

# Ordained Servant

Volume 22  
2013



A Journal  
for  
Church  
Officers

Elijah Kellogg Church, Congregational, Harpswell, Maine / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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A Journal for Church Officers

VOLUME 22, 2013

# *Ordained Servant*

## A Journal for Church Officers

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# Ordained Servant

A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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*Dedicated to Arthur Wyndham Kuschke, Jr.*

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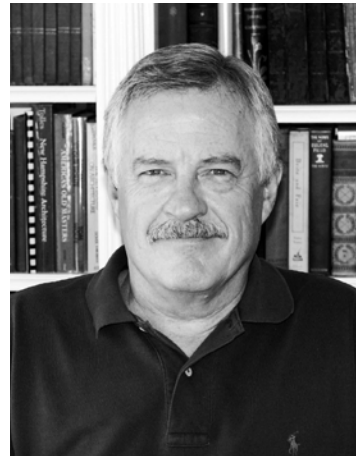
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# ✦ From the Editor

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

I have dedicated this annual edition to another one of my favorite churchmen, Arthur Wyndham Kuschke, Jr. I still remember my first encounter with Mr. Kuschke as an incoming junior seminary student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1976. He was introducing us to the library facility over which he presided. I thought, here is a man who is very serious about developing an intelligent articulation of the Reformed faith. His whole demeanor exuded this commitment. I am grateful to have known him.



The cover photo is of the Elijah Kellogg Church, Congregational, in Harpswell, Maine. The church was named after its nineteenth-century pastor, whose ministry lasted more than half a century (1844–1901). He wrote many popular children’s books and some poetry. A preacher of fine education (Bowdoin College and Andover Seminary) and notable oratorical skills, it was said of him, “It is well known that he refused many offers of large city parishes, where the people would have paid him a good salary, but he preferred to spend his life in his secluded home on Harpswell Neck.” He wrote,

May we, where runs no stubborn tide,  
No billows break, no tempests roar,  
In Glory’s Port, at Anchor ride.

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

This year I have been able to print everything published online. Becoming stricter about article length has paid off. I would like to thank the many fine writers who have worked with me to revise articles in order to stay within the prescribed limits.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange, and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Paul MacDonald, for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, 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 excellent formatting in InDesign of the printed volume.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds  
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church  
Manchester, New Hampshire

# ✦ Servant Tribute

## In Memoriam: The Rev. Arthur W. Kuschke, Jr.

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Alan D. Strange

A certain Presbyterian wag once opined that one could get an idea of eternity if Arthur Kuschke and John Skilton arrived at a passageway at the same time with space sufficient for only one: “After you, please,” each would say, over and over again, insisting that the other go first, continuing on forever, neither willing to go before the other. This humorous scenario is apt, expressing the humility and dignity of each man. Certainly, Arthur Kuschke was a dignified man: he was cultured, well-mannered, and a true gentleman. He was, at the same time, an extraordinary servant, who considered others better than himself and delighted in serving—his Lord, the church, Westminster Seminary, and his family.

Arthur W. Kuschke, Jr. was born on September 18, 1913, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and lived a full life, dying July 1, 2010, at the age of ninety-six. He received his undergraduate degree from Wheaton College in 1936 (the year that the OPC was formed), earning a divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary three years later and a Master of Theology in 1940. In that same year, he was ordained in the Presbytery of Philadelphia (May 21, 1940), in which he served all of his life, and became assistant to the field secretary at

Westminster Theological Seminary for four years. In 1946, he became the librarian (succeeding Leslie Sloat), serving in that post until 1979, and, thus, laboring for almost forty years at Westminster. Over the course of the years, he wrote numerous essays and articles, particularly for the *Presbyterian Guardian*. He married Charlotte Milling in 1951, and they had three children (David, John, and Margaret) and five grandchildren.

Mr. Kuschke enjoyed the longest tenure, without rival, as librarian at Westminster Theological Seminary. Under him, the library came to possess one of the finest theological collections, particularly among confessional institutions. He not only supervised the expansion of the collection, but also oversaw the construction of the Montgomery Library as a fire-proof, air-conditioned building to house the growing collection that had been located in a wooden carriage house. Inasmuch as a library is the intellectual heart of an academic institution, Mr. Kuschke contributed greatly to the expansion of Westminster Seminary and, thus, the role and growth of the seminary in the life of the church. He did not stop serving after he retired, however, but continued active as a churchman for the next thirty years.

Mr. Kuschke’s deep humility might conceal that he was a “valiant for truth,” though not to anyone who knew him at the seminary, in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, or as a commissioner or committee member in service at the general assembly. To those of us who knew him, it was evident that nothing pained him more than having to enter the ranks of theological controversy, but he did it willingly and joyfully because he believed, as did Paul, that contending for the gospel—the gospel in all its fullness and purity—was a worthy battle. Over the years, he was involved in many of the great controversies that have marked the OPC in her history: the Gordon Clark matter, the Peniel case, the Norman Shepherd controversy, and more. Mr. Kuschke was a staunch Presbyterian who believed that God worked through the judicatories of the church, and he engaged in these battles as they took place at the level of presbytery and general assembly.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=386&issue\\_id=89](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=386&issue_id=89).

With respect to the most prominent of the controversies in which Mr. Kuschke was involved, the Presbytery of Philadelphia constituted itself a committee of the whole<sup>2</sup> in 1979 and spent some sessions discussing the teachings of Norman Shepherd. Mr. Kuschke was one of the leading opponents of Professor Shepherd, arguing that Shepherd was a theological innovator who compromised the utterly gracious character of the gospel. If there was one thing for which Mr. Kuschke gave his life, it was that salvation is of the Lord, all of grace, from first to last. Mr. Kuschke was set to defend this truth wherever and whenever he thought it necessary. Candidly, he tended to see later cases as reprising the issues of the Shepherd case, as in the John Pedersen case, which was not a revisiting of the Shepherd case, and the John Kinnaird case, which addressed some issues similar to the Shepherd case, but was also, arguably, not a reprisal of that case.

Also quite dear to Mr. Kuschke's heart were his labors as a member, and chairman, for many years of the Committee on Candidates and Credentials in the Presbytery of Philadelphia. According to his wife, Mr. Kuschke considered service on this committee one of the great privileges and responsibilities of his ministry. She notes that at the beginning of the OPC most candidates were Presbyterians leaving the mainline church due to its liberalism. Mrs. Kuschke continues, "As the years went by and the OPC grew, men from various denominations and diverse backgrounds sought the OPC out. Arthur wanted to ensure that such men had an understanding of the system of truth the Scripture proclaimed and what the Reformed faith stood for." Mrs. Kuschke stresses that her husband would seek to work with the men, particularly desiring to help them in areas of weakness, spending time with them personally, and directing them in reading and further preparation.

At the denominational level, Mr. Kuschke was

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2 According to parliamentary procedure, a body may constitute itself as a committee of the whole if it wishes to have a broad discussion about a subject without particular motions being on the floor (RONR, [11th ed.], pp. 529–542).

involved with the reconciliation ministry of the church, what ultimately developed into the Committee on Appeals and Complaints. I was privileged to work with Mr. Kuschke on this committee and to learn from him the importance of the discipline of the church and how it is used for the honor of Christ, the purity of the church, and the reclamation of the offender. This ministry was very important to him, burdened him greatly as cases were before the committee, and was an object of earnest and importunate prayer on his part. Mr. Kuschke had a passion that discipline be biblically administered, which is to say, that proper biblical processes be followed so that the guilty might be brought to repentance and those not guilty be acquitted and vindicated.

Mr. Kuschke liked walking and was quite a nature enthusiast, enjoying the Morris Arboretum and strolls along the Wissahickon Creek. He could identify trees of every variety and birds not only by sight but by also by song. Summers were enjoyed in Maine and he loved spending time with his children and grandchildren to whom he passed along his love of general revelation. As part of that, Mr. Kuschke also loved reading, having membership in five local libraries, with particular interest in history, biography, art, music, birds, mountain climbing, poetry, and mysteries. He had a special interest in music, sacred and secular. With respect to the former, this manifested itself most pointedly in his fourteen years of service on the Trinity Hymnal Committee as its secretary. He loved, and was a great champion of, *Trinity Hymnal*. He also loved orchestral and vocal music, having an extensive collection of old 75 RPM records. I enjoyed speaking with him about music especially and sharing some of our favorites—Bach, Brahms, Schubert, and many others. He was also a philatelist (stamp collector), something that I just recently found out and wish I had known earlier as a fellow philatelist.

According to his wife, Mr. Kuschke was an ardent student, above all, of the Word of God; he also loved the writings of John Murray (under whom he did his Th.M.), Cornelius Van Til, and Martin Lloyd-Jones, all of whom he also counted as close personal friends. Family devotions were



held after the evening meal. Sunday afternoon was a special time of “apple parties” about the fireplace. Mrs. Kuschke writes: “Here catechism instruction took place, interspersed with a snack of cheese and crackers and a slice of apple offered (carefully!) on the tip of a paring knife to each as he has his turn.” The children were each given in the first grade a Bible at Christmas. According to Mrs. Kuschke, speaking for herself and her husband, “It was a special joy to see our children make their profession of faith, to be thankful to the Lord for their fine Christian spouses, to welcome grandchildren and see them make professions of faith within the OPC.”

Arthur Kuschke was a man faithful to his Lord, to Christ’s church, and to his family. If asked about his hope, however, he would undoubtedly have answered in something of the fashion of J. Gresham Machen: “So thankful for the active obedience of Christ; no hope without it.” Arthur Kuschke, to any who knew him, was a man who sought to magnify Christ and to give all glory to God. He was a man who knew that he was a miserable sinner, having no hope of eternal life apart from the grace of God in Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, was all his hope and stay. *Soli Deo Gloria.* ☺

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

# ✦ Servant Thoughts

## Editorials

### Who Reads Scripture?

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Ours is not an age in which the Western church places a high value on the public reading of Scripture. In many churches, anyone who volunteers may read Scripture in public worship. To assert that only the minister of the Word is to read Scripture is tantamount to heresy in our egalitarian world. It is curious that, while ministers are not thought to be necessarily the only ones called to the public reading of Scripture, they are often believed to be CEOs, public relations experts, social organizers, psychiatrists, and many other callings that are well beyond the pale of the biblical job description of the minister. And so this is why I like to refer to the office of pastor as minister of the Word.<sup>2</sup>

Within our narrower world of confessional Presbyterian and Reformed churches, I realize that elders often read Scripture in public worship

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

2 For those interested in my argument for the three-office view see, Gregory E. Reynolds, "Democracy and the Denigration of Office," in *Order in the Offices*, Mark Brown, ed. (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1994), 235–55. See also "Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church" submitted to the 58th G.A. (1991), <http://www.opc.org/GA/unordained.html>.

within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our new Directory for Public Worship allows this with the wording: "He who performs this [the public reading of God's Word] serves as God's representative voice. Thus, it *ordinarily* should be performed by a minister of the Word" (DPW II.A.2, emphasis added).

Our former directory, as amended in 1992, contained a contradiction by adding a separate paragraph, reflecting the practice in some of our churches of having elders read Scripture in public worship (III.8).<sup>3</sup> Without that contradictory qualifying paragraph the old Presbyterian three-office<sup>4</sup> view stood alone in an earlier paragraph: "The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is performed by the minister as God's servant" (III.2). This was the practice in our tradition going back to the Westminster Assembly. In the original 1645 directory: "Reading of the Word in the congregation, being part of the publick worship of God, ... is to be performed by the pastors and teachers." The one exception is those who "intend the ministry ... if allowed by the presbytery."<sup>5</sup> That the public reading of the Scripture belongs to the pastor's office was everywhere asserted by Presbyterians, as well as other Reformed communions, as the clear biblical teaching.

It is interesting that the broadest view of the involvement of unordained persons in public worship, expressed in the 1991 Report of the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church, affirms the traditional restriction on reading Scrip-

3 "Nothing in the preceding sections shall be understood so as to prohibit ruling elders from leading in public prayer, reading the Scriptures, leading responsive readings, or, on occasion, exhorting the congregation as part of public worship."

4 In my understanding, the traditional three-office view of church office in no way diminishes the importance of the eldership, rather it distinguishes between the office of elder and minister of the Word in order that each might pay attention to the proper functions of their respective offices. Cf. footnote 1. Anyone who uses the three-office view to arrogate power to the ministerial office is not holding the traditional biblical, Presbyterian position. On the session the minister has only one voice and one vote.

5 *The Confession of Faith* (Inverness, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1976), 375.

ture.:

The DPW, however, also sets definite limits on the involvement of the unordained. Specifically, an individual role or individual expression, in distinction from the rest of the congregation, is limited to the minister; besides preaching, only he, for instance, may pray aloud and read Scripture to the congregation. Even ruling elders, by implication, are excluded by such individual expression.<sup>6</sup>

The new form, which took effect on January 1, 2011, is a more consistent way of recognizing and approving of the present practice in our churches. For that I am thankful, especially given the fact that the assumed exceptions are elders who are ordained with the same doctrinal commitment as ministers. But the fact that over three hundred years of Presbyterian tradition is being altered should give us pause to at least reflect on the rationale for the old view. So, while I personally believe in restricting public Scripture reading to ministers and men approved by presbytery, who are training for the ministry, my main objective is twofold. Negatively we should not underestimate the pressure that the egalitarian instinct in our culture can place upon the word “ordinarily,” as a justification for lay readers. That only ministers of the Word should read the Word publicly is an idea to which our egalitarian world is entirely unfriendly. Fortunately, the new directory limits the possibility of abusing the exception implied by the use of the term “ordinarily,” by explaining,

When the session deems it fitting, ruling elders may lead the congregation in prayer, read the Scriptures to the congregation, lead unison or antiphonal readings of Scripture by the congregation, lead congregational singing, or, on occasion, exhort the congregation as part of public worship. (DPW I.D.2.d)

Positively, I would like to encourage a renewed interest in the public reading of Scripture.

A high view of what ministers are doing when they read will help us strive to put greater effort into it.

Some will complain that I am advocating a “one-man show.” But I hope to demonstrate that there is a biblical and confessional logic to the single leadership of the minister of the Word in public worship on the Lord’s Day. Many of us succumb to the fear of being labeled “elitist” for suggesting that only ministers should lead worship, under the false assumption that only those “on stage” are participating.

The metaphor of the “one-man show” is, itself, very instructive in analyzing the problem we face. In a world strongly flavored by, and motivated with, entertainment, we have become a world of spectators who tend to envy those on stage. Thus, in smaller venues like bars and churches it is expected that everyone gets their moment in the spotlight. But public worship is not karaoke. Where worship is led by the minister alone, many struggle to participate because our culture largely has spoiled that ability.

Hearing the Word read and preached is true participation. The *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:5–6 indicates that biblical hearing is active, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” This is the true meaning of participation—that everyone in the worship of God is fully involved—God speaking through his servant and the congregation responding by hearing, praising, obeying, and serving. Hughes Oliphant Old, in commenting on the ministry of Ezra, observed that the reading and preaching of Scripture comprise the ministry of the Word. This ministry is “a public act of worship. It was done with great solemnity and reverence. . . . It was an act of the whole religious community.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, properly understood, the leadership of one man, called by God for that very purpose, is in no way inimical to congregational participation.

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<sup>6</sup> *Minutes of the Fifty-eighth General Assembly*, (1991), 266.

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<sup>7</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 59.

Relatedly, there is an aesthetic consideration. Unity of leadership enhances unity of liturgy. Aesthetics is a consideration usually downplayed or ignored today. However, every kind of worship service has an aesthetic dimension, whether it is acknowledged or not. Sensitivity to the perception of beauty is an inescapable reality. When a man is called and trained to lead worship, the simple beauty of Word and sacrament ministry will be more suited to leave a lasting spiritual impression on worshippers.

During the Reformation the “Liturgy of the Word” encompassed every other part of public worship except the separate liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. The nomenclature indicates the centrality of the Word, read and preached, to worship, but also the unity of the liturgy itself as essentially a ministry of the Word, to be administered by a minister of the Word. My concern is that, above all, the reading and preaching of Scripture go inextricably together as the central task of ministers of the Word.

Professor Old’s phrase “with great solemnity and reverence” reminds us of the most fundamental and germane doctrine underlying my assertion: that the public reading of Scripture is an authoritative and interpretive act. Worship leadership in the Bible is clearly restricted to men gifted and called by God to minister the Word. So the public reading of Scripture is an essential part of that leadership. Minister of the Word Timothy is the one who is enjoined by Paul to read Scripture. This is inexorably tied to preaching. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13). The ESV properly interprets “the reading” (τῆ ἀναγνώσει *tē anagnōsei*) to refer to public, not private, reading. Modern ears instinctively read this in terms of personal devotions. But in the first century few could afford to own personal copies of Scripture. Furthermore, the codex had not yet been invented, although a century later Christians would be the ones to do so, given their intense devotion to God’s Word.

Our present directory asserts the divine authority inherent in the reading of the Word in public

when it states, “Through this reading, God speaks directly to the congregation in his own words” (DPW II.A.2). The logical corollary to this is that only those God has called to preach his Word should read it. The Westminster Larger Catechism is instructive in this regard:

Q. 156. Is the Word of God to be read by all?  
A. *Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families: to which end, the holy scriptures are to be translated out of the original into vulgar languages.* (emphasis added)

So the restriction of the public reading is made clear. Question 155 ties reading and preaching together, “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means . . .” (cf. WSC 89). Then question 158 makes the above restriction explicit in terms of the authority of preaching, “The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.”

The restriction mentioned in WLC 156 gives the following proof texts:

*Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. When all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. (Deut. 31:9, 11–13, emphasis added)*

So Ezra *the priest* brought the Law before the assembly. (Neh. 8:2, emphasis added)

The reason for the restriction is the authority of God's Word. This requires an authoritative office to minister it.

But, what is often entirely overlooked, due to a misunderstanding, is the interpretive aspect of reading aloud. Some misinterpret the DPW's prohibition on commentary interspersed with the reading (DPW A.2.a) to mean that reading of the Word itself involves no interpretation. However, anyone who has ever heard the difference between a school boy stumbling through a Shakespearean sonnet and an actor such as the consummate Shakespearean John Gielgud knows the vast difference. Expert reading clarifies meaning. That is an authoritative activity.

Another misconception is fostered by thinking that synagogue worship, because laymen were allowed to read Scripture, had authoritative status in New Testament times. The assumption that synagogue worship is normative for the New Covenant church is false. The Old Covenant does not authorize the synagogue. What was done there was not worship but "Torah study." It was voluntary in nature. In reviewing Ralph Gore's book, criticizing the regulative principle, Dr. T. David Gordon observes:

If we are required, by apostolic example (Acts 2, Acts 20), endorsement (1 Cor. 16:2), and command (Heb. 10:24), to assemble on the first day of the week, what can those who call us to those assemblies lawfully require us to do there? This was the question that Calvin and the Puritans addressed; and they would have been unmoved by any consideration of what free individuals did in voluntary societies for encouragement, prayer, or study.<sup>8</sup>

What are the practical implications of this? Paul addresses Timothy as an ordinary (not apostolic) minister of the Word. "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). He

places the public reading of Scripture on a par with preaching. This means that denying that the reading of Scripture in public is an authoritative and interpretive act diminishes God's Word. I am not saying that this is necessarily intentional. But, when the reading is not done by an ordained minister, the authority of the Word is diminished.

Having said this, it is therefore incumbent upon us to train ministers to take the public reading of Scripture with the utmost seriousness. The corollary to this involves the continuing education of ministers of the Word. We need to continue developing rhetorical and interpretive skills necessary to read the Word of God well in public. I suggest listening regularly to poetry read aloud, which is widely available online. Reading Scripture aloud for daily devotions is an excellent way to cultivate this holy skill.

In 1 Timothy 3:8, Paul warns deacons not to be "addicted to much wine." The word "addicted" (προσέχοντας *prosechontas*) is the same word used in 1 Timothy 4:13, translated "devoted." Truly "public reading of Scripture" is something to be addicted to. Oh, that we may devote ourselves with great energy, enthusiasm, and intelligence to this great work. ☺

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<sup>8</sup> T. David Gordon, Review Article: "The Westminster Assembly's Unworkable and Unscriptural View of Worship," *WTJ* 65:345–56 (2003), 347.

# “Submission”: A Model for Preachers

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

George Herbert’s poem “Submission” is a model for preachers in both form and content.

## Submission

George Herbert (1593–1633)

But that thou art my wisdom, Lord,  
And both mine eyes are thine,  
My minde would be extreemly stirr’d  
For missing my designe.

Were it not better to bestow  
Some place and power on me?  
Then should thy praises with me grow,  
And share in my degree.

