post* 22 (March 2016), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/princeton-theological-seminarys-gender-bender-fluidity-conference-against-gods-design-bible159679/>.

world's greatest male athletes, has fashioned himself as a 30-something female pin-up who recently won the ESPN Arthur Ashe athletic award for courage; In Toronto, a 6' 2", 46-year-old father has convinced himself that he is a 6-year-old girl, with the blessing of the Metropolitan Christian Church; At a 2016 United Methodist forum for their VBS programs, the Reconciling Ministries Network demanded workers to "drop the gender binary" by avoiding such offensive language as "boys and girls." In the UK the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England for school-children between 13 and 18 asked students to complete a questionnaire choosing from 22 "gender types," included (sic) "gender non-conforming," "tri-gender" and "gender fluid."⁵

Crown and Covenant Publications has produced two very helpful books that speak to this issue of sexuality. While they cover the same ground, often making the same points, they do so in very different ways. *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation: A Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, edited by Michael LeFebvre, is a small book based on a report to the synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and it retains some of its church-report shape. Yet this in no way detracts from the helpfulness of the book. It contains helpful insights and guidance to the pastoral care of those struggling with questions of sexual identity. It is not merely a clerical report; it is a pastoral report.

Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ, by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, is more of a personal confessional-reflecting kind of book, continuing on from her previous book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. In many ways, reading the two reviewed books together was just as important to my thinking as reading them separately. On the one hand is a report of a

church court, not dry as dust and weighed down in church-speak, but scriptural and full of pastoral wisdom. On the other hand is the personal report of one who is a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and that personal account not only oozes humanity, but the gospel comes welling up into that messy kitchen-table, backyard, yearning-for-community humanity. Both books are a must-read for officers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation

The Gospel and Sexual Orientation begins with an excellent introduction to the issues facing the church from the proponents of the new perspective on same-sex issues. These proponents argue that "same-sex desires are . . . not a matter of moral choices, but are a natural disposition—a legitimate sexual identity" (6). In a careful discussion of issues of biology (are there physiological causes for same-sex desires?), the report notes that "even if it were to be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that some people possess a same-sex orientation through biological or sociological factors outside their own control, this would not indicate that homosexuality is part of God's intended order" (20). Sexual identity is included in the "all parts and faculties of soul and body," WCF 6.2–3, disordered by original sin.

The next section summarizes questions of personality traits and the multiplication of gender categories. While many Christians are bewildered by the discussion on who may use which restrooms or locker rooms in public schools, we must be on our guard that we do not overreact. The report states, "The Church needs to be aware of these trends in our society," and then adds:

It becomes increasingly important that the church be careful not to fall into the trap of treating "sensitive men" as less masculine or "strong women" as not feminine and thereby contributing to a sense of gender confusion and the resulting burden of individuals being given one of society's new gender identities. (27)

5 Peter Jones, "Your Soul For—A Pronoun?" truthXchange, posted on Feb 23, 2016, <https://truthxchange.com/articles/2016/02/23/your-soul-for-a-pronoun/> (accessed April 4, 2016).

From these introductory points, helping to explain the confusion evident in our culture, the report moves to scriptural and confessional statements, leaning heavily on the work of Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective*, and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*.⁶

The final section helpfully states that “homosexuality is not just an issue to understand, it is a struggle experienced by real people” (57). There is a very helpful balance between recognizing the need to evangelize unbelievers and the need to disciple Christ’s flock. The desire in giving some pastoral guidelines is for the sake of “improving our ministry as Christ’s church to men and women with same-sex tendencies” (58). The guidelines are general, yet applied to issues of same-sex temptations.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has done us a great service and greatly helped the church in the work of mutual edification and gospel witness.

Openness Unhindered

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield’s book is a most beautiful book. Not only is it well researched, and timely, it is well written: the author uses words artfully. This is clear even from the choice of title. *Openness Unhindered* comes from Acts 28:31, where Paul, in Rome, was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (NASB). Such gospel openness is usually met with hostility, and surely Rosaria Butterfield has faced her share of that. Yet there is a glorious truth here: God’s gospel should be stated openly, and, if it pleases God, it shall be unhindered. Concerning the title, Butterfield says:

I have come to understand ‘openness, unhindered’ as tidings that, in their biblical context,

outline Christ’s posture for the forgiveness of sexual sin and the renewal that he gives to the body and the mind. My prayer is that this book will serve as a bridge to Christ for those of us whose sin (sexual and otherwise) has clobbered us more times than we can count, and for our churches and Christian friends who want to help but don’t know where to begin or what to say. (2)

Butterfield begins by suggesting three lenses through which people view sexuality. They include: 1. rejecting Scripture; 2. accepting Scripture but misapplying it by believing the struggle is the sin; or 3. accepting Scripture, but supplementing it with the “moral logic” of experience or the culture in which we live. This part of her book was reprinted in the March 2016 edition of *New Horizons*.⁷ It is a helpful way of focusing discussion. The second lens exposes how Christians are often insensitive to the struggles of same-sex temptation. The third lens exposes the dangers of abandoning *sola Scriptura* for *sola experientia*. Many believers now frame their life not by the Word of God alone, but by the principle that one’s own life experience may validate and explain the human condition.