But when I thus dispute and grieve,  
I do resume my sight,  
And pilfring what I once did give,  
Disseize thee of thy right.

How know I, if thou shouldst me raise,  
That I should then raise thee?  
Perhaps great places and thy praise  
Do not so well agree.

Wherefore unto my gift I stand;  
I will no more advise:  
Onely do thou lend me a hand,  
Since thou hast both mine eyes.

For spiritual and lyrical sublimity, as well as superbly crafted clarity, this poem has few equals. Harold Bloom acknowledges, “There are only a few extraordinary devotional poets in the language, including Donne, and the Victorians Gerard Manley Hopkins and Christina Rossetti. By any

standard, George Herbert is the devotional poet proper in English.”<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of good poetry should, first of all, be a pure pleasure; but that pleasure can translate into a great benefit for preachers. The recitation and analysis of the best poetry disciplines the preacher in the economy, power, and beauty of the English language. In the case of sacred poets, like Herbert, there are personal lessons that may be learned and etched in the memory. This, in turn, can inspire the preacher to pass the most salient lessons on to his congregation. There is no preaching so powerful as that which is born of an understanding of Scripture that the preacher has deeply experienced. While much poetry does not do this directly, the sacred poems of Herbert and Donne are rooted in a profound understanding of Scripture. In the age of “wit,” understanding the complexity of structure and meaning can be daunting to the novice, but Herbert’s poem “Submission” is crystal clear.

“Submission” is especially well suited to instruct us regarding our worldly aspirations—to which every sinful man, especially preachers, given our public position, are prone. George Herbert, himself, had deep experience in this matter. If you are not content with your humble place of service to God in this world, a good dose of this poem is a potent and pleasant cure. Herbert was in a high position in Cambridge University as university orator; and he served in the king’s court, with hopes of appointment to secretary of state. Those hopes were dashed with King James’s death. Then the Lord called Herbert to the ministry—a call he hesitated to heed for a time—in a humble place, where he served until his untimely death in the country parish of Fugglestone St Peter, in Bemerton Church near Salisbury, England. He used his wit well as a poet, reminding us of Alexander Pope’s observation, “True wit is nature to advantage dressed, what oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed.”<sup>3</sup> But unlike much of the wit

2 Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2004), 183.

3 Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*. This is actually a long

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=373&issue\\_id=87](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=373&issue_id=87).

of his age, he used it for the glory of God and the edification of the church. “Submission” is one of the most powerfully beautiful sacred poems in the English language.

The bulk of his poetry was published posthumously in *The Temple* in 1633. Herbert had instructed his close friend Nicholas Ferrar, whom he tasked with executing his literary remains, to publish his poetry only if he believed that it would be edifying to Christians. For one nobly born, of great intelligence, learning, and gifts, with high hopes of royal preferment, this was no small act of humility.

### The Importance and Benefits of Poetry

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

But, why is this so? My guess is that the difficulty of understanding poetry inhibits its ascendancy in our culture. Of course, poetry slams have appeared in venues throughout America. Although this gives a glimmer of hope, it usually does not represent the kind of appreciation that grows out of a deep reading of the best poetry in the English language. I have even encountered disdain among slammers for the forms and discipline of the greatest poets. But this is not to say they are not onto something important. They read or recite their poetry in small public settings. Thus, I also think the

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poem.

decline is due to a lack of reading aloud, especially hearing poetry well read or recited. What I have discovered in my “memory walks” is that by memorizing poetry, through regular oral repetition, the meaning becomes clearer with time. Memory muscles are exercised along with the physical ones. The sound of the words begin to sink in, reminding me of Robert Frost’s dictum that poetry is the “sound of sense.” But few of us have patience to repeat poems aloud until they are etched in our memories. That is why I have learned to combine memorizing poetry with my daily two-mile walk.

There are also additional benefits for preachers. Reading and memorizing poetry trains us to meditate deeply on texts. The compression of language in good poetry forces the reader to pay attention to the details of grammar and punctuation. It thus tends to make us better oral communicators, speaking in memorable sentences, and—a near miracle for Reformed preachers—making our preaching more concise. I have often finished leading worship before noon since engaging in this exercise. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was a little over two minutes long (280 words), while the forgotten Oration by famed orator Edward Everett was over two hours long (13,508 words). The next day Everett wrote to Lincoln, “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”<sup>4</sup>

It is also important to read more accessible poets. Herbert is surely one of them, although not every poem he wrote is as accessible as “Submission.”

### Structure to Model

Herbert’s creation of the simple rhythm of the five quatrains is itself an act of submission.<sup>5</sup> So,

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4 Bob Green, “The Forgotten Gettysburg Addresser,” *The Wall Street Journal* (June 22–23, 2013): A15.

5 For a comprehensive literary biography, I recommend Joseph Summers, *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). For commentary from many authors on every English poem of Herbert, I recommend *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Thanks to Leland Ryken for

structure and meaning are closely allied. Herbert often broke from traditional forms to make a point. But here he impresses the reader with the lovely rhythms of his alternating rhyme scheme (abab). The poetic feet, in this case iambic (the syllabic pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable), follow the poetic pattern known as the “hymnal measure.”<sup>6</sup> This standard form of quatrains contains alternating lines first of iambic tetrameter (four iambic feet), and then iambic trimeter (three iambic feet) and so forth.

The biblical metaphor of sight for faith, or its absence, is brilliantly conceived to hold the whole poem together. Scripture is filled with this concept. “I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways (Ps. 119:15); “there is no fear of God before his eyes” (Ps. 36:1).

The poem is also a perfect chiasm, following the patterns of ancient poetry, in Herbert’s pre-Enlightenment world. Each stanza follows the form with the first and fifth, and second and fourth, focusing on the problem in the central third—his sin.

But that thou art my wisdom, Lord,  
And both mine eyes are thine,  
My minde would be extreemly stirr’d  
For missing my designe.

Were it not better to bestow  
Some place and power on me?  
Then should thy praises with me grow,  
And share in my degree.

But when I thus dispute and grieve,  
I do resume my sight,  
And pilfring what I once did give,  
Disseize thee of thy right.

How know I, if thou shouldst me raise,  
That I should then raise thee?  
Perhaps great places and thy praise  
Do not so well agree.

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these recommendations.

6 I highly recommend Miller Williams, *Patterns of Poetry: An Encyclopedia of Forms* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

Wherefore unto my gift I stand;  
I will no more advise:  
Onely do thou lend me a hand,  
Since thou hast both mine eyes.

When he complains about his humble state he views things from a purely human and sinful perspective, thus robbing God of his Lordship.

The chiasmic center is nested between stanzas two and four. Each represents a query. The first asks, would it not be better for the Lord to place him in a powerful position, since then God’s praise would grow with and share in the poet’s ascendancy. Here the hubris of the poet’s ambition is made plain, especially in his address of such a question directly to the Lord. The second (stanza four) asks the convicting question, which gets to the heart of the temptation, how do I know, if the Lord should raise me to a high place, that I would glorify him. He concludes with the most memorable line of the poem, “Perhaps great places and thy praise, Do not so well agree.”

Then the inclusio (bracketing or framing device) of the first and last stanzas focuses on the wisdom of living by God’s wisdom, instead of the poet’s own. It begins with an expression of the security the poet feels as a result of being committed to following God’s wisdom in his life as the introduction to the struggle he has been through and resolved. He gladly admits the Lord’s gracious hold on him, “both mine eyes are thine.” The conclusion in the fifth stanza is a beautiful expression of commitment to submitting the gift of his life and calling to the Lord’s wisdom in place of his own. He presents his gift without argument, acknowledging his need for God’s guidance with a simple supplication, “Onely do thou lend me a hand, Since thou hast both mine eyes.”

The structure and the content, as we will briefly see, are really inseparable.

### Content to Model

Although wisdom is mentioned only once, in the first line, it is clearly the theme of the poem: whose wisdom will guide his sight? Herbert wrestles with God’s wisdom over against his own.



Herbert scholar Helen Wilcox suggests that the poem is based on Proverbs 4:5–9.<sup>7</sup>

Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.

Job 28:28 also comes to mind, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.”

The pilgrim, living in a fallen world, has two pathways to follow—his own or the Lord’s. Herbert is brutally honest about his temptation. He knows that following his own vision for his life is a kind of robbery, “pilfring what I once did give,” which easily tempts him. He recognizes that, left to himself, he would be troubled deeply by not realizing his own plan for his life: “My minde would be extreemly stir’d For missing my designe.” Only God’s wisdom has prevented such inner trouble.

He has a profound understanding of the nature of his temptation:

Were it not better to bestow  
Some place and power on me?  
Then should thy praises with me grow,  
And share in my degree.

This is the folly of thinking that we will naturally use preferment for the Lord’s glory.

But this is the sight of the natural man, the perspective of the man who seeks self-glorification:

But when I thus dispute and grieve,  
I do resume my sight  
This leads to the great question,  
How know I, if thou shouldst me raise,  
That I should then raise thee?

And then the punch line,

Perhaps great places and thy praise  
Do not so well agree.

And finally, the firm resolve,

Wherefore unto my gift I stand;  
I will no more advise:

The plea for help restores his divinely given sight, depending for guidance on his Lord, and looking at his life from God’s perspective. This reminds us of Psalm 139:24, “And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Onely do thou lend me a hand,  
Since thou hast both mine eyes.

What a call to contentment with God’s calling in our lives. The world’s ambition so easily intrudes into our lives as servants. The quest for celebrity always has been a temptation, and even more so in our electronically mediated world. We are called to be God’s ordained servants. This is a lesson in servanthood as well as a lesson in the value of poetry for the servant preachers of the Word. ☺

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<sup>7</sup> Wilcox, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, 344.

# ✦ Servant Worship

## The Public Reading of Scripture in Worship: A Biblical Model for the Lord's Day

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by Glen J. Clary

In this article, we will briefly survey the history of the public reading of Scripture in worship from Moses to the apostles with a view toward developing a biblical model for this act of ministry that may be applied in our own day. While the public reading of Scripture may be carried out in a variety of contexts, our primary concern here is with the regular services of worship on the Lord's Day.

### Moses at Mount Sinai

The public reading of Scripture played a central role in the worship of Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1–11). After writing down all the words of the Lord, Moses read the book of the covenant in the hearing of the people (vv. 4, 7).<sup>2</sup> The Israelites responded to the Word by making a solemn vow: “All that the LORD has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient” (v. 7). The covenant between God and Israel was then sealed with two visible

signs: the sprinkling of blood and the sharing of a meal in the presence of God (vv. 8–11). As Moses threw the blood on the people, he exclaimed, “Behold, the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you *in accordance with all these words*” (v. 8, italics added).<sup>3</sup> The main point is that the public reading of Scripture was a central part of the ceremony at Mount Sinai which is “the prototype of the worship of God's people down through the centuries” (cf. Josh. 8:30–35; 2 Kings 22:8–13; 23:1–3; Heb. 12:18–29).<sup>4</sup>

### Ezra at the Water Gate

The Book of Nehemiah records another event that highlights the public reading of Scripture in worship (Neh. 8:1–9; cf. 8:13–15, 18; 9:3; 13:1). After rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, the Israelites assembled to hear Ezra the scribe read the book of the Law of Moses (Neh. 8:1).<sup>5</sup> Standing on a wooden platform built for the occasion, Ezra and his assistants read from “the Law of God, clearly and gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading,” meaning they either translated the text into Aramaic or gave an actual exposition of the text or both (v. 8).<sup>6</sup> The reading of Scripture

3 On the significance of “the blood of the covenant” (cf. Zech. 9:11; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 10:29; 12:24; 13:20), see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 60–107.

4 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 22; cf. John Hilber, “Theology of Worship in Exodus 24,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 177–89.

5 “The book of the Law of Moses” may refer to the Pentateuch as a whole. See John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) 391–92. On the teaching ministry of priests and scribes (cf. Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10; 2 Chr. 15:3; Ezra 7:6–12; Mal. 2:7), see Craig Evans et al., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 1086–89; Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second Temple Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); David Orton, *The Understanding Scribe* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); George Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 37–47.

6 This could have included both the targum and the midrashic sermon. See Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971), XIV; cf. Charles Perrot, “The Reading of the Bible in the Ancient Synagogue” in *Mikra*, Martin Mulder et al., eds. (Peabody: Hen-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=342&issue\\_id=81](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=342&issue_id=81).

2 “The book of the covenant” probably included the Decalogue and its exposition (Ex. 20:1–23:33). See Victor Hamilton, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 438–43; Peter Enns, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 488–89.

was prefaced by certain liturgical acts. When the scroll was opened, the Israelites stood and lifted their hands in prayer; Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and the people bowed their faces to the ground in worship (vv. 5–6). Clearly, the reading of Scripture was regarded as an act of worship; it served the glory of God just as much as the prayers and sacrifices that were offered during that festive month (Neh. 8:2; cf. Lev. 23:23–43; Num. 29:1–39). This account of the public reading of Scripture is “the oldest description we have of a liturgy of the Word”; accordingly, it became the model for the liturgical reading of Scripture in both synagogue and church.<sup>7</sup>

### Jesus in the Synagogue

By the time of the New Testament, the public reading of Scripture was a regular part of the synagogue service.<sup>8</sup> At the Jerusalem council, James observed, “From ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).<sup>9</sup> In other words, reading the Law in the synagogue was a long-standing, widespread, and

regular tradition.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Law was read on a *lectio continua*—beginning with Genesis and continuing each Sabbath where one left off the previous Sabbath, until one reached the end of Deuteronomy.<sup>11</sup> This *lectio continua* of the Law was only interrupted during annual festivals and fast days when special lessons, corresponding to the significance of the day, were read.<sup>12</sup>

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus regularly participated in Sabbath worship, including the reading and preaching of Scripture (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44; John 6:59; 18:20; etc.). Luke’s account of Jesus’s participation in the service at Nazareth is most informative (Luke 4:16–30).<sup>13</sup> When Jesus stood up to read, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and he found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18–19).<sup>14</sup> After reading the text, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant (*chazzan*) and sat down (v. 20).<sup>15</sup> Here, we see a clear distinction between the act of reading and the act of preaching. Jesus stood to read and sat to preach;

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drickson, 2004), 155; Donald Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 401; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 151, 156; William Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 41.

7 Old, 1:96; cf. Binder, 399; Elbogen, 130–31; Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002), 60–61.

8 Attempts to reconstruct the synagogue service in the Second-Temple period are somewhat conjectural since most of our sources come from a later period. There is no question, however, that the public reading of Scripture on the morning of the Sabbath was “a universally accepted custom in the first century of our era both in Israel and the Diaspora,” Perrot, 137. Cf. Heather McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

9 Some first-century Jews (e.g., Philo and Josephus) believed that Moses had instituted the study of Scripture on the Sabbath. According to Binder, the septennial reading of the Torah prescribed by Moses (Deut. 31:9–13) was “extended both temporally and spatially so that the weekly synagogue assemblies served as microcosms of the larger, national convocation,” Binder, 399. When this practice was established is unknown. See Perrot, 137–59; Mann, XIII–XIV; Elbogen, 130–32; Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1959), 51.

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10 Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 507.

11 Old, 1:99; cf. Perrot, 137–59; Mann, XII–XIII, XXI–XXIII; Elbogen, 129–42; Moore, 1:296–307.

12 Cf. Perrot, 145, 147–50; Ferguson, 580; Mann, XIX; Werner, 57; Elbogen, 129–31.

13 See Larrimore Crockett, “Luke 4:16–30 and the Jewish Lectionary Cycle” in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (1966): 13–48.

14 That Jesus “found the place” may mean that the lesson had been previously prepared and marked in the scroll in such a way that Jesus could easily find the prescribed passage (Werner, 56). However, Wacholder conjectures that the particular book (Isaiah) was predetermined (either by custom or by the synagogue officials), but Jesus was free to read any text from that book (Mann, XVI; cf. Elbogen, 144). Although not recorded in Luke, it is likely that Jesus offered benedictions before and after the reading (e.g., Neh. 8:6; cf. Perrot, 144, 155; Elbogen, 146; Werner, 53).

15 On the *chazzan*, see Aaron Milavec, *The Didache* (New York: Newman Press, 2003) 594–602; cf. Binder, 343–87; Evans and Porter, 1146–47; Perrot, 154–55; Ferguson, 581. The *chazzan* “carried out the orders of the president of the congregation. It was he who asked the members of the congregation to lead in prayer, to read the Scriptures and to preach. It was his task to take the Torah scrolls from the ark and to return them; it was he who opened the scroll at the portion to be read,” David Hedegård, *Seder R. Amram Gaon* (Lund: A.-B. Ph. Lindstedts Universitetsbokhandel, 1951), XXXI.

also, the scroll was rolled up and returned to its place before the sermon began.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the synagogue, the reading of Scripture was treated as a distinct act of ministry.<sup>17</sup>

That Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and not from the Law indicates that this was the second Scripture lesson in the service.<sup>18</sup> In each service, there were two Scripture lessons: the Law (*torah*, *parashah*, *sefer*) and the Prophets (*haftarah*, pl. *haftarot*), which in the Jewish division of the Scriptures also included the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Moses was read every Sabbath (Acts 15:21) and so were the Prophets (13:27). Unlike the *torah*, the *haftarot* were not read as a *lectio continua* but were specifically chosen to complement the *torah* lessons and provided the key to their interpretation.<sup>20</sup> In Luke's account of the service that Paul and Barnabas attended in Pisidian Antioch, both readings are mentioned:

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." (Acts 13:15)

The sermon ("word of exhortation") immedi-

ately followed the Scripture reading in the order of service because it was an exposition of the biblical text.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, whenever Jesus preached in the synagogue, he was expounding the Law and the Prophets, by which he provided a model of systematic, expository preaching for his disciples to follow.

## The Apostles in Worship

The first converts to Christianity (being either Jews or God-fearers) were personally familiar with the liturgical customs of the synagogue.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the earliest Christians continued to participate in synagogue worship as long as they were permitted, and some Christians (e.g., Paul) even carried out a teaching ministry in the synagogue.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the basic pattern and elements of Christian worship came from the synagogue service.<sup>24</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than in the reading and preaching of Scripture in worship.<sup>25</sup>

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21 Among Hellenistic Jews, "word of exhortation" was an idiom for the synagogue sermon (Acts 13:15; Heb. 13:22). It also "appears to be a fixed expression for the sermon in early Christian circles," William Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 568. See Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* (1984): 277–99; Carl Black II, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon," *Harvard Theological Review* (1988): 1–8.

22 On the synagogue liturgy in the Second-Temple era, see Bradshaw, 21–46 and works cited therein; Binder, 389–435; cf. Elbogen; Oesterley.

23 See Acts 6:9–10; 9:20; 13:5, 13–48; 14:1; 16:13–16; 17:1–3, 10–11, 17; 18:4–8, 19, 24–28; 19:8–10; 28:23.

24 This is not to ignore the influence of the Temple on early Christian liturgy. In my opinion, one should not dichotomize Temple worship and synagogue worship as if they were contradictory. As Binder demonstrates, it is simply incorrect to categorize the Temple as "the place of the cult" on the one side, and the synagogue as "the place of the scroll" on the other, Binder 403–4; cf. Peter Leithart, "Synagogue or Temple? Models for the Christian Worship" *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2002): 119–33. See Aidan Kavanagh, "Jewish Roots of Christian Worship," in Paul Fink, *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 617–23; Hedegård, XIII–XL; Oesterley; Clifford Dugmore, *The Influence of the Synagogue Upon Divine Office* (London: Faith Press, 1964). For more recent studies, see Bradshaw, 21–46 and works cited therein.

25 See Crockett; Leon Morris, "The Saints and the Synagogue," in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church*, Michael Wilkins et al., eds. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 38–52; Michael Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974); Leon Morris, *The New Testament and the Jewish Lectionaries* (London: Tyndale, 1964); Aileen Guilding, *The Fourth Gospel*

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16 On sitting to teach, see Elbogen, 139, 158; Binder, 72, 306; Kenneth Newport, "A Note on the 'Seat of Moses' (Matthew 23:2)," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 29 (1990): 127–37; L. Y. Rahmani, "Stone Synagogue Chairs: Their Identification, Use and Significance," *Israel Exploration Journal* 40 (1990): 192–214.

17 Gerhardsson writes, "Scripture reading was ... a distinct entity, sharply distinguished from explanatory translation ... and the expository or practically applied sermon ... which also had its place in worship. Scripture reading did not, then, merely form a basis for instructional translation and preaching, but had its own intrinsic value," Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 68.