After summarizing her conversion to Christ, Butterfield goes straight to the issue of identity. Here she skillfully shows that seeking identity in anything other than Christ leads to a blurred view of self, of the world, and of God. In a later chapter she discusses the origin and power of the idea of “sexual orientation” and draws this conclusion, “The category of sexual orientation carries with it a cosmology of personhood that undervalues image bearers of a holy God” (95). Or again, “Sexuality moved from verb (practice) to noun (people), and with this grammatical move, a new concept of humanity was born—the idea that we are *oriented* or framed by our sexual desires” (97). Or again, “Prior to the nineteenth-century category invention of sexual orientation, no one’s sexual practice

6 Greg L. Bahnsen, *Homosexuality: A Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

7 Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, “Three Lenses through Which People View Sexuality,” *New Horizons* 37, no. 3 (March 2016): 5.

or sexual desire prescribed personhood or defined their personal identity” (97). That is why it is vitally important to understand the principles of identity in terms of union with Christ.

Butterfield takes the good and glorious doctrines of the old story and brings them into sharp focus on the landscape of sexuality. Here is a clear statement of sexuality as it relates to the doctrines of original sin, of union with Christ, of sanctification, and of repentance. While her statement of original sin does not discuss the idea of the imputation of Adam’s sin, she is very clear on the reason the doctrine is vital:

My fear is that the use of the term *sexual orientation* when used as a morally neutral starting point for a conversation about biblical sexuality muddies the water about what Original Sin really means. It forgets that Original Sin is everyone’s preexisting condition. (126)

In the middle of a section on sanctification and repentance, Butterfield writes, “One reason I am writing this book is that I believe we need a more stalwart understanding of sin, repentance, and sanctification to provide pastoral care to all people struggling with unwanted sexual temptations” (56). Her careful statements of sin, repentance, and sanctification go a long way in helping the church to speak the gospel with wisdom and gentleness. Speaking of the benefits of union with Christ, she says, “One more crucial gift that identity in Christ bequeaths is it gives me a way to defend myself against Satan’s accusations. Union with Christ is part of the saints’ armor” (40). Here, in the midst of the struggle with sin, this identity in Christ is the true story, the true experience of every believer. Many well-meaning Christians often forget that sanctification is not an act of God’s free grace, but a work of God’s free grace. The result of forgetting this distinction is that we foolishly expect people to no longer face temptation. Butterfield observes:

Sometimes when I speak to church and college audiences, I am asked if I am healed. Sometimes the person asking the question will say: “God does not make people gay. So if

your homosexual desire does not disappear in this lifetime, then you are either not a believer or not praying hard enough.” Both the use of the term “healing” and the “pray the gay away” philosophy strike an unbiblical chord to me, and I said that to my questioner. (55)

She is right; these are unbiblical chords.

There are also well-meaning Christians who love the doctrine of grace, but somehow bypass repentance to get to grace. Repentance, I suppose, sounds too much like law, and not grace. They argue that we should certainly admit sin, and then cry for more grace. Butterfield shows that admitting sin and confessing sin is not the same thing. “Confession of sin is meant to drive us to Christ. But Christians who indulge the habit of admitting rather than confessing sin over time tend not to see their sin as sin at all. It just seems like life” (70).

Community

The last chapter of Butterfield’s book expresses the human yearning for community. The church, of course, fulfills that, but, as on my grade school reports, there is a could-do-better note. One of the best things about this book is the foundational place given to the ordinary means of grace. One finishes with a sense that the church of the Lord Jesus is well equipped to speak into the world the glorious gospel of Jesus. This is not a hunker-down and circle-the-wagons time. This is an age of opportunity, for preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness. Shall it be unhindered? That is in God’s hands. ©

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Brain Changer?

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by T. David Gordon

i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming, and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species, by Mari K. Swingle. Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society, 2016, xix + 242 pages, \$19.95, paper.

For a decade or two, the digital technologies largely received a “free pass.” Commercial forces routinely advocated their purchase on the ostensible ground that these technologies would radically alter human experience for the better. And, until there was enough experience with these technologies to assess their influence, those of us who were more cautionary were ordinarily dismissed as curmudgeons, cranks, or both. Our reservations were ordinarily more modest than our detractors thought; we merely observed that all benefits have costs, and/or that we already have a Messiah, to whom we look for the true re-creating of the present mortal and sinful order, and therefore do not need to open the field to ostensible competition. The “free pass” phase of digital technology is now well behind us; the jury is in, and author after author presents evidence that the cost for these benefits is a good deal higher than we had supposed.²

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=574&issue_id=118.

2 Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future* (Or, *Don't Trust Anyone under Thirty*) (New York: Tarcher, 2008); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: Norton, 2010); Winifred Gallagher, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Maggie Jackson, *Distraction: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (New York: Prometheus, 2008); Jaron Lanier *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2010); Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper, 2007).