18 Binder, 401.

19 Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 37. See Binder, 400; Perrot, 137–59; Mann, XI–XXIII; Elbogen, 129–63. I agree with Elbogen that the word *haftarah* indicates the conclusion of the reading and not the conclusion of the service. Elbogen, 143; cf. Perrot, 153. See 2 Macc. 15:9; 4 Macc. 18:10–18; Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16, 29; 24:27, 44; John 1:45; Acts 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21, etc.

20 Perrot, 153, 157; Elbogen, 143–39; Werner, 55; Old, 1:10, 102, 130.

After commending the Scriptures to Timothy, Paul solemnly charges him to “preach the Word,” namely, “all Scripture” which is inspired and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16–4:2). In other words, the Law and the Prophets that were read and preached in the synagogue every Sabbath were to be read and preached in Christian assemblies as well. Paul instructs Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and to teaching (1 Tim. 4:13).<sup>26</sup> This, of course, refers to the Old Testament Scriptures, but “the reading and exposition of the New Testament Scriptures soon joined that of the Old Testament.”<sup>27</sup> This is already hinted at in the New Testament (cf. Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Pet. 3:15–16; Rev. 1:3), and by the middle of the second century, it was firmly established. Justin Martyr, writing at Rome around the year 150, says that on the Lord’s Day, “the memoirs of the apostles” and “the writings of the prophets” are read as long as time permits.<sup>28</sup> According to Everett Ferguson:

The Gospels and Prophets may have been a Christian counterpart to the Jewish readings from the Law and the Prophets. Justin does not say whether the reading was part of a continuous cycle of readings (a lectionary) or was chosen specifically for the day. The phrase “as long as time permits” implies that the reading was not of a fixed length, but it does

not have to mean a random selection. There is a third possibility: the reading may have been continuous from Sunday to Sunday, taking up where the reading left off the last week, but not of a predetermined length. The indication is that the readings were rather lengthy.... The sermon [which immediately followed the reading of Scripture] was expository in nature, based on the Scripture reading of the day and making a practical application of that Scripture to the lives of those present.<sup>29</sup>

Although Justin’s description of Christian worship is brief and at some points vague, one thing at least is clear: “By the middle of the second century the writings of both the Old Testament and the New Testament were read in worship side by side as Holy Scripture.”<sup>30</sup>

## A Biblical Model for the Lord’s Day

From this brief survey of the public reading of Scripture in worship from Moses to the apostles, we can develop a basic pattern (a biblical model) for carrying out this act of ministry in our services today—a model that can be adapted and applied in a variety of ways. The public reading of Scripture (according to this model) is: (1) prefaced by prayer, (2) distinguished from interpretation, (3) followed by exposition, (4) sealed with visible signs, and (5) systematically conducted.

### 1. Prefaced by Prayer

Before the reading of Scripture, the people of God “bless the Lord” in prayer—as in the example of Ezra (Neh. 8:5–6). In this prayer, it is appropriate to petition the Lord for the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the eyes, opens the heart, and makes the reading of Scripture an effectual means of salvation (WLC 155).<sup>31</sup>

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and *Jewish Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

26 The word “reading” in this verse indicates “the public reading of Scripture” in particular. See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Frederick Danker et al., eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 60–61; cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963) 105; see Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15, 27; 15:21; 2 Cor. 3:14–15; Deut. 31:11 (LXX); Neh. 8:8 (LXX); 1 Esdr. 9:48; 2 Clem. 19:1; Melito 1:1. According to Lane, “The definite expression ‘the exhortation’ is a synonymous designation for the sermon. It referred specifically to the exposition and application of the Scripture that had been read aloud to the assembled congregation,” William Lane, 568; cf. Old, 1:244–50.

27 Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968) 267; cf. Werner, 58.

28 See Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 3–10; cf. Old, 1:265–69; Rordorf, 262–73; Oesterley, 117–18.

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29 Everett Ferguson, “Justin Martyr and the Liturgy,” *Restoration Quarterly* 36 (1994), 271–72.

30 Old, 1:267.

31 See Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 139–74; cf. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*, American ed. (Black Mountain: Worship Press, 2004), 211.

## 2. Distinguished from Interpretation

The reading of Scripture is a distinct act of ministry that is never confused with, but distinguished from, the interpretation of Scripture in the sermon. The exposition of Scripture does not begin until the whole lesson has been read (cf. Luke 4:16–30; Acts 13:15).<sup>32</sup>

## 3. Followed by Exposition

That the people of God may understand the meaning of Scripture and know what they are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of them (WSC 3), the reading of Scripture is followed by a sermon that is an actual exposition and application of the text read (Neh. 8:8).

## 4. Sealed with Visible Signs

As in the covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai, the proclamation of Scripture is sealed with visible signs (Ex. 24:1–11). In the new covenant, this is done by means of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which, as Calvin said, are added to the Word as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing it.<sup>33</sup>

## 5. Systematically Conducted

In the regular services of worship on the Lord's Day, the Scriptures are read and preached as a *lectio continua*. While there are certain occasions when the *lectio continua* may be interrupted (as was the case in the synagogue during festivals), the continuous, systematic reading and exposition of Scripture is the basic rule (Deut. 31: 9–13; Neh. 8:1–9; 2 Tim. 3:16–4:2).<sup>34</sup> ©

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32 This is also the model found in The Westminster Directory for Public Worship. See Richard Muller et al., *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 121, 122, 146.

33 See Glen J. Clary, "Holy Communion in the Theology of John Knox," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 7 (2011), 18.

34 The *lectio continua* was carried over from the synagogue into Christian worship and remained the basic rule for the first few centuries of the church, as we see in the sermons of Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, etc. It was eventually supplanted, however, by lectionaries and the liturgical calendar. See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

# ✦ Servant Truth

## What I Learned from My Dutch Reformed Brethren

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by G. I. Williamson

It was my privilege to serve as a pastor for nearly two decades with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). And it was during this time that they adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) as one of the doctrinal standards of their Churches having authority equal to that of the Three Forms of Unity. And what has impressed me more and more over the years is not only the fact that these Dutch immigrants did this rather remarkable thing, but also showed quite clearly by their actions the integrity of that adoption.

It was not long after the WCF was adopted that one of the pastors who came from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands lodged what they called a gravamen against WCF 21.7–8. The pastor, who brought that gravamen to his session, then presbytery, and finally synod, was a man of integrity. He did not start publicly preaching or teaching “his” view of the Lord’s Day/Sabbath. No, he had too much respect for the integrity of confessional subscription. What he wanted was either the removal of 21.7–8, or a newly written replacement for that section of the WCF. So he sought it by refraining from publicly teaching or writing any-

thing contrary to the church’s adopted confessional standards, while working within the assemblies of the elders of the churches to effect a change with which he could agree. I was opposed to his gravamen, but I respected very much the way that he dealt with this matter. We remained good friends during the time when this was adjudicated—and also after he left New Zealand to serve in a different confessional context in Australia.

One of the things that left a deep impression on me was the fact that even though this was an issue that could have become a serious source of conflict, it did not. The reason was that an orderly course had been followed. And when the synod (or what I would call the broadest assembly of the elders of the RCNZ) determined that the churches wished to uphold WCF 21.7–8, my friend did not even want to publicly teach or preach what was contrary to this. He sought, instead, a place in a church that had not adopted the WCF as the RCNZ had. And it is my conviction that we Presbyterians would profit by learning from this example.

In our earlier history, as I understand it, we Presbyterians had a similar concept and conviction. Let me give two examples: (1) the original text of the WCF 25.6 said:

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof: but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.

I hope that everyone who reads this will understand that I am in complete agreement with the first part of this section of the WCF. But I am also thankful that the part that I have underlined has been changed. I certainly believe that what the Scriptures say about the Antichrist has a valid application to the false claims of the papacy. I also believe that what 2 Thessalonians says about “the man of sin [or lawlessness]” can be applied—by the principle of analogy—to the papacy. But I do not believe (as the authors of the WCF did) that the papacy is what the apostles Paul and John spe-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=343&issue\\_id=81](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=343&issue_id=81).

cifically intended us to understand their words to mean. I am therefore in complete agreement with the deletion of the underlined words in the OPC and PCA version. (2) The original text of WCF 24.4b said, “The man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: not the woman her husband’s kindred, nearer in blood than of her own.” It is my recollection that Professor John Murray defended this original section of the WCF. But my interest here is to point out that in earlier times Presbyterians saw it as important to either agree with their confession or change it so that it says in plain, understandable words, what the church actually believes. When they no longer held this view, it too was deleted. And it is this integrity that I wish we could recover.

I have noted several instances, lately, in which the great Herman Bavinck has been cited in support of the assertion that no creed has as yet made six-day creation a confessional doctrine. And it is true that Dr. Bavinck not only admitted that historically “Christian theology, with only a few exceptions, continued to hold onto the literal historical view of the creation story,” but then went on to say “not a single confession made a fixed pronouncement about the six-day continuum.”<sup>2</sup> I have the highest respect for Herman Bavinck and am thankful, at last, to have my hands on his great work of dogmatics in English. But even great men make mistakes. And the fact is that on this he was not correct. The Westminster Assembly of Divines did make a fixed pronouncement about the six-day continuum. They said in the WCF, and again in both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, that God—by the word of his power—created “all things visible and invisible, in the space of six days.” And that they intended this to mean what our children take it to mean when they learn the shorter catechism, has been clearly demonstrated by Dr. David Hall.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 495.

3 David Hall, “The Westminster View of Creation Days: A Choice between Non-Ambiguity or Historical Revisionism,” <http://www.reformed.org/creation/index.html>.

I (and other six-day creation people) have been accused of wanting to excommunicate Hodge, Warfield, and Machen because of their willingness to tolerate views such as the day-age view. This is a false charge. Did Luther and Calvin want to excommunicate Augustine because they found error in his teaching? Wasn’t the Reformation itself liberation from blind obedience to false tradition—even if that false tradition was sometimes embraced by truly great men? Likewise, I believe a serious mistake was made in the way this creation issue was handled by some truly great men. I think it should have been handled in the same way the items enumerated above as (1) and (2) were handled. Men who did not hold to the six-day view (so clearly expressed in the three Westminster Standards) should have been required to refrain from public teaching or preaching their different views unless and until those sections of the WCF and Catechisms were either removed or rewritten. I say this because I think it is a serious failure on the part of the eldership of the church to teach our children one thing (in the catechism) while the preacher teaches another thing. Had this restraint been required, those who do not agree with six-day creation would have seen it as their duty to remain silent (in public utterance and writing on the subject) while they made diligent study in order (in private) to formulate what they had come to believe to be the truth in order to bring it before their session, presbytery, and general assembly, seeking a change in the Westminster Standards. Had this been done, it is possible that the church would have finally been persuaded that one or another of the various views was correct. Then the doctrinal standards could have been changed to clearly state the other view. Or at least it might have resulted in the church simply removing the sections of the WCF and Catechisms that say God created the world “in the space of six-days.” As it is at present, we have, in effect, taken on a new method of confessional revision. We no longer insist that our confession and catechisms unambiguously state what we as a church unitedly believe, so that the words of our confession themselves are subordinately authoritative (mean-



ing that while they can be changed when appropriate, as Scripture cannot, they nevertheless must be adhered to unless changed by due process). Now the doctrinal authority seems more and more to reside in whatever the majority is willing to allow, rather than in the words of the confessions and catechisms taken according to their intended and long-received meaning. I think the brethren who brought the Dutch Reformed heritage to New Zealand exhibited something better than “our way” of dealing with our subordinate standards, and we would do well to learn from their example.

I am aware that some may appeal to *animus imponentis* as a way of weakening what I have written. But, as the 2004 report on Creation to the Seventy-first General Assembly itself admits,

the church ought to interpret her Standards consonant with the meaning intended at its adoption.... It is inimical to constitutional government for the church to interpret her constitution in any way that is clearly at variance with its own words and the original intention of the framers/adopters. To disregard the Standards’ clear statement about a particular doctrine and to believe otherwise in spite of what is confessed is the mark of a declining, if not to say, apostatizing church. When the church comes to believe that the Scriptures teach something other than what she has confessed the scriptures to teach, integrity demands she amend her constitution in the manner that the constitution itself prescribes for its own amendment.<sup>4</sup>

Or, to say it more briefly, “*animus imponentis* may not be employed so as to make a wax nose of the Standards and to pit the church’s interpretation of the Standards against the plain words of the Standards itself.”<sup>5</sup> In our OPC handling of the doctrine of creation I do not believe we have lived up to these excellent statements. ☉

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## Do the Minister and the Elder Hold the Same Office?

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by **Alan D. Strange**

All Presbyterians agree that there are at least two special offices in the church—elder and deacon. The question that divides good Presbyterians, however, is this: Do the minister and the ruling elder hold the same office or is the office of minister, while sharing governance with the ruling elder, a distinct office in its own right? Let’s begin our exploration of this question by focusing on the nature of “office.”

Insofar as office denotes duty (Lat. *officium*, duty), all believers might be said to have a general office in that they have a duty to serve the Lord Christ in his church. All believers have vocations and are to pursue the whole of their lives as unto the Lord (Eph. 6:5–8). As well, all believers have their place of service within the body (1 Cor. 12:12ff.), often referred to as the “general office of believers.” “The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special

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<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the Seventy-first General Assembly (2004), 260.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=393&issue\\_id=90](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=393&issue_id=90).

offices.”<sup>2</sup>

Special office exists under both testaments—prophets, priests, and kings in the Old, as well as elders, Levites, etc. In the new covenant, we see two kinds of offices: extraordinary and temporary—as were the foundational offices of apostle and prophet (though they also had an ordinary and perpetual aspect to them); ordinary and perpetual—as are the offices of minister, elder, and deacon, given to furnish the church with the gifts of teaching, ruling, and serving. Rome would tend to emphasize special office to the detriment of the general office of the believer. The Radical Reformation would tend to emphasize the general office of the believer to the detriment of special office. The Reformers demonstrate their genius in upholding both general and special office.

With respect to the offices of minister and elder (or ruling elder, as commonly put) a question is often raised as to the distinctness of the ministerial office. Specifically this question: Do the minister and the ruling elder hold the same office? The historic Presbyterian (if not to say Calvinist) answer is *sic et non*. Yes, inasmuch as the minister is also a church governor, or, to put it another way, the minister is everything that the ruling elder is (the latter “join with the minister”<sup>3</sup> in the government of the church). No, insofar as the ruling elder is not a minister of Word and sacrament but rather, primarily, a governor of the church together with the other ruling elders and the minister(s).

## Historical Considerations

This distinction in office between the minister and elder was recognized, from all the evidence, in the apostolic and post-apostolic church. Bishops and presbyters had parity of rule, apparently, in the apostolic church, though even at this point there is heated debate as to the range of meaning of “presbyter.” The debate is over whether “presbyter” was restricted to preaching presbyters or could also

include ruling (lay) elders. And then the question is what the role of the bishop was vis-à-vis that of presbyter. Differentiation clearly occurred, distinguishing bishop and presbyter—perhaps beyond the New Testament distinction of minister and elder—at least by the early second century (Ignatius), witnessing the establishment of the supremacy of the bishop in the late second century (with the rise of the diocesan bishop, as seen in Irenaeus and Tertullian).

By Cyprian’s time in the mid-third century, presbyter had come to mean entirely the parish priest over against the diocesan bishop. There are multiple reasons for this hierarchical development: the church mimicked the political structure of the empire in a measure, to be sure, but the notion of apostolic succession, though unbiblical (the foundational office of apostle not admitting of a successor and there being no evidence of such in the Pastoral Epistles), was helpful. The Lord, in his providence, makes all things work together for the good of his people and the glory of his name: the episcopacy was useful in developing the *regula fidei* (and what Oberman called Tradition 1), serving to preserve orthodoxy against heresy at a time when the canon was still in formation. There was no biblical warrant for such, however, and Calvin and others in the time of the Reformation sought to return to a more biblical pattern of church government as they had come to understand such.

When the Reformers argued for parity of office they meant two things: a complete parity between presbyter (as it had come to be understood as the parish priest) and bishop—rejecting the distinction between higher and lower clergy—and a parity of rule between the minister and the newly recovered office of lay governor (elder), which office had, in the development of prelacy, fallen out of the church, with diaconate itself being a first step in attaining priestly office. The Reformers retained special office, though, even after having suffered under Rome’s abuse of office. Whatever differences the Reformers might have had about lay offices—was the office of ruling elder lifetime or temporary?—they all recognized such office (at least the Reformed did) as well as the central

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2 *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government 3.1 (2011), 4.

3 *Book of Church Order*, Form of Government 10.3 (2011), 13.

importance (and indeed, indispensability) of the office of minister of Word and sacrament. This is understandable, since the Word, particularly the preached Word, had brought about the Reformation. Thus the Reformers (all, including Lutherans and Anglicans as well as Reformed) were zealous to maintain a high view of the office that, through Word and sacrament, the Spirit was pleased to act for the gathering and perfecting of Christ's church.

### Exegetical Considerations

With respect to the New Testament, Edmund P. Clowney is right: the Pastorals in particular and the New Testament in general are not a book of church order.<sup>4</sup> Lest we be dispensationalist in our polity, we must see the foundation and origins of church office in the Old Testament. Lee Irons has an excellent discussion of the eldership in the Old Testament, in his paper arguing for a three-office view, bringing a plethora of relevant texts into view and clearly demonstrating that the elders were leaders of the people who represented them and on whose behalf they held session in the city gate, ruling together with Moses and the Levites, who served as courts of appeal. Irons argues:

The case for the three-office view rests in large part on the office of elder as it is found in the Old Testament. The collective entity of leaders known as "the elders" (*hazzekenim*) is referred to more than 100 times in the OT and about 60 times in the NT (*hoi presbyteroi*). According to Holladay, in the OT it refers to "the totality of men (with full beard) of mature years with legal competence in a community." As a collective unit in each village, the elders had governmental authority to rule and judicial power to function as judges in the community. The senior male heads of each household met at "the gate of the city" to deliberate in council regarding disputes that had arisen within the community (Gen. 23:10, 18; 34:20; Deut. 25:7; 2 Sam. 15:2–4; Job

29:7ff.; Amos 5:10–15). For example, if a man married a woman and later thinks that she was not a virgin, then her parents are to bring the tokens of virginity "to the elders of the city at the gate" in order to refute the husband's allegations (Deut. 22: 15). The levirate marriage of Boaz and Ruth was a legal transaction that took place in the gate of the city in the presence of the elders (Ruth 4:1, 10–11). In fact, "the gate" functions as a court and is so translated by the New American Standard Bible. The gate becomes a virtual synonym for the session of elders: "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (Prov. 32:23). It was the center of social, economic, civic, and judicial decision-making.

According to Numbers 11, however, the Israelite eldership was no mere sociological phenomenon but an institution of divine sanction that had ecclesiastical power as well. In response to Moses's complaint that the burden of single-handedly hearing all the judicial cases of the people was becoming unmanageable, the Lord said, "Gather for me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting" (v. 16). The Lord then took of the Spirit that was upon Moses and the Spirit on the seventy elders as well, who prophesied once but never thereafter [*sic*]. The implications of this narrative are twofold. First, the eldership of Israel is of divine right—that is, it was sanctioned and authorized by divine revelation. It was not merely a human institution. This seems to be the over-riding point of the Numbers 11 etiology (i.e., a narrative explaining origins). Second, the elders were anointed by the Spirit to perform their task of judging cases, yet they only prophesied once.<sup>5</sup>

With respect to the New Testament, the apostles, having replaced the Levites as teachers

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4 Lectures on the doctrine of the church, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988.

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5 Lee Irons, private paper formerly published but no longer available on the Internet. Citations omitted.

of the Law—whose office was rendered nugatory by the superior Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ of the tribe of Judah—are seen in the First Council (Acts 15) meeting together with the elders. After the canon is complete, there are no more apostles, but there is an office that carries on the ordinary aspects of the apostolate (the extraordinary having ceased with the close of the canon)—the New Testament ministerium. The apostles spun off diaconal duties and retained ministerial ones (the Word and prayer—Acts 6), including rule. The ministerium is the ordinary successor to the apostolate even as the lay eldership is retained from land and synagogue. One may schematize it this way:

OT		Acts 15	NT
Levites (Priests)	→	Apostles	→ Ministers
Elders (rulers in the gate)	→	Elders	→ Elders

Irons then takes up the question: Are all presbyters bishops? Certainly we must look here at 1 Timothy 3. Several positions have emerged: presbyters and bishops are the same, with both referring to pastors/preachers (Charles Hodge); *presbyters* can refer more broadly to lay elders as well as ministers, though *bishop* always refers to ministers (Calvin); in the apostolic church there were only elders “with the office of preacher being a superadded function [in post-apostolic times] to the Presbyterate”<sup>6</sup> (James Henley Thornwell); and presbyters and bishops both refer to elders and ministers alike (Thomas Witherow; Douglas Bannerman). The view that the minister and the ruling elder hold the same office (not simply that they share certain duties and not others) is a distinctly nineteenth-century Scottish and American innovation with respect to the recovered office view of the Reformation (the view that there are three, or four, offices: minister, doctor or teacher, ruling elder, and deacon).

The meaning of 1 Timothy 5:17 is also a component of this discussion. How one approaches

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<sup>6</sup> James Henley Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (1875; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 119.

this—and whether one hangs the whole of one’s office view on this verse—is key: all the views, save the consistent two-office view, have certain difficulties in interpreting this. Irons has an interesting proposal with respect to this verse, given its context of the care of the church for the aged: he thinks that this refers to superannuated ministers vis-à-vis those that continue active in service. No persuasive case has been made, in this writer’s estimation, that 1 Timothy 5:17 teaches a two-office view *simpliciter* and solves all the issues surrounding the two-vs. three-office debate. There remain considerable exegetical differences in interpreting this verse.

### Church Order Considerations

In the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of Calvin (1541), Calvin sees the “governors” as assistants to the minister and implies term limits for elders. His primary texts (though he does cite 1 Tim. 5:17) seem to be 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:8. The *First* (1560) and *Second* (1578) *Book of Discipline* in Scotland also address these questions. In the *First*, John Knox and company use the term “seniors” rather than presbyters and limit the term to one year. The *Second*, drafted by Andrew Melville, is more mature: three-office and yet a higher view of the elder, including the view that the ruling elder is ordained to lifetime service (one can have both a high view of the minister and the elder, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding).<sup>7</sup>

The *Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* (1645), part of the complex of documents comprising the work of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, makes the classic Calvinistic connection between the Levite of the Old Covenant and the minister of the New Covenant.

1. That the priests and Levites in the Jewish church were trusted with the publick reading of the word is proved.
2. That the ministers of the gospel have as ample a charge and commission to dispense

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<sup>7</sup> All references in this paragraph are from Lee Irons, private paper formerly published but no longer available on the Internet.

the word, as well as other ordinances, as the priests and Levites had under the law, proved, Isa. lxvi. 21. Matt. xxiii. 34. where our Saviour entitleth the officers of the New Testament, whom he will send forth, by the same names of the teachers of the Old.<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the ruling elder, Westminster refers to them as “other church governors” and says the following about them:

As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.<sup>9</sup>

The view of the Westminster Assembly of Divines is classically three-office and well articulates the position of historic Presbyterianism.

The *Form of Government* for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (2011 edition) in chapter 5 (“Offices in the Church”) sets forth three offices: “The ordinary and perpetual offices in the church are those given for the ministry of the Word of God, of rule, and of mercy.... Those who share in the rule of the church may be called elder.... Those who minister in mercy and service are called deacons. Those elders who have been endowed and called of Christ to labor also in the Word and teaching are called ministers.”<sup>10</sup> Chapters 6, 10, and 11 are, respectively, devoted to the offices of ministers, ruling elders, and deacons. Chapters 7–9 are devoted to several expressions of the ministerial office, notably those of evangelists (chapter

7), pastors (chapter 8) and teachers (chapter 9). Chapter 6 summarizes the duties of ministers as follows:

Every minister of the Word, or teaching elder, must manifest his gifts and calling in these various aspects of the ministry of the gospel and seek by full exercise of his ministry the spiritual profit of those with whom he labors. As a minister or servant of Christ it is his duty to feed the flock of God, to be an example to them, to have oversight of them, to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing and beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, to exhort and convince the gainsayer by sound doctrine, and to dispense the sacraments instituted by Christ. Among those who minister the Word the Scripture distinguishes the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.<sup>11</sup>

It is true logically and inferentially that one is pushed either to episcopacy, on the one hand, or to congregationalism, on the other hand, in the rejection of the historic three-office position. If the minister and elder hold the same office, Hodge argues, this means that there is only one order of governors in the church—thus the leadership of the church is only clerical and does not properly include lay leadership, which is what the ruling elder is. The exclusion of lay leadership amounts to a practical episcopacy. Contrariwise, the genius of Presbyterianism in this regard involves the ruling elder (as representative of the congregation, as was the elder in the gate) joining with the minister in the joint rule of the church, a rule that is neither exclusively clerical nor exclusively congregational.

With respect to Reformed polity, over against Presbyterian polity, the shape of this discussion about the number of offices is somewhat different. Minister and elder in the continental schema came to be viewed as two different offices, with the ruling aspect separated from the pastoral one as if the office of minister does not entail the offices of

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8 *The Confession of Faith* (Inverness: Free Presbyterian Publications), 399–400.

9 *Ibid.*, 402.

10 *Book of Church Order, Form of Government* 5.3 (2011), 8.

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11 *Ibid.* 6.2, 9.

ruling elder and deacon. In the Presbyterian view, the office of minister entails that of the elder and the deacon, even as the office of elder entails that of the deacon.

### **The Primacy of Preaching and the Place of the Preacher**

As we address the question of the distinctness of the ministerial office, it is helpful to recognize that there is a distinct office of preacher because there is a distinct call to preach. Preaching, accompanied by the sacraments, is the central activity of the church in the gathering and perfecting of the saints. This carries on the ordinary aspect of the office of the apostles as they gave themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. To be sure, the apostles delivered the Word of God in its inscripturated form as only the apostles and prophets could (Eph. 2:20): under the direct, immediate control of the Spirit of God—verbal, plenary inspiration. Being God-breathed, the Scripture was fully authoritative. Given its inspired and thus authoritative character it was infallible, inerrant, in a word—unique. We affirm the veracity (truthfulness), sufficiency (for doctrine and life), and perspicuity (clarity) of the Holy Bible.

The same Holy Spirit, who inspired the apostles and prophets—imbuing the Word with all of its marvelous attributes—has illumined the church through the ages to receive the inspired Word of God. The Spirit who gave the Word works in, with, and through the Word to apply to us all the benefits of the redemption purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ (WLC 154–155). And the chief way (WLC 155) that the Spirit makes use of the Word is through *its being preached*. For instance, Paul delivered the Word of the Lord to the Thessalonians in the power of the Holy Spirit, both as an inspired apostle *and* as a faithful preacher.

While many readers may assume that what the Thessalonians welcomed from Paul as the Word of God was the divinely inspired Word of an apostle, that does not seem the implication of 1 Thessalonians 2:13. To be sure, as an apostle Paul spoke, as noted, on occasion, divinely-inspired words.

But not always. *More often than not he preached*. Certainly the vast majority of Paul's teaching is not inscripturated. As an apostle, Paul was also an evangelist, a pastor, an elder, and a deacon. Much of what he did in ministry is to be associated with the ordinary continuing offices that we find described first in the Old Testament in the Levitical priesthood and then as modified in the New Testament.

I take 1 Thessalonians 2:13 as referring to preaching: the Word of God which they heard from Paul, and which they welcomed/received as the Word of God, was the *preaching* of the apostle Paul. The most significant commentators (both Luther and Calvin) regard this as referring to Paul's preaching. WLC 160 cites this as a proof text that we are "to receive the truth [preached] ... as the Word of God." According to the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566,<sup>12</sup> there is a sense in which "the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." Thus all preachers who faithfully preach the Bible engage in the same sort of activity that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and for which reception as the Word of God Paul commends the Thessalonians.

A high view of preaching entails a high view of the office of preacher, which is to say, the minister of the Word and sacrament. Historically, there was in Protestantism a high view of the preaching office. Among the magisterial Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox), the Protestant affirmation of "the priesthood of all believers" did not mean to them what it did to the Anabaptists and what it has also come to mean to many evangelicals: the leveling of all Christians and the assertion of the superfluity of special office in the church. The concept as adduced by the magisterial Reformers was anti-sacerdotal, not anti-office, even as *sola scriptura* meant that the Bible alone is God's Word not that the Bible only is to be consulted in our theological work (and creeds and confessions rejected).

Among the English and American Puritans

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<sup>12</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition: Reformation Era*, vol. 2. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 460.

there was also this conviction, what might be called a high view of the preaching office. The Westminster Assembly of Divines in its *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, as noted above, as well as in its *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* reflected such a high view of the preacher and his task (in its qualifications for preachers and in its description of preaching). The colonial New England parson, for instance, was looked to as the man in town to go to when seeking guidance, being, often, the only university-trained man there. The witness of E. Brooks Holifield in *Theology in America*<sup>13</sup> to the place of pastor/theologians before the American Civil War is striking. There was a real appetite for serious theological teaching and preaching before the war, and it was met in the pulpits and in the writings of ministers in parish service. Unlike the years since the Civil War, those that preceded it enjoyed a higher view of the preacher and preaching. The theologian was not so much a “pure academic” as he was to become in the years following the war in which, having ravaged Germany and England, higher criticism finally took hold here. The “academic theologian” (if not the historian of religion) replaced the pastor as leading theological voice. But even more than this, the perceived need for any theological voice whatsoever faded.

What we have seen, beginning in the Enlightenment (which did not take its fuller effect in America until after the Civil War) and increasing in recent years, is a downgrade of the preaching office and of theological instruction in preaching (Bible reading becoming increasingly focused on reader-response and preaching becoming increasingly seeker-sensitive).

This downgrade was concomitant with the rise of the intellectual, which occurred earlier in Europe than America. As Alister McGrath notes in *The Twilight of Atheism*:

The emergence of the intellectual as a recog-

nized social type is one of the most remarkable developments of recent centuries. Intellectuals became a secular priesthood, unfettered by the dogmas of the religious past, addressing a growing audience who were becoming increasingly impatient with the moral failures and cultural unsophistication of their clergy. At some point, perhaps one that can never be determined with historical accuracy, Western society came to believe that it should look elsewhere than to its clergy for guidance. Instead, they turned to the intellectuals, who were able to portray their clerical opponents as lazy fools who could do no more than unthinkingly repeat the slogans and nostrums of an increasingly distant past. A new future lay ahead, and society needed brave new thinkers to lead them to its lush Promethean pastures.<sup>14</sup>

The modernism that developed after the Enlightenment witnessed the enthroning of naturalism and the secularization of the sciences; the postmodernism that arose in the wake of the evident failures of modernism saw the rejection of propositional truth and the embracing of epistemic skepticism. Both of these post-Enlightenment developments meant further marginalization of the office of minister and the replacement of that office with the scientist or therapist or spiritualist, with the laboratory and the couch shoving aside the pulpit. The response of the church and the ministry has varied, ranging from a call to return to pre-modernism, the re-embrace of rationalism, to the embrace of postmodernism in movements like the Emergent Church. What is needed, I believe, is a recovery of preaching and, thus, of the office of preacher.

The democratization of American religion would seek to separate the two questions, with some agreeing that preaching is the need of the hour but arguing that any committed Christian is called to and competent for such a task. Such

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13 E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

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14 Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (New York: Random House, 2004), 49.

a denial of the preaching office can be seen in a measure to flow out of both Great Awakenings but far more out of the Second, which denied man's inability and, thus, had an across the board effect of wiping out distinctions. Jacksonian democracy, Restorationism, and the whole American ethos of self-reliance contributed to what is sown after the Civil War when the office of preacher is low-rated. It is not only the intellectual and the expert (the scientist, philosopher, psychiatrist, etc.) who shove aside the minister, it is also, on the other end of the spectrum, the anti-intellectual who senses no need for the minister in the grip of a "Jesus, my Bible, and me" mentality.

The needed recovery of preachers and preaching will not come about through manipulative techniques (drama in worship, musical productions, etc.). It will only come about through the Church recognizing men who fit the bill of 1 Timothy 3, of giving such men solid theological training, and of placing such men in office, willing to receive with meekness and joy the Word of God from their lips. The cure for our spiritual ills can never be anything other than what God himself has prescribed. If our postmodern situation is rightly understood we have come full circle, in our neo-paganism, back to the pre-modern paganism of Paul's world, the world of Acts 17, to which world the apostles, and those who followed them in the ministerial office, preached.

Preaching is not, as some postmodernists have claimed, passé, but as relevant as ever, particularly in a post-Christian world that has come more to resemble Paul's world than that of Christendom. The call to preach the gospel is a distinct call to which one is to give one's life, and it is a call that still goes out. We need to recover a high biblical Presbyterian view of both the office of preacher and the central activity to which that office is given: the preaching of the Word of the Lord, which God is pleased to use to gather and perfect the church, through the lips of those called to preach the gospel. ©

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# ✦ Servant Word

## The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October, November, December 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Robert Letham

### Introduction

J. Gresham Machen famously declared, “Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative.”<sup>2</sup> The foundation of the Christian gospel is what God has done for our salvation in Christ, his Son. It is a sovereign work of the Holy Trinity. From this it follows that what the church is to do is at root an announcement, a declaration. It is good news. That good news is to be announced like a herald. Upon this, all subsequent action by the church rests.

### WHAT IS PREACHING?

Preaching can be understood in a variety of ways, corresponding to the terms used in the New Testament for the preacher.<sup>3</sup> At root, it is possible to boil everything down to two major, indispensable aspects: proclamation of the word of God, which is foundational, and appeal to the hearers.

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1 [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=380&issue\\_id=88](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=380&issue_id=88); [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=387&issue\\_id=89](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=387&issue_id=89); [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=394&issue\\_id=90](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=394&issue_id=90).

2 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 47.

3 John Stott considers the preacher as a steward, a herald, a witness, a father, and a servant. J.R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (London: Tyndale Press, 1961).

### Proclamation

For Karl Barth, proclamation is integrally connected with the lordship of Christ; he declares, “preaching does not put it into effect; preaching declares and confirms that it is in effect.”<sup>4</sup> In turn, Stott states, “the preacher does not supply his own message; he is supplied with it.”<sup>5</sup> This follows from Machen’s “triumphant indicative.” Christianity is not a method of self-help; it is a manifestation of the grace of God. Hence, in the public teaching of the Christian faith, the primary weight falls on declaring what God has done to save his people from their sins. As Barth puts it, proclamation “is directed to men with the definitive claim and expectation that it has to declare the Word of God to them ... in and by which God Himself speaks like a king through the mouth of his herald, and which is meant to be heard and accepted as speech in and by which God Himself speaks.”<sup>6</sup> In short, all comes from God to humanity. The message, and consequently the medium, is prescribed for us.

In the light of this, Barth continues in his inimitable style, “God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to him if he really does. But unless we regard ourselves as the prophets and founders of a new Church, we cannot say that we are commissioned to pass on what we have heard as independent proclamation.”<sup>7</sup> Rather, true preaching is “the attempt by someone called thereto in the Church, in the form of an exposition of some portion of the biblical witness to revelation, to express in his own words and to make intelligible to the men of his own generation the promise of the revelation, reconciliation and vocation of God as they are to be expected here and now.”<sup>8</sup> This definition of Barth’s lacks the element of appeal—it is simply a

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4 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–77), I/1, 153.

5 Stott, *Portrait*, 20.

6 Barth, *CD*, I/1, 51–52.

7 Barth, *CD*, I/1, 55.

8 *Ibid.*, 56.

declaration, an exposition, a making intelligible. This is both necessary and primary and—as Stott remarks—if one or other of these elements only were present it would be best that this be the one. Without the proclamation and content we would be left with emotional manipulation; but without the appeal we would not have a sermon but a lecture.

On the other hand, Barth's threefold form of the Word of God provides some helpful ways of considering the question. His proposal of the perichoretic interpenetration of the revealed Word, the Word written, and the Word proclaimed points us in the direction of an integrated grasp of the relationship among Christ, the Bible, and preaching.<sup>9</sup> We should see these three as interconnected. Christ, the living Word, is the central theme of Scripture (Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; 1 Pet. 1:10–12) and thus of preaching. The written word testifies of Christ and is the basis of preaching. Preaching itself must be grounded on Scripture and testify of Christ. Not only are the three integrally interconnected but they are inseparable. No one element can be excluded without undermining the whole.

## Appeal

By this we do not mean the kind of evangelistic call associated with the Arminianism of preachers like Billy Graham, which presupposes some form of autonomy in the human subject. Rather, it is an appeal by the preacher to the consciences of the hearers, whether they are believers, covenant children, or unbelievers. It is an appeal to submit to the Word of God, to trust in Christ, to be obedient to his call. It is an integral part of what makes preaching what it is. As Stott says, “the herald does not just preach good news, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. No. The proclamation issues in an appeal. The herald expects a response. The Christian ambassador, who has announced the reconciliation which God has achieved through Christ, beseeches men to

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9 Ibid., 121.

be reconciled to God.”<sup>10</sup> Since in preaching God directly confronts men and women with himself, it follows that he expects faith and obedience to result. We find in all biblical sermons, and in every biblical book, a demand for change by those who hear or read. Declarations of truth are followed by searching calls for repentance or discipleship.

These appeals are most urgent entreaties to people to get right with God—“nothing less fervent would be appropriate to one who labours ‘on behalf of Christ’ and Him crucified.”<sup>11</sup> The proclamation comes first,<sup>12</sup> but without an appeal it is not biblical preaching.<sup>13</sup> Stott cites Richard Baxter, who wrote, “I marvel how I can preach ... slightly and coldly, how I can let men alone in their sins and that I do not go to them and beseech them for the Lord’s sake to repent.... I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent.... It asketh me: ‘How could’st thou speak of life and death with such a heart?’”<sup>14</sup>

Inherent in the appeal are searching diagnostic questions. The interrogative is an essential element of true preaching, as John Carrick insists.<sup>15</sup> As much as the preacher is to indwell the Word he proclaims,<sup>16</sup> he is to get under the skin of those to whom he preaches. There is to be an engagement with the Word and the world, with Christ and his church. The preacher is to grasp both of these elements and not to let them go, rather like a dog gnawing at a bone.

## Necessity

Calvin regards preaching as at the heart of the church’s life. He states that “doctrine is the mother from whom God generates us (*Doctrinaenim mater*

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10 Stott, *Portrait*, 31.

11 Ibid., 45.

12 Ibid., 48–49.

13 Ibid., 50.

14 Ibid., 51.

15 John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 56–81.

16 Cf. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

est, ex qua nos Deus generat).”<sup>17</sup> Again, in the *Institutes* he affirms that “the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church (*salvifica Christi doctrina anima est Ecclesiae*).” The context indicates that he is writing about preaching, for a few lines later he mentions “the preaching of doctrine (*ad doctrinae praedicationem*).”<sup>18</sup>

Reformed theology has consistently maintained that the ministry of the Word and the sacraments together are the outward means God uses to bring his people to salvation (Westminster Shorter Catechism 88; Westminster Larger Catechism 154). Yet the Word has priority over the sacraments; the sacraments are nothing without the Word (Westminster Confession of Faith 27:3; WLC 169).<sup>19</sup> As Barth says of the Reformed, “They could not and would not assign to the sacrament the place which falls to preaching according to Roman Catholic dogmatics,” for “the former must exist for the sake of the latter, and therefore the sacrament for the sake of preaching, not *vice-versa*.”<sup>20</sup> Yet the sacraments are to be together with the Word, if under it.

A number of biblical passages reinforce this claim. In Romans 10:14, in which Paul insists on the urgency of preachers being sent to his compatriots, the Jews, the subjective genitive is to be preferred, yielding the clause, “How are they to believe him whom they have not heard?” (my translation). In short, Christ is heard in the preaching of the gospel.<sup>21</sup> When the Word is truly preached,

Christ is present.<sup>22</sup> That Paul refers to the preacher as sent indicates the ministerial nature of preaching; the preacher is subservient to the Word and is commissioned by the church.<sup>23</sup> In Ephesians 2:17, Christ is said to have preached peace to the Gentiles at Ephesus: “he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.” Jesus never visited Ephesus; Paul refers to his own preaching in founding the church. In Paul’s preaching, Christ himself preaches. In Luke 10:16, Jesus sends the apostles to preach and heal, saying, “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” The apostles were Jesus’s special representatives in their preaching ministry; their preaching is his own, their words will be his. Their acceptance or rejection is the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. The intrinsic quality of their preaching is not in view—their status depends on their having been commissioned by Jesus. In John 5:25, the voice of the Son of God raises the dead. This means spiritual resurrection in the present rather than the physical resurrection in the future mentioned in vv. 28–29. Already present (“and now is”), it comes through hearing the voice of the Son of God, or hearing the word of Christ and believing (v. 24). Finally, Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:19–20 that God makes his appeal through us. Paul and all true preachers are ambassadors of Christ, so possessing the authority of the one they represent. Behind this is the figure of the *shaliyach*, a personal emissary, whom the Talmud considered to carry the authority of the one who sent him.