Enter Dr. Mari K. Swingle, a Canadian neurotherapist, whose research and clinical specialty is in the neurology of brain waves, and how such neurology affects human behavior. On the Swingle Clinic website, they describe their discipline as follows: “Clinical psychoneurophysiology is a biological approach to healing and wellness.... Neurophysiological treatment does not involve pharmaceuticals or other potentially dangerous or ineffective drugs.” Dr. Swingle’s father, Dr. Paul G. Swingle, is considered one of the founders of neurophysiology. Note that neurophysiology is a “biological approach,” an approach grounded in the use of EEG (“electroencephalography”) technology to measure brainwaves. Dr. Swingle is not, therefore, a mere essayist; she is a behavioral scientist, whose own practice and research have persuaded her that for many individuals, the digital world is having a significant negative impact on behavior:

For children, adolescents, and youth, excessive usage of digital media is now highly associated with learning disabilities, emotional dysregulation, as well as conduct or behavioral disorders. For adults, it is highly correlated with anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction and sexual deviation, insomnia, social isolation, disaffected pair bonding, marital conflict, and compromised work performance. In clinical practice, I am also starting to note some rather frightening connections with thwarted emotional and cognitive development in the very young. (xii)

The fifteen chapters that constitute the book (including the fifteenth itself, on iAddiction) contain what Dr. Swingle and other neurologists have learned from their research and clinical practice. Those interested in the science will appreciate the rich bibliography supplied in the 234 endnotes.

Two principles recur in the book as the criteria by which Dr. Swingle assesses i-tech (the concept not the company). First, she constantly raises the question about the extent to which we are “immersed” in digital technologies (and why). Second, she repeatedly distinguishes integration from

interference: when and how digital technology becomes *integrated* into a healthy and productive life, and/or when and how it *interferes* with a healthy and productive life. She likens digital dis-integration (problematic digital experience) to food disorders. People with food disorders cannot simply go “cold turkey” as other addicts can, because we have a biological need for sustenance. Likewise, Dr. Swingle argues that the digital world is such a large aspect of most professional lives that people simply cannot choose to opt out entirely; they must, rather, learn how to integrate digital tech into their lives without permitting digital tech to interfere with their lives.

Dr. Swingle intends for the work to be accessible to non-scientists, to which end she has a number of places in the book set aside by different type, and entitled “Scientific Corner.” For those less interested, these portions can be skipped. Early in the book, however, she has a section entitled “Electroencephalography 101,” which is in the text itself, because this brief introduction is necessary for understanding so much of the other material in the book. Even this section is as non-technical as possible.

Because Dr. Swingle is a clinician, her research (and her book) are not merely technical; she is very much concerned about human behavior, to which end she (refreshingly) permits herself to express the occasional value judgment, and she always does so self-consciously, so that the reader can distinguish those comments that have been substantiated empirically from those that have not. This reviewer considers this candor to be an asset, not a liability. She candidly acknowledges, for example, that most clinicians believe that there should be no use of digital technologies before the age of four, whereas she believes that the age should extend to six.

The chapter on addiction is one of the more fascinating ones, because many of us have observed (in ourselves or others) digital behaviors that appear to be analogous to addictive behaviors. Dr. Swingle has observed that many studies examined the more obviously dangerous or damaging uses of digital technology: “second life” websites that

become, for many, their first life; pornography; digital bullying, etc. But she has discovered that one of the most addictive behaviors surrounds the more-neutral-appearing process of digital searching: “One hundred percent of my participants reported using the Internet compulsively for searching” (199). She likens such searching to gambling, where part of the attraction is to the unknown, the unpredictable. That is, she distinguishes digital *content* from digital *process*, arguing that the process itself is (or should be) the primary concern:

Gaming, gambling, stock watching and trading, e-mailing and texting, auction shopping, as well as pornography are all addictions that can be driven by both content and process as supplied by the medium, the Internet. This last classification appears to be the classification of most threat. Technological addiction is *all about process*, and more and more of us are succumbing to it. (198, emphasis mine)

If Dr. Swingle is even partly right, much of our approach to the digital world has been extremely inadequate: educators, parents, clergy, mental health officials, et al., have primarily addressed the *content* of digital technologies (gambling, pornography, violence, bullying); we have been much less likely to discuss the *process* of surfing the web itself, and how such searching alters our brainwaves:

What is evident is there is just something bewitching about the buzz, the ring, and now the endless possibility for more: instant accessibility both in content and material, attainable. Like Pavlov’s dog, we have conditioned ourselves to salivate to the bell; like lab rats, we push and push on the lever for the food pellet of pleasure, of intrigue, of more. What we have forgotten to ask is what is happening to our brains in this great experiment of life on i-tech. (208)

Dr. Swingle is not a theist, or, apparently, a religious person: “Although I am not crazy about the religious framing of his work, one author, Struthers, has some very powerful points in his book *Wired for Intimacy*” (171). Swingle therefore

does not address or answer every question that religious people would address; however, in her epilogue, where she provides some succinct advice, much of it is remarkably common-sensical, and therefore consistent with what we would ordinarily call natural theology. Consider some of her advice (and try to ignore some of her non-Sunday-school nomenclature):

- I do not reply to work emails past a specific hour or on weekends.
- Take back play and don't get caught in the organization and the capitalism of it all.
- Fight like hell to have sport, music, and art reintroduced in schools during the curriculum.
- Bring back hobbies where, by definition, being good or bad at them is irrelevant!
- In formal education ensure that the integration of technologies serves a true educational purpose, and is not merely introduced because of novelty, convenience, or vested external interests.
- Get back to your beds as opposed to your computers together. Snuggle, touch, and be touched by people, by each other.
- Play! Play with your children, your partners, your friends, your pets and any and all non-tech objects around you. (211–13)

Perhaps the group who would most benefit (and may be most disturbed) from reading *i-Minds* is parents. The book concentrates substantially on how digital technologies (unless used in extreme moderation) retard emotional, intellectual, moral, and creative development in the years most critical to developing a healthy neurology (e.g., who would have thought that eight-to-sixteen-month-old infants who watched “educational” videos to develop vocabulary actually learned eight words per hour *less* than infants who were *not* exposed to such videos?). Several times in the book, she repeats the counsel she gives to her clients: “No more than one hour of screen time a day for older children, absolutely none until the age of four; and waiting until six is notably healthier” (145). Also repeated is this maxim: “Nothing wrong with a

little, a lot wrong with a lot” (144).

Twenty years ago, those of us who issued cautions about digital technology were largely dismissed as cranks. After all, we had no scientific “proof” for our claims, and indeed, there can be no scientific proof of things that will happen in the future. While we did not understand the biology, we did (or so we thought) know something about human nature, and we made our predictions and warnings on that basis. The jury is now in; the digital world can no longer resist scrutiny by dwelling in the future; it is now part of our present and part of our recent past, and how it affects human behavior and experience have now been subjected to rigorous scientific scrutiny (and will continue to do so). A consensus is emerging: the digital technologies enable us to perform some tasks more rapidly or economically; but they do not tend to make us fuller or richer humans. The sheer weight of empirical study that Dr. Swingle has read and/or conducted is now staggering, and the commercial forces can no longer foist their digital wares on an unknowing or unsuspecting public. ☺

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The Literati Face the Last Enemy

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

The Violet Hour: Great Writers at the End, by Katie Roiphe. New York: Dial, 2016, 308 pages, \$28.00.

When requesting a review copy of this book from the publisher, I noticed that I had mistakenly titled the book *The Violent Hour*. I responded: “Sorry for botching the title. When I think of death, I think more of violence than violets as in Dylan Thomas’s, ‘Do not go gentle into that good night.’” Indeed, Dylan Thomas is one of the six great writers whose final days are examined by Katie Roiphe in this book. Though she writes from a secular perspective, Roiphe’s account of death is poignant and reflects her own profound encounter with her own potential death at age twelve.

The Puritan imperative, based on an accurate interpretation of Scripture, was that the Christian life should be lived in preparation for death. What we discover in this book is that, Christian or non-Christian, death is always in view; it hovers over human consciousness like black flies in New England May.

In reviewing *The Violet Hour*, I will follow Roiphe’s order in discussing each of the six writers, but with an emphasis on John Updike and Dylan Thomas, the two with whom I am most familiar.

Roiphe is a master of identifying the Achilles heel of each dying writer. She reports their talents, hopes and fears, virtues, vices, and foibles accurately. For example, Susan Sontag, filmmaker, teacher, political activist, and author of *On Photography* (1977) and *Against Interpretation* (1966), among many others, “was a person who took creative

liberties with truth” (50).

Many years before she was diagnosed with breast cancer, Sontag wrote in the notebooks: “Thinking about my own death the other day, as I often do, I made a discovery. I realized that my way of thinking has up to now been both too abstract and too concrete. Too abstract: death. Too concrete: me.” (67)

A very talented but self-centered woman, Sontag always asserted her presence (68), and had no time for religion. Yet, she was interested in viewing religion as a tourist at a distance. After visiting a Tibetan prayer meeting, she remarked about a monk, “He was very charming, but, my God, what nonsense!” (73). As she was dying in the hospital, her last words to a friend as she grasped her sleeve were, “Get me out of here” (75). She could never accept her death, but death accepted her. She died at age seventy-one, three days after Christmas in 2004.

Sigmund Freud, the creator of psychoanalysis, whose work and writings have had a major influence on Western thought and popular culture, was an advocate of a stoic approach to death, facing “the hard facts of mortality” (83). “After all, we know that death belongs to life, that it is unavoidable and comes when it wants.” It is something to be mastered by reason (84). Here Roiphe mocks this attitude, “As if one is supposed to be only *a little bit* attached to life” (85). For Freud control was everything. Even in the face of being obsessed with the idea that he was dying, he refused to give up smoking twenty cigars a day, against his doctor’s advice (92). He was diagnosed with mouth cancer in 1923 at age sixty-seven. Here is the irony of irrationality of the supreme rationalist. Roiphe notes that he even called his smoking his sin, “an interesting word choice for a man of science” (95).

Freud’s focus on rational assessment and complete control was so all-consuming that it encompassed his mode of dying (101). He refused painkillers. His neurotic fear of death succumbed to resignation in the face of his “inescapable anger” over his own demise (105). His youngest child, Anna, who was present at his death, poignantly

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=575&issue_id=118.

observed, “I believe there is nothing worse than to see the people nearest to one lose the very qualities for which one loves them, I was spared that with my father, who was himself to the last minute” (110). My mother was also herself right to the end, but that would have been small consolation had she not trusted her crucified and resurrected Lord.