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17 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (T.H.L. Parker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 85; John Calvin, *Commentarii in Pauli Epistolas* (Ioannis Calvinii Opera Exegetica; Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992), 108.

18 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, 4:12:1; John Calvin, *Opera Selecta* (Petrus Barth; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1936), 5:212.

19 See also *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645), in *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large, Together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Applecross: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1970), 383, 385.

20 Barth, CD, I/1, 70.

21 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965), 2:58; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International*

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*Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 533–34; James D.C. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 38b: Romans 9–16* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 620; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 389–90. In this and the following paragraph see Robert Letham, “The Authority of Preaching,” *Baptist Reformation Review* 3, no. 4 (1974): 21–29.

22 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 1 The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 186–87.

23 Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume 1*, 184.

In line with this, Calvin regarded preaching as both a human and divine activity, the Holy Spirit working in sovereignty through the words of the preacher.<sup>24</sup> As such, he states that “God himself appears in our midst, and, as author of this order, would have men recognize him as present in his institution.”<sup>25</sup>

## WHY IS PREACHING NECESSARY?

A number of factors underlie this commitment, all of which in inseparable combination force the conclusion that preaching is the appropriate means by which the decisive acts of God for us and our salvation are to be transmitted.

### The Nature of God

The Christian doctrine of God is summed up by the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the new covenant name of God.<sup>26</sup> The revelation that God is Trinitarian is the culmination of God’s progressive self-revelation throughout the Old Testament. It entails that God is one indivisible being, three irreducible persons. All three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—exhaustively participate in the one being of God. Neither are any more God than the others, nor are the three together greater than any one. In keeping with this, the three mutually indwell each other, occupying the same infinite divine space.<sup>27</sup> The eternal life of the Holy Trinity is one of indivisible union, marked by love between the three. At the heart of this is communication.

God is relational and personal. Jesus talks of the glory he shared with the Father in eternity

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24 See the discussion by John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Us Today,” in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (ed. Timothy George; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 210–12.

25 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:1:5.

26 Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 411–12.

27 Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 158.

(John 17:22–24). The Father advances his kingdom through the work of the Son, for it is his will that the Son should have preeminence in all things (Col. 1:19). We read of the Father’s love for the Son (John 3:35; 17:23–24; Rom. 8:32). The Son brings honor to the Father (John 17:4). The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14–15). The eternal generation of the Son by the Father tells us that God is not at all lonely even without the world and us.<sup>28</sup> Apart from the generation of the Son, creation would be inconceivable.<sup>29</sup> The eternal vibrance of the living Holy Trinity—an indivisible union of life communicated, received, and mutually possessed, as instanced in the relations of the three, in eternal generation and procession—grounds the free and sovereign determination of the Trinity to bring into existence what is contingent and other. God is life itself, overflowing vitality, inherently fecund.<sup>30</sup>

In short, God is indivisible and personal—communication is at the heart of who he is and what he does. It is in keeping with who God is that in dealing with humanity, who he created in his own image, that communication is basic.

### The Incarnation

So much is evident when we consider that, while Adam was created *in* the image of God, the second Adam, the Word become flesh, *is* the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).<sup>31</sup> In the incarnation, the eternal Son took our nature into union. Consequently, in answer to the question as to the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth

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28 Barth, *CD*, II/1, 139–40.

29 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 420.

30 See Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2012); Robert Letham, “The Doctrine of Eternal Generation in the Church Fathers,” in a forthcoming symposium, as yet untitled, to be published by Crossway.

31 See Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History and Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2011), 13–14; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 281–86.

(exactly *who* is Jesus Christ?), the reply given by the church is that he is the eternal Son of the Father.<sup>32</sup> This Cyrilline Christology was affirmed at Chalcedon (see the repeated “the same” in its Definition) and even more emphatically at the second Council of Constantinople (AD 553).

Old is correct when he recognizes that the Pauline statement that faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ—and, thus, Christ speaking through his Word—follows from the doctrine of grace. God saves us because he loves us, and has spoken to us, revealing himself and opening up communion with himself.<sup>33</sup> This is nowhere more evident than in the incarnation, in which our humanity has been taken into permanent, personal union by the eternal Son.

### The Personal Nature of Man

The incarnation establishes the point that humans are personal beings. While this is a constantly elusive concept, it indicates that we have been made by God for partnership, fellowship, communion, and union with himself. From this, it underlines the reality that preaching is the means God uses to bring the good news of salvation, as personal address is utterly suitable for the purpose.

Preaching as personal communication is located at the heart of God’s covenant. Central to the whole flow of the history of the covenant of grace is the constantly repeated promise, “I will be your God, you shall be my people” (Gen. 17:7–8; Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; 31:33; Rev. 21:3).<sup>34</sup>

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32 See John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: On the Unity of Christ* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995); Thomas G. Weinandy, “Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation,” in *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (London: T.&T. Clark, 2003), 23–54; Donald Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–132; J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975).

33 Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume 1*, 183.

34 See Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 285–336; Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 39–49.

This is clearly established in the biblical record. Verbal communication was necessary even before the fall. It provided the meaning of creation and the purpose of human existence.<sup>35</sup> God, having created man, announced to him the nature of his task (Gen. 1:26–29), instructed him about his agricultural responsibilities—a function which may well have been both priestly and kingly<sup>36</sup>—and the outcome if he proved disobedient (Gen. 2:15–17). From the description of the aftermath of the fall, in which God was walking in the garden and calling out to Adam, it appears that such communication was a regular feature in the original setting of creation.

Thereafter, this is pervasively evident. In the Old Testament, preaching became embedded at the heart of worship. The prophets constantly engaged the community by word written or spoken. Old remarks that over the centuries preaching developed “both theological depth and literary refinement.”<sup>37</sup> In the New Testament, more than thirty verbs describe it.<sup>38</sup>

We recall that there was a time when documents, such as the New Testament gospels and letters, were read aloud in public to groups. This was the case in the primitive church. Later, with the invention of the printing press and the wider spread of books, reading became increasingly a private, individual, and silent matter. However, in earlier days, preaching would have regularly accompanied the reading of the biblical books.

### The Suitability of Speech

Hence, speech is the normal means God uses to communicate to us. This is in marked contrast to the ideas of Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Answer to Eunomius’ Second Book*, 44, where he argues for

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35 Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: A Resource for Preaching in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 316.

36 John V. Fesko, *Last Things First* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007).

37 Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume 1*, 102.

38 Klaas Runia, “Preaching, Theology Of,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, and J.I. Packer (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 527–28.

the primacy of sense knowledge over the intellectual, of the visual in creation over words, which, he suggests, are inherently ambiguous.

All that appears, or that is conceivable in respect to us, depends on a Power who is inscrutable and sublime. This is not given in articulate speech, but by the things which are seen, and it instills into our minds the knowledge of Divine power more than if speech proclaimed it with a voice. As, then, the heavens declare, though they do not speak, and the firmament shows God's handiwork, yet requires no voice for the purpose, and the day uttereth speech, though there is no speaking, and no one can say that Holy Scripture is in error—in like manner, since both Moses and David have one and the same Teacher, I mean the Holy Spirit, who says that the fiat went before the creation, we are not told that God is the Creator of words, but of things made known to us by the signification of our words.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Gregory continues, visible objects are more readily comprehensible, while God needs no words to make known his mind.<sup>40</sup> Gregory's argument has had an ongoing effect in the Eastern Church, where worship is very strongly visual, with icons everywhere, the comings and goings of the priest into and out of the sanctuary symbolizing Christ coming to feed his people, the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, the opening of the gates of paradise, and so on.<sup>41</sup> However, this is counter to the normal way God communicated to his people. In reference to his appearance to Israel at Sinai, it is recorded that "the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut. 4:12).

Whereas the visual can be evocative, it is in-

39 Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, 44, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, ed. P. Schaff (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5:273.

40 Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, 45–46.

41 Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy; A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 143–62.

herently ambiguous. If the President of the United States were to declare war on a particular country, it is unlikely he would disclose this to the nation by means of a troupe of dancers, or actors performing a skit. A matter of such seriousness would demand direct, personal, verbal address, with clear explanations.

Speech-act theory reinforces this argument.<sup>42</sup> Words are uniquely adaptable. Any number of illocutions—types of speech—are available. Words can promise, warn, encourage, rebuke, inform, elicit, express sorrow or thanksgiving, praise, advise, or command—and many other things. In turn, words can effect actions and bring about change; what are termed perlocutions. The urgent shout, "Fire!" will usually result in a rapid exodus from a building; an inconsiderate comment will produce anger or bitterness; a tenderly, soothing whisper, "I love you," will sometimes accomplish the intended aim.

### How Far Is There Confessional Support?

The *French Confession* (1559) 25, in which Calvin played a central role, stresses the importance of preaching in no uncertain terms: "We detest all visionaries who would like, so far as lies in their power, to destroy this ministry and preaching of the Word and sacraments."<sup>43</sup>

The *Scots Confession* (1560) 18, drawn up by John Knox, asks, "Of the Notis, be the quhilk the trewe Kirk is decernit fra the false, and quhasall be judge of the doctrine," and answers, "The notes therefore of the trew Kirk of God we beleeve, confesse, and avow to be, first, the trew preaching of the Worde of God."<sup>44</sup>

The *Belgic Confession* (1561) 29 agrees stating that "the marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel

42 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered in Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

43 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 3:374.

44 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:460–61.

is preached therein.”<sup>45</sup>

The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) 65 places preaching in the context of our deliverance from sin: “Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith? A. The Holy Ghost works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy Sacraments.”<sup>46</sup>

The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), 1:2, declares in a celebrated passage:

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful (*credimus ipsum Dei verbum annunciari et a fidelibus recipi*); and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good.<sup>47</sup>

There is here a marginal reference—*praedicationis verbi Dei est verbum Dei* (the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God). We note the important point that the efficacy of preaching is not dependent on the minister but on the Word of God itself. Another significant stress here is on the lawful calling of the preacher. Therefore, there is a twofold check, preventing the idea that any fool standing up and spouting off about the Christian faith can say that he is preaching the Word of God. First is the comment “when this Word of God is now preached” which directs us to the content of the preaching; it must be within the boundaries of the rule of faith. Second, it is done “by preachers lawfully called,” referring to at least licensure and probably ordination, and thus church authority. In this, it is in harmony with the New Testament correlation of the Holy Spirit and the church, as

in Acts 13:3–4, in which the sending of Paul and Barnabas by the church is equated with their sending by the Holy Spirit, and the comment of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:28 that “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) 1 refers to the propagation of the truth, later defined as through the ministry of the Word, as the revelation by the Lord which has been committed wholly to writing in the Scriptures: “It pleased the Lord ... to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving *and propagating* of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church ... to commit the same wholly unto writing.” In this the preaching of the church, properly understood, is not to be seen in detachment from the Lord’s revelation of himself and his will to the church, nor from the written record of that revelation in Scripture, which in turn is wholly identified with that prior revelation.

We conclude that preaching is absolutely central to the being and well-being of the church. This is established on biblical grounds and it has found expression in the creeds and confessions of the Reformed churches.

### **Apart from the Perennial Matter of Sin, What Barriers Exist to Preaching Today?**

A point Old makes repeatedly in his massive work on the reading and preaching of the Scriptures in the worship of the church is that the church’s health is directly related to the vibrancy of its preaching. In turn, the quality of the preaching is largely dependent on the level of education in society.<sup>48</sup> Referring to the Benedictines and their cultivation of learning, Old remarks, “If the Church was to worship as it always had, there needed to be a steady supply of young men who knew how to speak in public, how to use words, and how to read and understand a written text. If

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45 Ibid., 3:419.

46 Ibid., 3:328.

47 Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:237, 832.

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48 See, *inter alia*, Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 3 The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 190.

there was to be a ministry of the Word, then the culture of words, the arts of literature, and the preservation and distribution of books had to be cultivated.<sup>49</sup> There is no point in pietists praying for revival if one cannot speak the language of the people or put together a decent sentence, let alone a thought.

Besides a lack of education, there is another barrier to preaching in our day. This is the hostility towards all forms of authority that pervades contemporary culture. Gregory Reynolds remarks that in our age, when authority of all kinds is being repudiated, the monologue is anathema. However, he adds, biblical preaching has never been acceptable to the autonomous mind.<sup>50</sup>

However, preaching—as presented in Scripture—is not principally a monologue. It is dialogical because it is covenantal.<sup>51</sup> It is personal address by God that demands a response from the hearer. Hence, as John Carrick sagely comments, the interrogative is as much a vital element of preaching as the indicative and imperative.<sup>52</sup> We conclude that, where preaching lacks this element, it is on the way to losing its identity.

Indeed, as face-to-face encounter, preaching is in vivid contrast to the direction of today’s social media. As Reynolds observes, these are marked by an attempt to transcend space and time.<sup>53</sup> Electronic technology connects us to remote locations but is in itself disincarnational. It aims to transcend the limits of human finitude but at the expense of normal human relationships. Recent social media have encouraged connections remotely but have undermined face-to-face human contact. At my older daughter’s wedding in the USA a few years ago, a social media event live on Twitter and Facebook (her husband a graduate in film from the University of Southern California, with his own

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49 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 400–401.

50 Reynolds, *The Word*, 335.

51 *Ibid.*, 335–36.

52 Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 56–81.

53 Reynolds, *The Word*, 340.

film production company), friends remarked that at the reception no one at their table was speaking to each other; all were busy texting. In contrast, preaching is inescapably personal. We can close a book, switch off the TV or computer, exit email or Twitter, but the Word of God penetrates to our innermost being (Heb. 4:12–13).

Alan Strange remarks that the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus were very popular in the ancient world, but the apostles made no use of such a medium.<sup>54</sup> The same can be said for the Greek predilection for rhetoric and oratory.<sup>55</sup> This, as part of the *trivium*, was handed down by the classical educational system. Paul makes a point of saying to the Corinthians that he gave no attention to such matters but rather preached simply and directly, relying on the Holy Spirit to give understanding (1 Cor. 1:18–2:5). There was plenty of intellectual content, but it was shorn of extraneous adornments, devoted entirely to presenting Christ in as clear and direct a manner as possible.

One of the main features of Reynolds’s argument is that the medium shapes the thoughts, the actions of those exposed to it. Before the invention of the printing press, an oral culture prevailed. In New Testament times, Paul’s letters would have been read to the assembled church. The medium brought people together in community. Once the printing press entered, and books were widely distributed, reading took place privately and silently, by individuals. It shaped the society and the culture.<sup>56</sup> Hence, we might add, the proliferation of hymns such as this, by Mary A. Lathbury, 1877:

Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me  
 ...  
 Bless thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me  
 ...  
 Thou art the Bread of Life, O Lord, to me ...  
 O send thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me ...

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54 Alan D. Strange, “Comments on the Centrality of Preaching in the Westminster Standards,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 194 n. 12.

55 Strange, “The Centrality of Preaching,” 217 n. 28.

56 Reynolds, *The Word*, 191–201, 325–35.



Me, me, me, me, me, my dear Lord and me. Television accentuated this individualism, and has even been shown to have a physical impact on the human brain, introducing passivity.<sup>57</sup> The social media and the lightning speed of technological developments today are creating very new challenges to which attention must be given.

## PREACHING AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Reformed confessions uniformly witness to the inseparability of Word and Spirit in all the means of grace, preaching included. This is directly counter to the Anabaptist separation of the two, a view that is rife in the wider evangelical world, particularly in the revivalist camp. It also stands in clear distinction from a purely instrumentalist view of preaching, often associated with Lutheranism and some contemporary branches of evangelical Anglicanism. Whereas the Anabaptists and revivalists tend to focus on the distinction between Word and Spirit at the expense of their inseparability, the Lutheran idea stresses that they are inseparable but tends to minimize their distinctness.

Here the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648) is of great help.

Q. 155. How is the Word made effectual to salvation? A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Q. 158. By whom is the word of God to be preached? A. The word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to

that office.

Q. 159. How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto? A. They that are called to labour in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully ... wisely ... zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people.

According to the Catechism, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power is evidenced by the faithful preaching of sound doctrine, wisdom, zeal and—above all—fervent love. Preaching is an effectual means of grace. The diligent and faithful preaching is the instrumental cause, while the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause. The two together are indispensable. The Word without the Spirit is ineffective, the Spirit without the Word is inaudible. The Spirit is the author of Scripture and continues to speak in it today (cf. Heb. 3:7, WCF 1:4, 10). The Word and the Spirit go together for that reason. However, the Spirit is sovereign and free to work as he wills. Moreover, the Word itself—whether as the text of Scripture or as the message proclaimed by the preacher—does not have power of itself.

In this, there is a contrast with the idea that the Word works grace invariably unless it is resisted, the position associated with Lutheranism. The *Augsburg Confession* (1530) 5 states that “by the Word and sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given: who worketh faith, where and when it pleaseth God, in those that hear the Gospel,”<sup>58</sup> going on in the same article to condemn the Anabaptists “who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward word.” This view of the Word as the instrument of the Spirit has commonly been connected with Lutheran sacramental theology, in which grace is given objectively and is efficacious unless there is resistance. It seems to some that this minimizes the work of the Holy

57 Ibid., 248–58.

58 Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:10.

Spirit. The Spirit is held to work through the Word, rather than with the Word.

### The Anabaptist and Revivalist Theology of Preaching Is to Be Rejected

The Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* (1530) 5, strongly opposes the Anabaptists “who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward word.”<sup>59</sup> Theirs was a radical separation of the Spirit from the Word of God, and was adopted in order to justify claims of special extra-biblical prophetic inspiration. In more recent times, under the impact of the revivals of the eighteenth century, a doctrine of preaching has arisen, exemplified by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones,<sup>60</sup> stressing the sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit. In support of this approach to preaching, the prominent British evangelical Stuart Olyott argues that the preaching of the gospel is often powerless, urging the faithful to “strive and agonise and prevail in prayer,” to “storm the throne of grace, determined that by sheer importunity they will persuade God to accompany the word to be preached.”<sup>61</sup>

Lloyd-Jones makes a contrast between what he describes as “an ordinary ministry” and one characterized by an exceptional outpouring of the Spirit resulting in mass conversions and a transformation of the church. He provides a number of examples from the Welsh revivals. In each case the basis is an experience. In the story of David Morgan, it started with a certain Humphrey Jones who had a great experience of revival in the USA, “who said to himself, ‘I wish my people at home could experience this.’” So he returned to Wales “and began to tell the people of his home country

about what he had seen and experienced.”<sup>62</sup> One night Morgan heard Jones preach “with exceptional power” and became “profoundly affected.” He went to bed that night as David Morgan and awoke “feeling like a lion.” Previously “just an ordinary preacher,” he began to preach with such power that “people were convicted and converted in large numbers.”<sup>63</sup> One day some time later he went to bed feeling like a lion but awoke as David Morgan once more, and thereafter “exercised a most ordinary ministry.”<sup>64</sup>

This school of thought was influenced by the Welsh revivals. These brought large-scale additions to the church but left in their wake an emotionalism that has proved an inoculation against biblical Christianity. Wales is now the most resistant area of the United Kingdom to the gospel. In the recent UK census it led the country in the proportion of avowed atheists and pagans. It has the lowest percentage of church attendance in the UK. A similar scenario is evident in the USA, where New England and upstate New York, where revivals aplenty occurred, are the hardest areas to reach with the gospel. There can be no denying that remarkable things happened at those times. However, the point I am making is that *Lloyd-Jones to a certain extent constructs his theology of preaching around these experiences* and, in so doing, distorts the picture presented in the Bible and unwittingly and certainly unintentionally undermines the regular use of the means of grace.<sup>65</sup>

A popular proof-text used by this school of thought as determinative is 1 Thessalonians 1:5, “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.” This is used in order to assert that the

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59 Ibid., 3:10.

60 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971).

61 Stuart Olyott, “Where Luther Got It Wrong—and Why We Need to Know About It,” *The Banner of Truth* 555 (December 2009): 27. See in reply, George M. Ella, “Where Olyott Got It Wrong,” *Biographia Evangelica*, n.d., <http://www.evangelica.de/articles/where-olyott-got-it-wrong/> (accessed 21 December 2012); *idem*, “Where Luther Puts Olyott Right,” *Biographia Evangelica*, n.d., <http://www.evangelica.de/articles/where-luther-puts-olyott-right/> (accessed 21 December 2012).

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62 Ibid., 322.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 323.