Another person who was cogent to the end and even wrote poems about that end was the important writer John Updike.

On his deathbed at Massachusetts General Hospital, Updike felt compelled by custom to be a “good host,” but resented it, as he reflected in this poem:

Must I do this, uphold the social lie
that binds us all together in blind faith
that nothing ends, not youth nor age nor
strength,
as in a motion picture, once seen,
can be rebought on DVD? My tongue
says yes; within, I lamely drown. (116)²

Sex was a kind of redemptive activity for Updike; and while we may understand the impulse, we cannot embrace the conclusion since we know both impulse and conclusion to be sin. Roiphe sympathizes with Updike’s linkage of adultery with immortality: “I have a soft spot for those who try to defeat death with sex” (297). Malcolm Muggeridge observed, “Sex is the ersatz or substitute religion of the twentieth century.... Sex is the mysticism of materialism and the only possible religion in a materialistic society.”³

Ordinarily the best poems are not the last written by a poet. But Updike is an exception, as Roiphe accurately reports:

Yet in his new poems, the wily inventiveness,
the powers of observation, the sheer gift with

words that both his warmest admirers and sharpest critics found astonishing, are all on display. He had been writing about death since he was young, but now he had a fresh subject: his dying. (119)

On his deathbed, however, morbid apprehensions, or what he called “gray sensation” (121) could not be overcome with sex. Unlike life’s negatives of loss, fear, and guilt, which Updike had turned into “the honey of words,... the approach of death, and the dwindling of self, involved a whole other, physically and emotionally trickier level of pain” (124). Thus his deathbed reading included *The Book of Common Prayer*. Roiphe observes, “There was also a book he was not reading, Barack Obama’s *The Audacity of Hope*, which Martha [Updike’s second wife] had given him for Christmas” (126).

During the months before he died, Updike asked Martha to drive him to Smith’s Point to see Emmanuel Church, where Martha attended on her own in the summer (131). His son Michael couldn’t “understand how anyone so intelligent could believe in God” (138). Updike actually “plotted *Couples* almost entirely in a church” from jottings on the program (138). Roiphe opines that his faith coexisted with

a very American search for self-fulfillment, a kind of rapturous merging of the two. His affairs are tinged with guilt, his sex scenes with heaven, his love with rapture; it’s all jumbled together. (138)

Updike loved “the concrete stuff” of the church, the rituals, the Sunday mornings, the church pews. He said the Lord’s Prayer with the children in their rooms before they fell asleep. In later years he and Martha attended services regularly at an Episcopal church, St. John’s, minutes away from their home in Beverly Farms.... When he was too sick to go to church, the Episcopal priest came to his house two or three times a week to talk to him and give him communion. (139)

2 John Updike, from “Hospital 11/23–27/08,” in *Endpoint and Other Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 23. I have added the two lines, underlined, that Roiphe edited out with an ellipsis.

3 Malcolm Muggeridge, quoted in Dover Beach blog, accessed July 9, 2016, <https://lifeondoverbeach.wordpress.com/2012/04/14/malcolm-muggeridge-on-sex-and-materialism>.

After Updike married Martha, he shifted from “the flashy distractions of adultery to mortality” (141). His writing continued “not submitting gratefully to that eternal sleep” (148). So his last poetry was a way of “writing his way out of death” —

End point, I thought, would end a chapter in
a book beyond imaging, that got reset
in crisp exotic type a future I
— a miracle! — could read. (149)

— and reflecting with a kind of desperate resignation:

God save us from ever ending, though billions
have.
The world is blanketed by foregone deaths,
small beads of ego, bright with appetite. (150)

I partly disagree with Roiphe’s assessment that “the late poems breathe calm,” as this poem, while more resigned, still hates letting go:

With what stoic delicacy does
Virginia creeper let go:
the feeblest tug brings down
a sheaf of leaves kite-high,
as if to say, *To live is good*
but not to live — to be pulled down
with scarce a ripping sound,
still flourishing, still
stretching toward the sun —
is good also, all photosynthesis
abandoned, quite quits. (151)

But on the night before he died, Updike asked Martha if she was ready for the leap. Instead, she countered with her own question, “Are you?” “Yes!” he responded with a loudness that surprised her. “I am too,” she said. “And so is God.”

When Updike’s Episcopal minister arrived at the hospice, Updike’s children “recited the Lord’s Prayer with him, as they had in their rooms as children” (156). The following day, just before Updike breathed his last, Martha read from *The Book of Common Prayer*. “An ending so completely in the penumbra of his oeuvre that one can only think: How would Updike write it?” (158). He had requested that a passage from “Pigeon Feathers”

be read at his funeral. While the boy in the story gazed at the dead pigeons’ feathers,

he was robed in this certainty: that the God
who had lavished such craft upon these
worthless birds would not destroy His whole
Creation by refusing to let David live forever.
(158)

Of the six writers’ deaths reported and reflected upon by Roiphe, Updike’s is the only one with a ray of light. While finally Updike seemed to have breathed his last breath in gospel hope, the remaining three writers seemed to have plunged into everlasting darkness.

The initial fame of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas revealed an early focus on death. Roiphe reports, “Dylan Thomas had burst into public at nineteen with his first lush poems, many of which, like ‘And Death Shall Have No Dominion,’ were preoccupied with death” (162). Robert Lowell noted the looming disaster in Thomas’s life. Besides his enormous talent,

he was also, and perhaps this was more
important to some of his admirers, doomed,
damned, whatever you will, undeniably suffering
and living in the extremest reached of
experience.... Here, at last, was a poet in the
grand, romantic style, a wild inspired spirit not
built for comfortable ways. (163)

As was the case for Updike, sex played a central role in Thomas’s life. Unlike Updike, there was no obvious redemptive thread running through his life and work.

Women adored him. As the gimlet-eyed
Hardwick observed, “So powerful and beguiling
was his image — the image of the self-
destroying, dying young poet of genius — that
he aroused the most sacrificial longings in
women.” (170)

Also, unlike Updike, Thomas thought about his own death constantly. He described the poem he had written on his birthday, “Poem on His Birthday,” “Why should he praise God and the beauty of the world, as he moves to horrible death?” (172).

His morbid obsession with death also exhibited a curious enjoyment of illness. “He certainly liked the theater of sickness, the staginess, the attention it brought him, and later the excuses it provided” (176).

Thomas’s drunkenness was a way of escaping his manic creativity, which left the rest of his life in chaos. He preferred reading other poets aloud in performance because reading his own amplified the pressure to create new poems.

But in spite of hours wiled away in the pub, in spite of his nearly insatiable need for company, when Thomas was writing, he was fanatical. He wrote draft after draft; when one looks at the scrawlings and scratchings of those drafts, the sheer labor involved in his poems, the huge amount of time and effort on a single word, a phrase, is undeniable. He also felt peace and purpose when he was writing. Those rare moments of concentration in his shed at Laugharne were a great salve to him. (181)

This is the necessary discipline of all great poets, as I have learned from poets like Donald Hall. The tragedy is that Thomas was never able to embed his discipline in an otherwise disciplined life. The idea that creative genius must be cultivated in the soil of dissolute life is a dangerous myth initiated in the Romantic era.

Late in his life Thomas felt that his poetic muse was departing. “One can chart his self-loathing through his last years” (181). It was during his last trip to New York in 1953 that a poem that had been published a year earlier, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” became a prophecy fulfilled. The alternating refrain in the six stanza poem, “Rage, rage against the dying of the light,” was a lament over his father’s death, but really a presage of his own demise. Roiphe’s interpretation that it is “a poem about acceptance . . . a love song to death” (182–83) is considerably off the mark. It probably reflects the way that she wishes to deal with death.

Just prior to going into a coma, which would result in his death a few days later on November 9,

he lamented over his youngest son, Colm, “Poor little bugger, he doesn’t deserve this. Doesn’t deserve my wanting to die” (184).

Nearly a decade earlier, his gorgeous poem “Fern Hill” expressed the sentiment a drinking buddy recalled hearing from Thomas, “I’ve got death in me” (191). Far more than a recognition of his mortality, this was the hopeless theme of his life. The final lines of “Fern Hill” demonstrate the alluring beauty of his morbid musings:

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Roiphe sums up her assessment of Thomas, “Is this what Thomas was? A self-destroyed escapologist” (193).

The force that through the green fuse drives
the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of
trees
Is my destroyer.

Roiphe concludes, “It is this paradox, this morbidity mingled with celebration, the great seductive virile power of nature, combined with a constant awareness of its killing that is the essence of Thomas” (194).

Maurice Sendak is famous for his children’s book *Where the Wild Things Are*, winner of the 1964 Caldecott Medal for the Most Distinguished Picture Book of the Year. Sendak was both author and illustrator. “Maurice had always been obsessed with death. He drew through his obsession and used it” (203). His fame—more than is usual for a children’s book author—never relieved him of his obsession. When asked how it felt to be famous, he responded, “I still have to die” (217). So his obsession with work staved off death. He admitted to being crazy because “that’s the very essence of what makes my work good” (219). Sendak was always feeling surrounded by a hostile world. The death of his dog Jennie suffuses *Higglety Pigglety Pop! Or, There Must Be More to Life* (1967).

The darkness threatened to engulf him, and he tried to draw his way through it... Along the way, the odd, whimsical story gives voice to a very high level of bleakness, of nearly giving up... Tony Kushner writes of the book's ending: "Pop! Stop! Clop! Chop! The End." Samuel Beckett couldn't have put it more succinctly." (221, 222, 224)

Sendak found Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* books reassuring (227). But what he found most reassuring was knowing that "people love him best of all" (234). But he hated many things: adults, hospitals, Christmas, and snow—it showed in his books, as one little girl complained about *Outside Over There*, "Why did you write this book? This is the first book I hate." (255).

Sendak's cynicism was tempered by his child-like imagination and the sentimental hope that the invisible realm of angels stimulated. Faith for him was a purely psychological reality.