65 Perhaps this is connected with the fact that, in his fifty years of public ministry, Lloyd-Jones only referred to the sacraments on one occasion, and that in a Friday evening lecture and not in a regular service of the church. Such an omission is both astonishing and deeply disturbing. See Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 790.

preaching of the Word may be unaccompanied by the Spirit and so, as Olyott argues, preacher and congregation are to pray earnestly, persistently, and importunately for the Spirit “to visit” the preaching. However, in saying that his preaching at Thessalonica was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul hardly implies that on other occasions this was not so. Rather, he is drawing attention to the grounds for the Thessalonians’ assurance, remembering that they were subject to outbursts of persecution (Acts 17:1–9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:1–12). This persecution came from Jewish sources; it is probable that he is contrasting the Spirit’s power in gospel preaching with the empty words of the synagogue. In the similar passage in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5, it is obvious that there he contrasts his preaching with the Greek hankering for rhetoric. In both cases, “word only” and reliance on “human wisdom” refer to pagan or Jewish sources, not to Christian preaching. While it would be seriously and obviously wrong to argue against prayer for the ministry of the Word, it is untenable to base a strategic doctrine on a particular, debatable interpretation of an individual clause.

While advocates of this approach to preaching have strongly resisted Barth’s theology of Scripture, their view of preaching appears to have succumbed to a similar dynamic. For Barth, revelation was an act of God, unpredictable and outside our control, to which the Bible bears witness in a human way—and therefore in principle fallibly. For Lloyd-Jones preaching was second rate and ordinary if it was unaccompanied by what he considered to be “the Holy Spirit and power.” In short, according to this line of thought, true preaching occurs when the Spirit comes in power, an event outside our control, one which we are to seek and for which we are to pray, an event that will probably transform the preacher so that he feels like a lion, but an experience that may equally suddenly and inexplicably be withdrawn. As with Barth, where God can make the Scriptures be the Word of God in this or that circumstance, so with Lloyd-Jones, God can give a quantum boost to preaching on occasions entirely at his free and sovereign determination. Ordinary preaching may bear little fruit;

when these visitations of the Holy Spirit come, transformation occurs. These visitations are to be sought, and for the experience the preacher is to pray. Indeed, many in this camp refer to the Spirit as a “visitor.” That this is an erroneous view of preaching—one that has caused many a preacher and pastor to be overburdened with disappointment that their ministries have been substandard—should be clear. It entails an erroneous doctrine of the Holy Spirit, with far-reaching consequences for Trinitarian theology.

So we do not seek an experience, for nowhere are we encouraged to do so. Instead, as heralds of good news, as stewards of the mysteries of God, we aim to declare the message God has given and to await those words that mean more than any other: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The idea of the revivalist school that, without revivals, we are living in the day of small things is in error, for the day of small things ended at the ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father. We should not talk disparagingly of “an ordinary ministry,” for no faithful ministry since the ascension is ordinary, let alone “most ordinary.” How can the ministry of the Word of God ever be “ordinary”? How can a preacher, lawfully called, expounding and speaking the Word of the risen Christ ever consider himself about regular, humdrum business? Lloyd-Jones, in using language such as that, adopted criteria at odds with the reality of the age in which we live. Even those bearing little apparent fruit are part of a vast scenario that God is working together to accomplish ends way beyond our wildest comprehension. We do not do this for “when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful (*credimus ipsum Dei verbum annunciari et a fidelibus recipi*).”<sup>66</sup>

So for the Reformed, the Spirit and the Word are distinct but inseparable. Lutheranism stresses the inseparability at the expense of the distinction. The Anabaptists and revivalists stress the distinct-

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66 Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:237, 832.

ness at the expense of the inseparability. The Anabaptists stress statements like John 6:63a, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all,” referring to the Word as a dead letter, while ignoring the remainder of the verse, “The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.” The revivalists for their part consider it not only possible but frequent that the Word is unaccompanied by the Spirit.

This view stems from the insistence that the Word is not divine and is less than the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Spirit is free not only to leave the Word unaccompanied by his presence and power but also to work entirely independently of the Word. While it is true that the written and preached Word are not hypostatized, and so must be understood as under the living Word, yet to make such a distinction as Hywel Jones does, that “the Holy Spirit is ‘greater’ than the Word and must not be imprisoned in it,” leaves the door open to some grave consequences.<sup>67</sup> We must assert that God’s Word carries the authority of God himself and cannot be detached from him. According to Scripture, the Word of God shares in all the works of God; it creates (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3), maintains the universe (Heb. 1:3), brings about regeneration (John 5:24–25; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23), is Spirit and life (John 6:63), raises the dead (John 5:28–29), and will not pass away (Matt. 24:35). As Jesus said, “Whoever is ashamed of me *and of my words*, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father” (Luke 9:26).

We must affirm that the New Testament attributes efficacy to the Word (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:18; James 1:23; John 5:25). This is due to its being the Word of the Holy Spirit, the Word of Christ, the Living Word. The Spirit who breathed out the words of Scripture, accompanies the reading and proclamation of those words. He and his words are inseparable. “Faith comes by hearing, *and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rom. 10:17).

67 Hywel R. Jones, “Preaching the Word in the Power of the Holy Spirit,” *Foundations* 60 (2011): 84. To be fair, Jones does not go through this door, nor approach it himself.

The Spirit uses means; to write critically, as Olyott does, of “mediate regeneration” is at best misleading.<sup>68</sup> The Spirit does not speak, only to wander off and leave his ambassadors in the lurch. Nor does he speak in disjunction from the Word he has already and definitively spoken.

There is a close connection with the sacraments. The sacraments in themselves have no efficacy, for it is the Holy Spirit who makes them effective for the elect (WCF 27.3; 28.; 29.7; WLC 155; 161). In this, the difference with Lutheranism is clear. However, the Spirit works in and through the sacraments so that the faithful feed on Christ in the Eucharist; this is no evanescent or unpredictable matter. We should never come to the Lord’s Supper *pleading* with God to make them effectual, as if this is uncertain or unpredictable, assuming that we must “storm the gates of heaven” or else this will not be so. That is dangerously close to Pelagianism. Quite the contrary, we believe and trust that God is true to his Word. In line with the classic prayers of the Bible, we pray on the basis of God’s covenant promises. We know that he is reliable. He is our Father and we are his sons.<sup>69</sup> Here the clear blue water separating the Reformed from the Anabaptists and their successors is seen vividly. In both Word and sacrament human actions and divine grace—or judgment—go together. So inseparable is the Spirit from the Word that the attributes of the one can be applied to the other.<sup>70</sup>

### Expectations for Preaching

As a result we can *expect* the blessing of God upon the preaching of his Word. This is not presumption. It is simply faith, confidence that what he has promised he performs, and will continue to perform. This blessing can cut both ways; in some instances it is a form of judgment. As Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 2:1–16, “Thanks be to

68 Olyott, “Luther.”

69 *Contra* Olyott, “Luther.”

70 Behind this lies the classic doctrine of the inseparable operations of the persons of the Trinity, grounded on their indivisibility in the one *ousia* of God. To posit separability in preaching is to threaten Trinitarian doctrine.

God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance of death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”

Hughes cites Calvin to the effect that the gospel is never preached in vain, but is effectual, leading either to life or to death.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Calvin states that “wherever there is pure and unfeigned preaching of the gospel, there this strong savour that Paul mentions [in 2 Cor. 2:15–16] will be found ... not only when they quicken souls by the fragrance of salvation but also when they bring death to unbelievers.”<sup>72</sup> Hodge comments, “The word of God is quick and powerful either to save or to destroy. It cannot be neutral. If it does not save, it destroys.”<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere I have written that preaching has a twofold cutting edge, bringing life and death wherever it goes.<sup>74</sup> It is best to say, with Alan Strange, that the Holy Spirit makes the Word efficacious to different people in different ways at different times, according to his sovereign will.<sup>75</sup>

Certainly, the preachers of the gospel are called and required to exemplify in their lives the work of the Spirit and to be examples to the flock (1 Tim. 3:1–7; 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:1–26; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). That should be self-evident. But the Reformed confessions are clear that the efficacy of Word and sacrament does not depend on the piety and godliness of the ones who administer them (WCF 27.3; WLC 161). If that were so, the church would

be hostage to the daily uncertainties of individuals’ lives. Rather, their efficacy depends on the one who has established them, Christ to whom they inextricably point, and to the Holy Spirit who works through them. Can anything more secure be found? Against this, Hywel Jones’s claim that “no one who is in pastoral ministry has any grounds for thinking that his congregation will rise any higher than himself” is spurious.<sup>76</sup> Jones’s own concern for the freedom of the Spirit should expose the assertion as false; if it were true the Spirit’s freedom would be limited.

For the congregation, receiving the Word as blessing rather than as judgment is connected to a considerable degree to the extent to which its members have prepared themselves to hear it. In an age of egalitarianism it is quite common for professing believers to exhibit a critical attitude to anything that remotely resembles authoritative speech.<sup>77</sup> The Westminster Larger Catechism 160 addresses this matter.

We recall that all creation was brought into existence by the Word of God (Heb. 11:3; John 1:1–3), and continues to be sustained and directed towards its ultimate destiny by the powerful Word of God’s Son (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:18). As Athanasius said, God arranged it so that the redemption of the world is by means of the same Word who made it in the beginning.<sup>78</sup> It follows that categorizing the regular ministry of the Word as “ordinary” is literally beyond belief.

## HOW SIGNIFICANT IS THE PREACHING OF THE WORD?

Is preaching a matter of life and death? No, it’s much more important than that.<sup>79</sup> Preaching concerns not only this life but eternity. It points to the chief purpose of human existence (WSC 1). It relates to the glory of God. It is not only anthro-

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71 Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1961), 80.

72 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (David W. Torrance, Thomas Torrance, eds. T. A. Smail, translator; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 34.

73 Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959), 46.

74 Letham, “Preaching,” 24–26.

75 Strange, “The Centrality of Preaching,” 199.

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76 Jones, “Preaching,” 85.

77 Strange, “The Centrality of Preaching,” 228–31.

78 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 1.

79 This is to adapt a famous comment by Bill Shankly, manager of Liverpool FC from 1959–74, about the importance of football.

pological in scope but ecclesiological and above all theological. It points forward to the cosmic panorama of the redeemed universe. Hence, Jeremiah's profound turmoil when, for a time, he refrained from declaring the Word of the Lord to Judah (Jer. 20:7–9). So too, Paul records in words that should resonate deep in the conscience of every preacher, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

As such, anything that diverts the attention of the hearers from the Word of God is counter to the nature and intent of preaching. Into this category come the kind of sermons that begin with a tale about the preacher's family and their recent activities under the mistaken impression that this builds a bridge with the congregation by demonstrating that the preacher is "a regular guy," "a buddy." It should follow from the nature of church proclamation that the proclaimer is there to witness to Christ, not himself—"We preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5)—and by intruding personal anecdotes he is implicitly affirming that his own activities are of greater importance. In turn, the message God has called him to declare is, by implication, not so urgent after all.

So Paul's final, parting charge to his protégé Timothy, the charge that was most vital for him and all his successors—preach the Word, in season and out of season, when it seems productive and when it meets resistance, indifference, or hostility. Whatever the circumstances, preach the Word!

For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:10–11)

For no Word of God will be powerless. (Luke 1:37, my translation)

In the words of Michael Horton, "Though seemingly powerless and ineffective, the creaturely

mediation of his Word through faltering human lips is the most powerful thing on earth."<sup>80</sup>

Disposer supreme, and judge of the earth;  
who chooseth for thine the weak and the poor;  
to frail earthen vessels, and things of no worth,  
entrusting thy riches which ay shall endure.

Their sound goeth forth, 'Christ Jesus is Lord!'  
then Satan doth fear, his citadels fall:  
as when the dread trumpets went forth at thy  
word,  
and one long blast shattered the Canaanites'  
wall.

*J.B. de Santeuil, 1630–97.*<sup>81</sup> ©

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80 Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 761.

81 *The English Hymnal*, ed. Ralph Vaughan Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), hymn 178.

# Servant Work

## Reversing the Journey: When People Leave Reformed Churches

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2013<sup>1</sup>

by **Stephen D. Doe**

### **We've Got a Problem**

We live in a fluid society. People change their houses, cars, jobs, and spouses with astonishing regularity. And, if they are Christians, they change churches, too. Some of these ecclesiastical changes are simple: a move out of town and there's no OPC close by, so it is a sister Reformed denomination to which they transfer. Some changes are more puzzling: no move away physically, but people leave the OPC where they have been members and then go to another area church that, while not Reformed, at least preaches the gospel. A more heartrending change is when people simply "drop out" of church, and the session must erase them from the rolls as having abandoned their hope in Christ. Yet, just as wrenching for pastors and elders is the sad experience of dealing with members who have left the OPC to join either the Roman Catholic Church or one of the Orthodox communions. It is this last situation, which seems to be becoming more frequent, that I want to ponder with you.

Our *Book of Church Order* outlines the responsibilities of sessions in this matter. We seek to meet with these members and dissuade them and pray that they'll agree to talk to us. We try to

determine how firm their decision is, and how committed they are to that decision. We present the theological differences. We talk about the doctrine of the church. We retell the story of the Protestant Reformation and why it was necessary for Christians to break with Rome. We tell them that there are divisions within both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, that the outward unity is less than it seems. We may warn them of the unintended consequences of their decision for themselves and their families. We try to be faithful undershepherds.

But what if it isn't a church member? What if it is an ordained officer in the OPC who leaves to move into either Catholicism or Orthodoxy? What if it is a man who, at one time, subscribed to the Westminster Standards? What if it is a man who vowed to uphold the peace, purity, and unity of the church? He knows the challenges you'll present him with, and your responsibility to dissuade him from his course. Especially in the case of a minister, he knows the history of the church. He knows the theology behind the Reformation. In the case of ministers, departure from the OPC, from the Reformed faith, from Protestantism itself, is a shock to everyone. "I never knew." "He never said anything." "Nothing I said could shake his confidence in his decision." And maybe people say, "There's something wrong with him, with us, with the OPC, with Reformed churches."

It is this last situation, that of a minister leaving a Reformed church for the Roman Catholic Church, which came to me as a question and caused me to wonder what we should be learning as a church when this happens. Is something wrong with Presbyterianism when a man who knows his theology leaves what we believe is more light to a situation of less light? It is even more perplexing when men say that they are not abandoning the gospel, that their own hope is still in the fullness of the work of Jesus Christ as redeemer of God's elect. My questioner asked what the church can do to ensure that more OPC pastors don't leave for Rome or for Orthodoxy. What follows is an expanded version of my response.

<sup>1</sup> [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=346&issue\\_id=82](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=346&issue_id=82).

## Let's Be Presbyterian!

The question of what to do about ministers leaving the Reformed faith for either Catholicism or Orthodoxy is a painful and heartbreaking challenge to the church, but the short answer is clear: we need to be better Presbyterians! Although the things we will be considering apply to the responsibilities of ruling elders toward their pastor (and deacons in a different way), this is primarily focused on the responsibility of ministers to one another.

We look to our theology, which we are convinced is biblical and sound, because to go from a Protestant position generally, and a Reformed position specifically, into either Catholicism or Orthodoxy, flies in the face of that for which our Reformed forefathers fought. Why would someone trade the richness of the Reformed tradition for a church that has never repudiated the anathemas of the Council of Trent, or for a communion that views the debate over justification as a sign of weakness of the Western church?

An answer that is too easy, and therefore inadequate, is that the men who move away from the Reformed faith don't know their theology. Some very theologically bright men have made the move. It seems too simple to say that a man didn't know what he was doing because he really didn't understand what Protestantism is all about. That is perhaps our first response, and in some cases there may be truth to this, but certainly there are other factors as well.

First of all we need to see that, like all of our other decisions in life, the decision to leave the Reformed faith for Catholicism or Orthodoxy has other components besides an intellectual or theological one. We all do the things we do for a complex set of reasons. For example, if I am angry when another driver cuts me off in traffic, behind that anger may be that I am late for an appointment, an appointment that I am dreading, and I foolishly tried to do one more thing before I started out and so began ten minutes late, ten minutes that the volume of traffic compounded. I am mad at myself, I am feeling guilty, and the thoughtless

driver simply triggers a sinful response.

What may look like a simple doctrinal rejection of historic Protestant truth may be affected by family, situations, friendships, and so on. A man may be "won" to the Roman Catholic Church by the friendship of someone who spent time with him and helped him through some difficulty. A man may have key relationships that are influential in his life, far beyond relationships with fellow presbyters. He may feel distant from fellow pastors because of tensions within a presbytery. A man may have influences from his upbringing that seem to provide comfort and stability, the "faith of his fathers" that can become his default response to changes in his life. A man may be attracted to the image of both Catholicism and Orthodoxy as being ancient and focused on a high view of worship, and as providing a more full-orbed response to the world than much of evangelicalism offers.

## Things to Consider

A biblical anthropology helps us here. Our actions flow from our heart commitments. The heart is the fountain of all things, good and evil. We are admonished to guard our heart (Prov. 4:23; cf. Matt. 6:21; 12:34–35; Mark 6:45; Luke 12:34). As Blaise Pascal wrote, "The heart has its reasons."<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 14:10 states that "the heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy." Scripture teaches us to begin with the fact that God's judgment is that the thoughts of man's heart are only evil continually (Gen. 6:5), from our youth upward (Gen. 8:21; cf. Eccles. 9:3; Ezek. 14:3; Rom. 3:9–18). Depravity is a functional truth which radically affects our human experience, including our decision making. According to Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all things and desperately sick, who can understand it?"

It is because of the untrustworthiness of our own hearts that we need the Word of God, and

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2 Compare the fuller quote from Pascal: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason." We wouldn't agree with much of what Pascal says, but he recognized that more than man's intellect is involved in his decision-making.



we need the church. We need the Word of God to penetrate and correct our perceptions and conclusions about our situations, our choices, and our motives. We make faulty judgments because we always tend to think that our hearts will make the right assessment. In the church we can serve one another by reminding each other of this basic truth and by asking the right kind of questions of a brother. Ultimately, of course, God himself is the searcher of the heart,<sup>3</sup> yet Proverbs 20:5 says this: “The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.” God may use other believers to challenge us to reconsider how we are looking at things. We can convince ourselves that something is completely right, but in reality be deceived in our thinking. Our brothers can remind us to compare our thinking to the teaching of Scripture, the Word which tells us to take into account the corruption of all of man’s faculties and to see that only God’s Word can fully critique our thinking (2 Tim. 3:16–17; cf. Prov. 3:5, Jer. 17:5).

Presbyterianism, simply the church acting like the covenant community it is intended to be, can help because it means or should mean, that we are connected to one another and accountable to each other. True, Presbyterianism is always battling both the innate, sinful human tendency to think and act individualistically and that tendency’s rabid expression in the spirit of our own age. This is the spirit that says that I must make my decisions on my own without regard for others or for the larger community of believers. The “sovereign self,” as it is termed, dominates our age. Yet the church structure which Christ has given involves a bond which is reflected in the ordination vows which church officers in the OPC are required to take. Ministers vow submission to their brethren in the Lord,<sup>4</sup> a vow which expresses the connectedness to which we commit ourselves. Submission to the brethren is a vow to not allow the individualistic mind-set of our age to control us. The “sovereign self” is called

to hear the brethren.

What does this mean? In the case of ministers it means that we must talk to one another more than we do. We need to have brothers whom we can trust, with whom we can raise questions with which we are wrestling, even doubts that are troubling us without being immediately condemned as falling away from the faith. Too often men do not talk to anyone about the things that discourage them, or the doubts that may plague them, much less the sins with which they struggle. It is all too common to hear of a minister who has an addiction to pornography, an addiction that remains hidden until God in his severe mercy brings it to light. Men come to the point of demitting the ministry without having talked to another brother about their discouragements. The inner struggles a man may be experiencing are rarely openly spoken of to others. This includes the frequent unwillingness to discuss with another pastor the theological issues that trouble us, or the doubts about the truths of the Reformed faith that can develop. In the quiet of our own thoughts, we do not consider the factors that play upon the heart—loyalties, fears, and pressures. A man may turn so many things over in his own mind without speaking even to his closest associates because he fears the reaction he’ll encounter or that he will be “labeled” as unstable. Tendencies may develop within a man without any of the brethren to whom he vowed submission ever knowing.

The attractions of Catholicism or Orthodoxy may never be discussed with anyone except one’s wife or those within the communion to which they are thinking of moving. Brothers who could challenge them and help them think about their questions are not consulted. Often we see things in a very small universe of thought which is determined by our heart commitments. We need the brethren to help us see our questions in a different light and to challenge those heart commitments, yet often we fear to talk to one another about these things. We may think that we are displaying weakness, either theological or emotional. We may expect that anyone in whom we might confide would instantly distance himself and would start to talk to oth-

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<sup>3</sup> Jer. 17:10; Prov. 21:2; cf. 11:20; 20:12; 1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 33:15; 44:21; Prov. 17:3; 1 John 3:20.