Maurice [Sendak] liked the idea of believing, even though he didn't believe. He didn't believe in an afterlife. He didn't believe in God. When an interviewer asked him, at eighty-three, what came next, he said, "Blank. Blank. Blank." (259)

Such a sad tale brings new poignancy to Paul's declaration of the state of the Ephesian Christians before they believed: "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

James Salter is the only subject of the book of whom I had never heard. He is an American novelist and short story writer. Roiphe is surprised at Salter's claim that at eighty-nine he does not think about death, despite the fact that his fiction is obsessed with transience. "Everything he writes is elegy, a paean to a moment as it is in the process of being lost. Dusk is his language" (263–64). A West Point graduate and World War II veteran, "he took a masculine, romantic view of death" (265). Salter followed Updike's example of writing until he died, "He wrote through anything" (269).

But Roiphe discovers chinks in the armor. He

admitted that once when on a flying exercise as a cadet he was low on fuel and lost. "He tried reciting *Invictus*: 'I am the master of my fate ...' He didn't want to pray, but finally said a few prayers" (273). Out of control, his plane crashed. He ended up unharmed, but full of nightmares.

Black and white photographs of the writing desk—or in Sendak's case drawing board—of each writer add considerable interest to the text. A Dominique Nabokov photo of each writer would have been a nice addition. On the last page, Roiphe shows us her writing environment as well. It made me wonder how she will face her own end. She tells us.

The reason she calls the last chapter on Salter an epilogue is because it contains her own reflections on how she faces death. Remember, she faced death at age twelve.

When the terror of death blows through you, what do you do?... When Salter's daughter died, he recited the only psalm he could mostly remember.... Updike kept *The Book of Common Prayer* next to his bed and prayed with Martha and the reverend who visited him. Even Sontag, a passionate atheist, called Peter Perone to pray with her one morning. (274)

It turns out that literature is Roiphe's comfort.

To me, religion has never been consoling. I can't get anything out of even the cadences of it. It feels like a foreign language. I sometimes find the reassurance I imagine other people getting from religion in passages of novels, in poems. (274)

Roiphe latches onto Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," which promises "an eternal world of art" (275–76). She tries to tell herself that these death stories are okay:

They are not really okay, because in each case someone dies, and there may, in fact, be no less-okay thing than that. But it's okay for this reason: If you have to let go, you can. You can find or manufacture a way to.... The fear

returns, or it never goes away. (277–78)

Her tragic conclusion:

Here’s what I learned from the deaths in this book: You work. You don’t work. You resist. You don’t resist. You exert the consummate control. You surrender. You deny. You accept. You pray. You don’t pray. You read. You work. You take as many painkillers as you can. You refuse painkillers. You rage against death. You run headlong toward it. (283)

In the end Roiphe agrees with Salter’s proverb, “We make our own comfort” (285, 287). Cold comfort, indeed. This book is valuable to church officers as it brings us face to face with the reality of the world’s tragic emptiness and desperation. It reminds me of Blaise Pascal’s sage aphorism, “Men despise religion: they hate it, and fear it is true.” We must seek opportunities to tell them that if they believe Christianity is true and trust it, their fears will be quenched and their hope well founded. Let us hope they will ask.

But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:15–16) ©

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An Unlikely Witness

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The Faith of Christopher Hitchens: The Restless Soul of the World’s Most Notorious Atheist, by Larry Alex Taunton. Nashville: Nelson, 2016, xvi + 201 pages, \$24.99.

It is unthinkable that one of the most outspoken public intellectual atheists should praise a conservative Evangelical Christian, but that is just what Christopher Hitchens did. The subject of that praise has given us a remarkable account of his unusual friendship with the late Christopher Hitchens. Larry Taunton begins his book with a quote from Blaise Pascal which nicely sums up Taunton’s interaction with Hitchens, “Men despise religion; they hate it, and fear it is true.”

Taunton skillfully applies the Proverbs we often think of as mutually exclusive: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:4–5). There are times when these two different ways of interacting with unbelief apply singly to a particular person, but Taunton uses both in his conversations with Hitchens.

The antagonism that the new atheists, like Hitchens, often evoke is predictable, but actually it ought to humble us Christians to befriend those who share their desperate negation. Taunton can help show us the way.

Taunton describes the surprise ending of Hitchens’s life.

Between 1964—the year that he, as a fifteen-year-old-boy, declared himself an atheist—and September 11, 2001—a date that changed America and, if his biography is to be believed, Christopher Hitchens—his mind was *fixed*.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=591&issue_id=120.

One need only name the social or political issue of this period and he was there to take up the liberal cause with other standard bearers of the Left. Could there be any real suspense regarding what his position would be on, say, Vietnam or the presidency of Ronald Reagan? Not in the least. Hence, a Christopher Hitchens biography would be largely predictable.

Except for the ending. (5)

Chapter 1, “The Making of an Atheist” is an illuminating portrait fulfilling part of the author’s intended purpose, “My objective is not to recount his life, but to give some account for his soul” (7). Reminding the reader of Paul’s assessment of fallen humanity, “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). “Hitchens was seeking liberation in all of its manifestations—chiefly sexual and political—and atheism became a means of achieving it” (15).

Chapter 2 describes the intellectual weapons Hitchens marshaled as a would-be champion of his cause. “Voracious reading was undertaken for the sake of gaining new weapons to defend opinions he already held, rather than challenge and mature them” (19–20). He read wisely but not deeply because his chief aim was to excel in debate, a talent he honed in the Oxford Union Society while attending Balliol College (21–23).