<sup>4</sup> Form of Government 22.13.c; 23.8, 12.a–b, 14, 17–18.

ers, “Pray for him, he’s flirting with the Catholic Church. I don’t know what’s gotten into him.”

Ministers need to reach out to one another, pray with and for one another, be more honest with each other. We need to act as Presbyterians who are in fact connected to each other. We are not Presbyterians simply because we like to get together, but because of what we believe about the nature of how the church is bound together in Jesus Christ. Paul’s instruction in Galatians 6:2 to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” applies to ministers as brothers in Christ, as well as to the congregations we serve. We face busy schedules. Everyone believes that the time is too short for the things he should be doing. Yet the vows a minister takes to be in submission to his brothers reminds him that he must act as one connected to the other ministers in his presbytery by a true and deep bond. It is easy for us to assume that everything is going well with all the other pastors in our presbytery. It is admittedly uncomfortable to ask difficult questions and have them asked of us. And it is discouraging to be honest with a brother and have him ignore the painful doubts you have expressed or give you some pat and glib answer. Yet we must labor at this in order to live up to our claim to be Presbyterian.

The gospel constantly reminds us of our own weakness. When we confess Christ, we are publicly acknowledging our weakness and desperate need for deliverance from our sin and its power. This dependence on Christ does not diminish over time or by being ordained. We do not become immune to failure, struggle, doubt, or weakness through the laying on of hands. We should not be surprised (saddened? yes, but surprised? no) when a brother confesses his struggle, whether it be with sexual sin, anger, alcohol, or an attraction to a radically different theological view. As Presbyterians we confess the truth of our fallenness, but then we often act surprised when others tell of either sin or theological confusion.

In the church we have vowed submission to that Word which we believe is faithfully expressed by our secondary standards, and we have vowed submission to our brethren in the Lord. We are

Presbyterians, we are bound to one another in Christ and by his gospel to love one another, bear with each other, and call one another to walk in the light. This may not stop men from moving away from the clarity of the Reformed faith, but it will mean that we are seeking to be faithful to one another and to the Lord of the church as Presbyterians. ☺

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## Suicide: A Complicated Grief

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

Jim had come to check on his father, Ken, at the apartment half a mile down the road from the big farmhouse where Jim and his family lived. His father had not been feeling well for some time, suffering from chronic lung disease. Each morning before heading off to work Jim would knock on the door to be sure his father was up. This morning Ken did not answer when Jim knocked, so Jim used his key to open the door. There he found his father, lying in a pool of blood, his hunting rifle underneath his body.

About every sixteen minutes in America a

<sup>1</sup> [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=351&issue\\_id=83](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=351&issue_id=83).

person takes his or her own life.<sup>2</sup> More than 36,000 Americans commit suicide each year, and about 465,000 people receive medical care for self-inflicted injuries. Men are more likely to kill themselves, though women attempt suicide at similar rates. Men tend to use more lethal and violent means. Suicide has become the tenth leading cause of death in the United States. While those who are committed to a church or faith community have a lower incidence of suicide attempts and suicide,<sup>3</sup> Christians are not immune from the strong temptation which comes with severe depression or the unexpected stress which life sometimes brings.

For the families and friends left behind, suicide has a stunning impact, unlike any other form of grief.

### **Complicated Grief**

Suicide almost always precipitates complicated grief.<sup>4</sup> This grief is intense, debilitating, and unlikely to resolve without pastoral or other professional support.

Jim helped plan the funeral for his father. Through the service and interment, Jim remained strong for his family. He reflected the solid Christian faith which his father had imparted to him. His father was well known and loved in the community, so the service was well attended and the family received a great deal of support. Jim appeared to grieve appropriately and within a few weeks returned to his work as a community leader. We saw each other regularly, and he gave every appearance of having resolved his grief quite successfully.

It was more than a year and a half later, on a day in late spring, that we were riding up through the back hills of the rural community in his pickup. Jim stopped by a stone wall and got out to

admire it. He noted that his father had built that wall with stones cleared from the fields below. Suddenly he turned to look up the valley towards his farm house. Then he cried out with a haunting cry that still rings in my ears many years later. He then turned to me and for the first time ever, he hugged me, clinging as tightly as he could. I held him as he sobbed uncontrollably for what seemed like hours, but was probably only minutes. When he calmed, we prayed. Jim still struggles with his grief from time to time. It's the little things that remind him of his father and trigger intense grief. Jim is surrounded by his father's quality woodwork throughout his house.

Grieving a suicide brings with it a unique set of feelings. There is statistical evidence that those who have lost loved ones to suicide have a very difficult time handling their grief.<sup>5</sup> This is supported by the many stories and books on the subject, all of which offer common themes. Survivors speak of feelings of abandonment, rejection, and betrayal; intense anger; shame; fear; a need to assign blame; strong feelings of regret and guilt.<sup>6</sup> Two thoughts tend to dominate the thinking of those left behind. "Why?" and "If only I had ..." But the only person who could answer either of these is no longer available to provide those answers.

The complications of grief are increased if the survivor discovered the body, or worse, witnessed the event.

### **The Stigma of Suicide**

One common experience among families who experience the suicide of a loved one is the perceived need to make up a story which will explain the death in some other way. The first funeral I ever performed as a pastor was for a young man who had been in an "automobile accident." I comforted the grieving widow, consoled family members and friends, and gently shared the gospel with the crowd which gathered at the graveside. It

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2 The statistics here are drawn from the website of the Centers for Disease Control [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide).

3 Kanita Dervic, et al., "Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 161, no. 12 (Dec. 2004): 2393-98.

4 See my article, "A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 60-65.

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5 William J. Worden, *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy* (New York: Springer, 1991), 33.

6 Worden, 93-95.

was years later that I learned that the authorities suspected that Bill had intentionally driven his pickup into a tree.

There is a social stigma which is associated with suicide in Western societies. This stigma of suicide is found in Roman society, predating the rise of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> The early church Fathers condemned suicide, though at the same time defended voluntary martyrdom. It was Augustine's statement, "Those guilty of their own death are not received after death into that better life,"<sup>8</sup> which became the law of the church throughout the Middle Ages. Yet even Augustine struggled with the suicide of a godly woman, Lucretia, because she was unable to endure the horror of the foul indignity perpetrated against her.<sup>9</sup> Augustine approached the issue with due caution, noting that he would not "claim to judge the secrets of the heart."

The church of the Middle Ages engaged in a variety of superstitious abuses against the bodies of those who had committed suicide.<sup>10</sup> Most theologians of that period denied any possibility of salvation for one who died in such sin. Martin Luther viewed suicide as demonic in character. His assertion that suicide was a murder committed by the devil continued to perpetuate the stigma, while actually relieving victims of at least some responsibility for their deaths. Calvin and most of the Protestant Reformers simply reaffirmed Augustine's view that suicide was a violation of the Sixth Commandment and as such, serious sin, without supporting the superstitious excesses of the medieval church.<sup>11</sup>

In the struggle among English Puritans, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics, the issue of suicide became a polemical weapon. As such the

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7 The information in this section comes from Georges Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

8 Augustine, *City of God*, Book 1, Chapter 26 (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 38.

9 Augustine, 29.

10 Minois, 34–37.

11 Minois, 72.

rhetoric regarding suicide was escalated. There was a tendency to demonize the act, as Luther did. When prominent representatives of the various religious movements succumbed to the pressure of intense persecution and torture, they were held up as examples of the demonic character of their religious cause.<sup>12</sup> It is, in part, from this conflict that we have inherited the strongly conflicted feelings about suicide that are still shown in American society today. Suicide remains a taboo subject, rarely discussed, even more rarely acknowledged.

## Grace

Our Catechism reflects the view of Calvin, but neither the excesses of superstition nor the polemic described above. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 69 reads, "What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?" The answer given is that "The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor, unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." According to Scripture and our confessional standard, suicide is a serious sin, a violation of commandment of God, and ought to be avoided. Notice that the catechism leaves room for a just taking away of our own life, perhaps with a thought to Samson, who intentionally brought the house down upon himself in order to gain victory over his enemies and to bring glory to God (Judges 16:28–30). Suicide is serious sin. Does this mean that a person who commits suicide cannot enter glory?

God's Word suggests otherwise. Jesus assures his disciples, saying, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matt. 12:31). Most Reformed exegetes would understand "blasphemy against the Spirit" as willfully and deliberately ascribing to Satan what belongs to the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> We should not miss the grace

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12 Minois, 73–74.

13 William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 529; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 318–19; D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1984), 291; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to*

spoken in this passage, promising that all other sins will be forgiven to those who trust in Christ alone for salvation.

This reminds us that the entrance to glory is through Christ alone, and not through our own works. It is the finished work of Christ on the cross that secures our redemption. His blood avails for each and every sin of those who trust in him. And his love, demonstrated in his sacrifice for us, is such that nothing, not even our sin, can separate us from that love.

One sin, one failure to resist temptation, one impulsive act, does not undo our union with Christ and the blessings which this brings. Our eternal security does not hang upon our perfect obedience at every point in life. To the contrary, our security is found in the sovereign mercy and grace of God, secured for us by Christ upon the cross and at the empty tomb. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

This grace should not lead any to sin. Presuming upon the grace of God is forbidden in his Word (Rom. 6:1–2). Nevertheless, it is Christ’s perfect obedience and righteousness which alone secures for us eternal life and all other blessings of salvation. Even a violation of the Sixth Commandment can and will be forgiven for those who by faith are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

As to the stigma of suicide, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13). This is our

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*Mark, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 141–42, though Cranfield allows that the text may also point to apostasy, a turning away from Christ and his teachings. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 145, offers a slight alteration, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit denotes the conscious and deliberate rejection of the saving power and grace of God released through Jesus’ word and act.” I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 517, though Marshall also allows that “the NT reflects a less strict earlier usage; here the word refers to ‘the conscious and wicked rejection of the saving power and grace of God towards man.’”

confidence when we stand before God, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18).

We would all do well to heed Augustine’s caution, and not presume to judge the heart of another. That judgment belongs to God alone (Heb. 4:12; 1 Sam. 16:7).

## **A Pastoral Approach to Those Tempted by Suicide**

As pastors, we meet the issue of suicide in two distinct ways. We counsel some who are depressed and who struggle with suicidal thoughts and impulses. Many of us have also faced the need to comfort families stunned by the loss of a loved one by his or her own hand.

Often suicidal people will confess their struggles to their pastor. This confession is both an expression of despair and a cry for help. Any statement that someone is contemplating suicide should be taken with the utmost seriousness.

There are risk factors which serve as warning signs to the listening ears of a faithful shepherd:<sup>14</sup>

- A family history of suicide
- A history of mistreatment as a child
- Prior suicide attempts
- A history of depression or other mental disorders
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Isolation from other people
- Indication that the person has recently discontinued medications or treatment relating to mental health issues
- Experience of loss (broken relationships, unemployment, significant financial loss)
- Physical illness or disability
- Easy access to lethal methods

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from the material provided by the Centers for Disease Control website ([www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html)).

- Uneasiness in seeking help
- A sudden peace in a person who has been deeply depressed

Active listening gives way to frank conversation. The loving pastor will warn the suicidal person against rash and sinful actions. Like Paul to the Philippian jailor, we cry out: “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). We call men and women to “choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19). I remember being asked by a family to talk with their father. After the death of his wife, he became depressed and often spoke of wishing to end his life. I shared the story of Ken and his son, Jim, and urged him to choose life for the sake of his family. Several months later I received a letter from his daughter thanking me, noting that his discussion with me had proven to be a turning point for him, as he affirmed life and gave up his thoughts of ending his life.

There is no aid in overcoming depression, however, like a focus on the grace of God and his abiding love for us in Christ. This is the ultimate motivation for living for the sake of others.

Pastoral support doesn’t end with one crisis, but provides ongoing care, often by guiding the suicidal person to the professional help which can effectively treat his or her depression and address the life stresses which have brought the person to this point. One helpful tool in this is the national suicidal crisis or emotional distress hotline, 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). This hotline can connect those who are suicidal with host of resources associated with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Surgeon General’s office.

In many states, members of the clergy, along with child care workers, medical professionals, law enforcement officers, social workers, mental health professionals, and educators are considered mandatory reporters. This means, in part, that the pastor is required by law to report people who are a potential danger to themselves or others. In Maine, the pastor is encouraged to seek to persuade such people to get help, physically take them to a facility where help may be obtained, obtain a promise

from them that they will not kill themselves, or if these fail, to report the matter by calling the state hotline: 1-888-568-1112. Each of you should know what reporting requirements your state places upon you as a religious professional and as a church. You should seek to comply with these requirements as fully as is possible.

## A Pastoral Approach to the Survivors

Our focus in this article is on the second setting, the comfort of those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Here are some suggestions which you may find helpful.

- Be the safe person with whom the survivor may talk.
- Be present with the person who is suffering. That is, be like Job’s friends when they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, without speaking a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great (Job 2:13). Had they left it there, they might have avoided being condemned (Job 42:7).
- Listen with empathy and compassion, comforting others with the comfort you yourself have received from God (to paraphrase 2 Cor. 1:4).
- Encourage the church to be a safe and compassionate community, weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15).
- Let the grieving person lead in the dance surrounding the issue of the suicide itself. They will need to talk through their experiences and feelings, but only when they are ready and feel that it is safe to do so.<sup>15</sup>

Many survivors will need the help of a trained counselor or suicide survivors support group. Both are available in urban areas, but not so readily in rural areas. You may discover that in your commu-

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted for many of these suggestions and insights to Albert Y. Hsu, *Grieving a Suicide, A Loved One’s Search for Comfort, Answers & Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002). Hsu’s book is perhaps the closest to a distinctively Christian response to suicide.

nity there is the nucleus of such a support group. Consider getting the training needed to facilitate such a group. This training is often available through your local hospice agency.

William Worden outlines the approach that a professional grief counselor would take in caring for a grieving survivor:<sup>16</sup>

- A professional counselor would reality test the guilt and blame which are common among survivors. If there were inappropriate or sinful actions or neglect, then confession and forgiveness are available for those in Christ.
- Most professionals agree that families and friends should be encouraged to face the truth with honesty. This means avoiding the myth-making which is so common as a response to suicide. It also means avoiding the euphemisms and stating what happened in concrete and accurate terms.
- The counselor will explore the impact the suicide will have upon the survivor and how the person will cope with these expected outcomes.
- The counselor will work through the anger issues which are common, allowing the anger to be expressed while reinforcing personal controls which the survivor has over these feelings.
- The counselor will also talk through the issues of abandonment and rejection, which are also common feelings.

Heather Hays encourages survivors to write a letter to their deceased love one.<sup>17</sup> These prove to be very powerful for survivors and can be helpful in beginning the healing process.

Providing pastoral support or counseling may help the survivor to cope with the pain of grief, the “sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27). Complicated grief does not resolve quickly. It will likely take years of support. But then, this is the role of the

faithful shepherd of God’s flock to provide compassionate support for as long as it is needed.

## Conclusion

Carla Fine writes of the days following her husband’s suicide.

In my mourning, I . . . wanted to be like everyone else. I wanted my family and friends to comfort me, not to question me about why Harry had killed himself. I wanted to grieve my husband’s absence, not analyze his reasons for dying. I wanted to celebrate his kindness and friendship throughout our twenty-one years of marriage, not to rage at him for abandoning me in the prime of our lives.

The suicide of a loved one irrevocably transforms us. Our world explodes, and we are never the same.<sup>18</sup>

Suicide inevitably changes those who survive. Only by God’s grace can it produce spiritual growth, “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7). ☺

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16 This material is drawn from Worden, 96–97.

17 Heather Hays, *Surviving Suicide: Help to Heal Your Heart* (Dallas: Brown Books, 2005), xv.

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18 Carla Fine, *No Time to Say Goodbye, Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 20. Fine’s book is not written from a distinctively Christian perspective, but is strongly endorsed by professionals working in this area, and is comprehensive while remaining readable, targeted to the grieving survivor.

# The Pastor's Grief, and How to Cope with It

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June-July 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

## Pastors Grieve, Too

- My wife's unexpected diagnosis of breast cancer
- My sister's long, slow decline
- My father-in-law succumbing to the effects of a stroke
- My mother-in-law's downward slide into dementia
- Holding Grammy's hand when the monitor flat-lined
- The loss of numerous other family members
- Supporting many dear saints as they have departed this life for glory
- Working in hospice, where death is a natural outcome in most cases

Some of you who are reading this have a longer and even more personal list of significant losses.

- Leaving a pastorate where I had served for more than fifteen years
- Watching myself descend toward old age (have you looked in a mirror recently?)
- Declining personal health and strength
- The realization that I am not going to be the next John Murray
- Watching core families depart for other parts of the country in our highly mobile society
- The loss of so much that is dear in fires or other natural disasters
- The need to exercise church discipline, even to the point of excommunication
- Seeing someone with whom you have

shared both friendship and the gospel of Christ turn away, rejecting that truth which alone brings life

Some of these sources of grief are common to everyone, some are unique to a pastor. We have not always been spared the "sorrow upon sorrow" of which the Apostle spoke (Phil. 2:27). In my first article in this series,<sup>2</sup> I suggested that at times the church and well-meaning pastors discourage believers from grieving. This is even more the case when it is pastors who are experiencing the grief.

Congregations often think very highly of their pastor. They believe that pastors are spiritually strong, closely connected with God, mature enough to see the glorious purposes of God and thus be immune from the frailties of grief. Pastors are supposed to be those who provide comfort for others, not the ones needing to be comforted themselves. Regretfully, some pastors also accept these myths as if they ought to be true.

Yet consider the example of the great Apostle. Paul was constantly grieving. He grieved for his Jewish people who had failed to embrace Jesus as Messiah (Rom. 9:1–5). He acknowledged himself "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," an aspect of the hardships which he had endured in his ministry (2 Cor. 6:10). His relationship with the church at Corinth was characterized by "affliction and anguish of heart and ... many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4). The same was true of Paul's ministry throughout Asia (Acts 20:18–19). Thus, for example, Paul notes "that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears" (Acts 20:31). He also knew the grief of betrayal by those who abandoned Christ (Phil. 3:18). And, as has already been noted, in the face of the grave illness of Epaphroditus, Paul had anticipated "sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:27). Notice the variety of different causes of grief in the apostle. In all of this Paul is fully consistent with so many others who have labored in bringing us God's Word.<sup>3</sup>

2 Gordon H. Cook Jr., "A Pastoral Response to Grief," *Ordained Servant* 19 (2010): 38.

3 Cf. Job (Job 16:16, 20); Jacob (Gen. 37:35; 42:38); Samuel (1

1 [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=367&issue\\_id=86](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=367&issue_id=86).



Pastors grieve, just like every other human being. Sometimes pastors grieve about things that others would not. Though, to be sure, they ought not to grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

### Allowing Ourselves to Grieve

Pastors grieve. But rarely do we allow ourselves the time necessary to complete this process of grief. Our commitment to “making the best use of the time” (Eph. 5:16) often presses us under “the tyranny of the urgent.”<sup>4</sup> We willingly sacrifice our own needs for the spiritual needs of others. Yet, as many pastors learn, grief has its own time-table and it can re-surface at the most inopportune times.

It was almost a year after the death of my grandmother that I was asked to do a funeral service for an elderly woman in the community whom I barely knew. I met with the woman’s family, prepared an appropriate service, and was in the midst of delivering it, when suddenly I felt quite overwhelmed by feelings of grief. It became difficult to continue speaking, and I was very embarrassed. The family and members of the congregation comforted me, and soon I regained my composure and continued. What was this?

Therese Rando, a clinical psychologist, and one of the foremost writers in the area of grief, refers to this phenomenon as a STUG Reaction, a “subsequent temporary upsurge of grief.”<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, it was triggered by the context of a funeral service, the proximity in time, and some minor similarities between this woman and my grandmother. Anyone who has experienced grief knows what STUGs are. They can and do occur even when grief has been carefully processed.

They can occur many years after the event which was first grieved. Rando indicates that STUGs are even more common in cases of incomplete grief, where our grief has not been fully processed.<sup>6</sup> Taking time to process our own grief in order to reduce the likelihood of incomplete grief is a wise course.<sup>7</sup> It can enhance our ability to minister appropriately to others. It may take time now, but it will be time well spent.

Processing grief includes a) accepting the reality of loss; b) working through the pain and emotions associated with our grief; c) adjusting to the new environment in which the loss has occurred; and in due time d) emotionally relocating the one (or thing) who is now absent from us so that we can begin to move on with our lives.<sup>8</sup> Each of these tasks takes both time and emotional energy. They can be aided by spiritual and emotional support and by the good use of the means of grace. In the end we have not forgotten our loved one, nor even moved on without him or her. But we have allocated to them a new and special place in our life story which allows us to move on.