The danger here—and Christopher fell wholeheartedly into its snares—was developing a love of words insofar as they were weapons for attack and defense of *his* position, rather than loving words insofar as they lead to truth. (23)

All of his thinking and debating presupposed the antithesis of Christianity: there is no God (25).

Taunton soon learned the difference between the public and the private Hitchens. In Chapter 3, “Two Books,” he describes the “public Christopher” as “the confident, bombastic, circuit-riding atheist-pugilist” (29). But underneath the surface was an appreciation for the aesthetic aspects of Christianity. He loved the King James Version of the Bible (32–33).

It was no small thorn in Hitchens’s side that

his younger brother Peter became a Christian (48). A journalist and author, Peter “openly denounced his atheism” and wrote a book about it, *The Rage against God* (52).² The subtitle in U.S. editions is: *How Atheism Led Me to Faith*. While the brothers strongly disagreed, they maintained a cordial relationship.

September 11, 2001, proved to be a milestone in Christopher’s life. The title of his reflection on the event in *Slate* ten years later tells it all, “Simply Evil” (68). This turned his sympathies to “the forces of law and order” (68). He was appalled at the response of “the intellectual class” of which he considered himself so vital a part:

[They] seemed determined at least to minimize the gravity of what had occurred, or to translate it into innocuous terms (poverty is the cause of political violence) that would leave their worldview undisturbed. (68)

His worldview would do a 180, at least politically. In 2007, Hitchens became an American citizen (74). “Christopher wanted a real fight with a real enemy: 9/11 gave him both, and made him an American patriot” (75).

Hitchens’s political shift put him in contact with Christians. His

friendships with “Christian conservatives” formed after his publication of *god Is Not Great*³ would in fact bring about a deeper change, a change made possible by the shock of 9/11, one that moved him beyond any comfortable stopping point. (80)

This led to challenge to debate Christians “anytime and anywhere” (82).

Chapter 8 enters Hitchens’s encounter with true Christianity, which held out many surprises for him. “What started as a vain attempt to bring God’s kingdom crashing down became a means for his surreptitious investigation of hidden spiritual

2 Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

3 Christopher Hitchens, *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2007).

questions” (84). The third major shock of his life, after 9/11 and Peter’s conversion, was his discovery of intelligent and compassionate Christians. They just did not fit the atheist stereotype (86–87). Hitchens would later declare,

I much prefer this sincerity [Evangelical] to the vague and Python-esque witterings of the interfaith and ecumenical groups who barely respect their own traditions and who look upon *faith* as just another word for *community organizing*. (88).

After debating Al Sharpton, Hitchens concluded, “*Total huckster*. I’m convinced he is an atheist” (88). So he hated not Evangelicals but intellectual frauds.

Now enter Taunton, who first met Hitchens at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2008. Although Taunton doesn’t say this bluntly, there was a strong element of intellectual fraud in Hitchens. His performance in debate was more important than the substance of arguments. But there was more:

Christopher was not the atheist ideologue I had supposed him to be from reading *god Is Not Great* and listening to his lectures and debates. An ideologue will adhere to his given dogma, no matter what... I had just discovered, however, that this man, one of atheism’s high priests was, in fact, a heretic. (104)

Taunton waited for about a year before he had developed a friendship with Hitchens that enabled him to challenge some of the atheist’s assumptions. Importantly it was some of Taunton’s practices, like adopting a Ukrainian girl, Sasha, with “fetal alcohol syndrome, HIV, rickets, and significant emotional and neurological disorders,” that moved Hitchens to discuss the reasons for Taunton’s faith (107–8). Hitchens often issued a challenge to Christians: name a Christian ethical statement or practice that could not be affirmed or performed by a non-believer (107). Hitchens had no answer for Sasha. “Hitchens found this kind of Christianity, the sort that took the Bible’s mandate to care for others, deeply seductive” (108).

The genuineness and intelligence of Taunton’s faith eventually led to Hitchens accepting a challenge to take a trip and study the gospel of John (120). “Atheist Christopher Hitchens, spectacles perched on his nose, was reading the Bible aloud on the front seat of my car” (122). Taunton recognizes that in his long discussions with Hitchens, he is battling an agenda—the agenda of unbelief. Milton memorably sums up this Van Tilian point, “Who overcomes by force, hath overcome but half his foe” (125). Two strengths in Taunton’s approach to witness are his desire to let the Bible speak and his constant prayer for Hitchens. His conversations summarized in the chapter titled “The Shenandoah” are instructive and moving.

Taunton’s last debate with Hitchens demonstrates what a difference was made by Taunton’s patient witness in Hitchens’s life. When the moderator asked Hitchens what he thought of Taunton, an Evangelical Christian, Taunton braced himself for the public answer, which was often quite different from the private sentiment. Hitchens said, “If everyone in the United States had the same qualities of loyalty and care and concern for others that Larry Taunton had, we’d be living in a much better society than we do” (150). Of course, over the years Hitchens had become a pariah among the new atheists. But he never backed down on his appreciation for the genuine article he had discovered in Taunton.

I will not tell my readers the conclusion. That would spoil the suspense. Read it for yourself. It is well worth the time. ©

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