When members of your congregation grieve, they often turn to you for emotional and spiritual support, and rightly so. God has called you to serve as their pastor, a shepherd among the flock of God. The godly shepherd comforts and consoles God’s lambs with the consolation of God’s Word and Spirit. To whom do *you* turn as your pastor when you need comfort and consolation?

As Presbyterian pastors, we see ourselves as undershepherds of the Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Surely none can provide greater comfort than our Savior. Such a thought urges us to make good use of the means of grace, not only as that which we minister to others, but also as that

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Sam. 15:35); David (2 Sam. 1:17; 12:21, 22; 2 Sam. 19:2; Pss. 6:6, 8; 13:2; 31:10; 39:12; 56:8); various psalmists (Pss. 42:3; 80:5; 88:9; 102:9; 116:8; 119:28, 136); Elisha (2 Kings 8:11); Isaiah (Isa. 22:4); Jeremiah (Jer. 8:18; 9:1, 10; 13:17); Ezekiel (Ezek. 21:6); John (Rev. 5:4); Peter (John 21:17; Matt. 26:75); Jesus (Isa. 53:3; Mark 3:5; Luke 19:41; John 11:35; Matt. 26:38).

4 An expression made famous in Christian circles by Charles Hummel of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

5 Therese A. Rando, *Treatment of Complicated Mourning* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1993), 64–77.

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6 Ibid, 65.

7 I have also found that taking more time with families in preparation for a funeral is very helpful. It allows me to get to know the person in a far deeper way. It makes for a more personal funeral. It also helps to avoid those unintentional associations with others more closely related to me.

8 J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (New York: Springer, 1991).

which nurtures, supports, and comforts us. It is the God of all comfort who comforts us in our affliction and thus provides us with comfort with which we may comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3–4).

In practical terms, this involves spending time with God. It means reading God’s Word, not just as a preparation for the next sermon or Bible study, but with a desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in it; meditating upon that Word; and actively seeking to put it into practice in our lives.<sup>9</sup> It means partaking of the Lord’s Supper, blessing God for the quickening and comfort we find therein, looking to God to continue that comfort in our lives, spiritually feeding upon Christ, the Bread of Life, and waiting upon God for the fruit of it in due time.<sup>10</sup> It means spending extra time with God in prayer, pouring our hearts out to him, recognizing our complete dependence upon him, humbly submitting ourselves to his will even in the matters which have erupted as grief within us.<sup>11</sup>

Within Presbyterianism we also find strength and comfort in the plurality of elders. God has established sessions, consisting of ministers and ruling elders. Our Form of Government charges ruling elders that “they should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.”<sup>12</sup> These elders are called and equipped to support the minister in matters of grief. A wise minister will do well to be open to this support from the session, or even to ask for support and comfort from these mature church leaders who are entrusted with our care. Further, many of us enjoy a close personal relationship with one or more presbyters. We find in such a colleague an open and listening ear, ready and willing to hear our grief, indeed to share in our grief with us. In these close relationships we can and should share on a far deeper level. Such a friend is not likely to wait for you to call and ask for

support. A good friend offers this support as soon as he becomes aware of the need.

There is a danger within congregational ministry that a grieving minister may inadvertently burden a church member who is less mature with his own struggles and challenges, a practice both unwise and unwholesome within the church. Pastors ought carefully to heed the cautions Jesus offers in regard to offending “the little ones.” It is not wrong for the minister to wrestle with grief, but this should be done with the support of mature church leaders who are equipped and prepared to provide that support.

Ministers who struggle with grief have found some other activities which are particularly helpful. For those whose vocation involves the written word, another opportunity to process grief may be found in the form of writing, whether letters or poetry or memorials, this writing allows us to express things which might be difficult to verbalize. I have been impressed with the letters incorporated in Heather Hays’s book *Surviving Suicide, Help to Heal Your Heart*.<sup>13</sup> Survivors whose loved ones have chosen to take their own lives found great comfort in writing letters to that loved one. Indeed, readers of Hays’s book can also find comfort there. The same was demonstrated in the correspondence between Pastor David Biebel and a close friend and associate, the Rev. John Aker, following the death of David’s son, Jonathan.<sup>14</sup> Recently I was privileged to read a beautifully written letter by a fellow pastor regarding the passing of his mother, a letter which was clearly comforting for him and also for any who might read it. Putting these deep feelings into words on paper may be easier than saying them out loud, and can bring significant relief even in the midst of active grief.

Others may find comfort in gathering photographs or other items associated with those who have died, and services (public or private) of remembering and celebration. Pastors are usually

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9 Consider WLC 157.

10 Consider WLC 175

11 Consider WLC 185

12 *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government 10.3.

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13 Heather Hays, *Surviving Suicide, Help to Heal Your Heart* (Dallas: Brown, 2005).

14 David B. Biebel, *Jonathan You Left Too Soon* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 112–13.

very efficient at conducting funerals and memorial services, but rarely allow themselves to benefit from those services, being focused on the spiritual needs of others. Thus, it is often necessary that the minister find a separate time and occasion for his own grief, for saying goodbye, and for entrusting a loved one to the gracious hands of God.

Ministers, just like anyone else, can experience complicated grief in some circumstances. This is a grief which does not resolve with time. This is especially common in cases of sudden death, violent death, suicide, or the death of the pastor's child. Complicated grief was addressed in the second article in this series.<sup>15</sup> If the minister or an elder sees any of the signs of complicated grief: violent outbursts, strong guilt feelings, suicidal thoughts, lingering inability to concentrate, self-destructive behavior, radical changes of lifestyle, or physical symptoms which imitate those of the deceased, then professional support should be sought immediately.<sup>16</sup>

### Leading by Grieving

We ought to give ourselves the time needed to experience and process our grief. It is dangerous to try to “get on with life” too quickly. However, most ministers do not have the luxury of lengthy sabbaticals, or even long vacations. The needs of a congregation and presbytery must be met, a responsibility which we accepted in our ordination and installation vows. So how should our grief be resolved?

In grief, as in every other aspect of life, the minister should be “an example” to the flock of God.<sup>17</sup> Without imposing our spiritual struggles upon those who are less mature, it is fitting for the congregation to know of and to uphold their pastor in prayer during the time of grief. The faithful pastor is a testimony to the hope that we have in Christ, a hope which is undiminished even in

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15 Gordon. H. Cook Jr., “A Pastoral Response to Complicated Grief,” *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 60–65.

16 *Ibid.*, 62.

17 *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government, 6.2.

grief.<sup>18</sup> Setting a proper example as one who seeks and obtains comfort from the means of grace and from mature church leaders can be highly educational to the congregation. It should not be tucked away in a false privacy, but spoken of freely, albeit in edifying terms. At the same time, many will attest that keeping active in the labor of ministry can be very helpful as part of our effort to cope with grief. And our grief can make us far more sensitive to the spiritual hurts of others.

The pastor who adopts “stoicism” in the face of grief is not doing the congregation any exceptional favor. Rather, the pastor who demonstrates a godly and hopeful grief may open the way for others in the congregation to express their own deep feelings of loss, and find healing in the sweet communion of the saints. The church is to be a safe place in which we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

### A Congregation in Grief

Perhaps the most challenging situation is when the whole congregation, including the pastor, finds itself in grief together. The community of faith has suffered a loss. A prominent member has died. A core family has left the church. A beloved pastor has announced his intention to leave this pastorate. The church has sustained multiple losses in a relatively short period of time. A disaster has befallen the church facility or community.

Suddenly the signs of active grief are being exhibited by many or all of the members of the congregation. Members interact with each other with irritation or disinterest. The congregation feels fatigued. You can hear the uneasiness during the worship service. You can feel the heaviness of heart. As the pastor or one of the elders you feel that same heaviness yourself.

Grief interrupts the life of the church. The church as a congregation may move through the stages of grief not unlike an individual: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and hopefully

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18 There is wise and mature counsel on this matter in an article by Stephen Tracey, “The Danger of Excessive Grief,” *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 65–67.

one day acceptance.<sup>19</sup> Often church leaders will be eager to move on, to get back to normal. But grief for churches, just like individual grief, takes time, time often measured by months and years, not days or weeks. Pastors and elders need to be sensitive to the spiritual needs and comfort of God's people as they work together through this grieving process—attending to the means of grace, providing sensitive grief counseling, encouraging open discussion of the loss which is producing grief. Some churches have formed grief support groups for members who wish to make use of them. Some provide special worship services or study groups which explore loss and grief in biblical ways. Still others bring in counselors or interim ministers to help the congregation and pastor through the hard work of grieving.

It is vitally important that the pastor and elders approach their own grief realistically and in a godly way, not avoiding their grief, nor giving up that hope which is central to our Christian faith. Simply acknowledging the grief and the need of the congregation to work together through this grief may prove to be a major step toward restoring the spiritual well-being of a congregation. Listening and responding compassionately to the grief of the congregation is important. But ultimately, the comfort and substantial healing that is needed comes from God by his grace (2 Cor. 1:4). ☉

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<sup>19</sup> These are the stages of grief set forth by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her now classic text, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

# How to Run the Session Meeting

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by Alan D. Strange

There are a variety of ways to run the session meeting, the ordinary composition and work of the session being set forth in Form of Government 12.4–10. The meeting usually begins with a devotional time (that may or may not involve training; for more on this, see below) and a time of prayer. While presbytery and general assembly meetings are generally open, unless meeting for cause in executive session, session meetings in many of our churches tend not to be open, at least in practice (though perhaps not formally closed). This is generally because the meetings address matters relating to families of the church more particularly than occurs in the higher judicatories. Sessions may want to consider being open and inviting church members to attend (without privilege of the floor, of course) and restricting what needs to be private about counseling, member concerns, discipline, and so forth to an executive session. It is helpful and encouraging to the membership to provide access to the meetings of our judicatories, which is to say the parts of those meetings appropriate for members to hear.

In the early part of the meeting, after the devotional and prayer, it is common to adopt the docket (the schedule to follow in the meeting), give privilege of the floor to any non-elders (we commonly do this for deacons in attendance at our session meetings), adopt orders of the day (e.g., the time for interviewing prospective members, adjournment, etc.), approve the minutes of the previous meeting, and read communications. It is typical in reading communications to commit these to some latter place on the docket or to give them to a committee (e.g., announcement of an

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<sup>1</sup> [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=356&issue\\_id=84](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=356&issue_id=84).

upcoming youth meeting may be committed to the youth committee).

As noted, deacons may be at the session meeting, as there are often matters of interest common to both the elders and the deacons. With respect to this, it should be noted that not only does the session have regular oversight of the deacons through reading of their minutes (FG 6.5), but that the session is also encouraged to meet with the deacons “at regular intervals to confer on matters of common responsibility” (FG 6.6). It is my observation that fruitful interaction with the deacons is often a weakness for many of our OP sessions. The continental Reformed churches tend to be much better at this, with the elders and deacons meeting regularly in the council for matters of mutual interest. It seems that one helpful way of addressing this would be to have sessions not only read the minutes of the deacons quarterly but also to meet quarterly with them to address matters of common interest. Another place of fruitful interaction between elders and deacons may occur in the practice of house visitation. Rather than have two elders visit members annually, it might be helpful to have an elder and deacon visit. The deacon could particularly address needs, even advising as to budgeting and the like (helpful in the more difficult economic times that many of our people have experienced, along with our society, in recent years).

With respect to committees, it is common in our churches for the session to have various committees chaired by elders (and/or deacons) that report at the session meeting through the elder representing that committee. Typical committees are an evangelism/outreach committee, a missions committee, a Christian education committee, a youth committee, a fellowship committee, a hospitality committee, and the like. The strength of such an approach is that it allows the session to take proper leadership of all the parts of the work of the local congregation, and it allows the members of the local church an avenue of ongoing and focused service as a proper part of their exercise of the general office of believer (FG 3.1). If an area belongs exclusively to the elders (worship and

discipline, for instance), then the “committee” for that is the session itself. But it is good to enlist the members in outreach and fellowship and other areas of service. Many of these areas may also come under the ladies’ fellowship or whatever the women’s society may be called. For example, some churches have women’s missionary societies or other auxiliary groups that send cards and flowers at time of bereavement or provide meals for those in need of such. Such organizations should have an elder representative ideally who can interact with them and bring their concerns to the session, as well as provide sessional oversight.

An important part of sessional oversight involves finances: the pastor’s salary, financing and maintaining facilities, the church’s benevolent giving, etc. There are various ways of doing this: some churches commit this largely to the diaconate, who reports to the session either through a deacon or elder who is liaison to the session. Some churches handle this through trustees (FG 31). Others have a treasurer who is a session member and reports to the session. The session has general oversight of this work, however it chooses to carry it out. It is perhaps best that the details of this work, like the details of other work (say, the fellowship committee), not occur in the session meeting but be reported to the session for its approval.

The session meeting can be used for officer training. Take a half hour to an hour and discuss what you’ve read through or read through it together. It could be a devotional work, like John Owen on mortification or Ole Hallesby on prayer. It could be a book focused on the work of the eldership, like Tim Witmer’s *The Shepherd Leader*. Or you could study books of the Bible or work through the Westminster Standards (recommend the Larger Catechism) or systematics (Bavinck, Berkhof, Hodge). You could use this time to work through the *Book of Church Order* or parts of *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (11th ed.) (RONR). There’s so much one can do to train elders and deacons, and some prefer to use some part of the session meeting to do that.

Many of our sessions are smaller than twelve, and RONR indicates that a smaller body may

wish to operate informally rather than formally. This means not requiring seconds (the purpose of which is simply, in the larger body, to ascertain that someone other than the mover wishes to discuss the motion). It also means that the moderator can speak without leaving the chair. This last one only works, however, when the moderator is a reasonable man who will not abuse that privilege and completely dominate the meeting.

Who should the moderator be? The FG says only that the session “shall choose its own moderator annually from among its members” (13.4). This is, in many if not most of our sessions, the pastor. If the pastor is not the moderator, the pastor needs to draw up the agenda, because no one knows the congregation and its needs like the pastor. Elders are said to “share in the rule of the church” with ministers (FG 5.3) and also to “have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the Minister of the Word and help him in his labors” (FG 10.3). While an elder may moderate the session, it is the duty of elders to “help” the pastor “in his labors.” Whatever elders do is to be done with this in view and to this end, like Aaron and Hur upholding Moses’s arms (Exodus 17).

It is commonly—and wrongly—thought that moderators do not have the vote. If, however, “the moderator is a member of the body over which he presides, he may vote in all the decisions of that body” (FG 18.3). If it is thought advisable for a session to call in a neighboring pastor for counsel, that pastor can moderate the session meeting, though he will be without vote (FG 13.6). If, however, a pulpit is vacant, a ministerial advisor, jointly approved locally and by the presbytery, may not only moderate but vote (FG 13.6). Sometimes, when a church does not have a pastor and the ministerial advisor is unavailable, and the situation demands action, a session may meet and conduct its business without a minister. However, “the grounds for the call of such a meeting shall be reviewed at the next meeting at which a minister is present” (FG 13.6). This reflects that a proper session meeting should have at least one minister and elder present, or at least two elders if there are three or more (FG 13.5), reflecting both the

preaching and ruling offices. A minister, as member of a particular session, retains the right to debate, make motions, and vote. He usually does not exercise such rights when in the chair, because it is unnecessary. It is only necessary to do so, ordinarily, either to make something a tie (and thus defeat it) or to break the tie (so that the motion carries). Let us be done with the question in our sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies—does the moderator possess the right to vote? Yes, though he does not ordinarily exercise it on a voice vote, such not being necessary.

It is the case in a larger body (presbytery and general assembly, certainly) that the moderator leaves the chair if he wishes to engage in debate. He stays out of the chair the entire time the particular question and its allied motions are under consideration. This is to maintain both the appearance and the reality of impartiality on the part of the moderator. Even the moderator of the session, though permitted to speak to issues from the chair because of the more informal occasion, should not be overly partisan. It is wise even for sessional moderators to leave the chair if they wish sharply to contend for something and/or if their remaining in the chair seems too domineering to the proceedings.

Perhaps the session does wish to operate more narrowly according to RONR, either because it’s a larger session or simply prefers to operate more strictly according to the rules of order. The right use of *Robert’s* in all the judicatories of the church guarantees the rights of both minorities and majorities, seeking to avoid the tyranny of either. Most of the apprehension about *Robert’s* arises from having suffered under an abusive use of it by some person or persons who knew it well (or claimed to know it well) and used it to achieve their own ends to the detriment even of the good of the body. But such need not be the case. A right use of *Robert’s* begins with the understanding that such procedural rules are not inimical to the achieving of desired goals but are needed for such worthy ends, so that all will be done in equity and with effective time usage. The end of the use of rules of order in running a meeting is so that each might show

proper respect and honor to the other (Phil. 2:1–4) and that the business of the meeting be conducted in such a way that principles and not personalities prevail. One might say, the rules of order allow you to attack the issues and not each other.

Some examples of a wrong use of *Robert's* might be helpful in getting a handle on its right use. One may not, for instance, use the motion “to lay on the table” to kill a main motion. “To lay on the table” is only to be used to set aside an issue so that something that needs to be considered first can be taken up (e.g., folks needed to address a certain issue have to leave the meeting early and it's moved to lay on the table so that the matter that pertains to them may be taken up first). To lay on the table is not debatable and it is inequitable (not fair) to seek to kill a main motion (that is debatable) through a motion that's not debatable (another motion should be used for this—“to postpone indefinitely”—which is debatable). If there is any doubt on the part of the moderator as to the intention of the mover of the motion “to lay on the table,” he should ask the mover what his motives are—specifically, whether he intends to kill the motion. If that is the mover's intention, the moderator should rule the motion out of order and tell him that the correct motion here would be to postpone indefinitely.

Another abuse of *Robert's* is the use of “point of personal privilege” to malign an assembly for an action that it has taken. Sometimes after a vote, someone rises to a point of personal privilege and continues further to argue the case: “What we just did was wrong,” or the like. One may use it to say, “In the debate that we just had, I was intemperate and ask the body's forgiveness,” or more prosaically to say, “I can't hear the speaker,” or “It's too hot in here.” There is also the practice in some circles of someone yelling “question” or “call for the question” to demand a reading of the main motion followed by an immediate vote thereon. There is no provision for such a peremptory ending of debate in *Robert's* (there must be agreement by vote or consent to end debate). It is also an abuse of moving “the previous question” to propose such immediately after a motion has been made

or opportunity for debate given only to one side. Similar to this is a motion to close nominations immediately after only one nomination has been made. One last misuse that I will mention at this point is a dilatory motion, something that is unnecessary and simply has the effect of slowing the meeting down—like calling for division when the vote was evident or calling for it when the business has moved on after the chair declared the vote. It's these misuses that give *Robert's* a bad name and make people think that the rules of order are there for obstructive people to use to impede the flow of business, rather than well-meaning folk to use so that the business might be handled without rancor and with dispatch.

What if you are moderator, especially in a larger meeting (this would include, of course, presbytery and general assembly)? If you are a member of that body, you always have a vote (as noted above), though you should not ordinarily choose to exercise it except to make or break a tie or when a ballot is being cast. Maintain proper impartiality, ordinarily leaving the chair to debate. Seek common consent for uncontroversial motions. Pay careful attention to moderating and learn. Be prepared to give brief tutorials at the beginning of meetings and from time to time. Require men to rise and address the chair and know the rules for proper recognition of someone seeking the floor. Always give the mover the right of first speech. Call on those who have not spoken in preference to those who have when two rise together. Alternate “for” and “against” speeches where appropriate. Know the relevant bylaws and standing rules. Pay close attention to the debate and appropriately indicate where matters appear to be (“We heard extensive argumentation on both sides; are we ready to vote?”). You are, under the Lord, running the meeting. Be properly directive and prompting (not wrongly controlling; servant leadership). A pause in debate—“No further debate? I see no one seeking the floor. I am about to put the question. I will put the question ...” Know what to do at the point of the vote to the final declaration thereof.

Pay attention to speech lengths (*Robert's* permits two speeches at ten minutes each, though no

one is to speak a second time before all wishing to speak a first time have had such opportunity) and rule clearly on points of order as to whether the point is well taken or not. Parliamentarian aid may be sought, but he is always advisory. When appeal is taken, it must be seconded, and you get first and last speech (all others get one). Moderators must always keep in mind that the bodies they chair may have bylaws or standing rules that differ from *Robert's*. For example, the standing rules of general assembly allow only five minutes for a second speech and "if any member consider himself aggrieved by a decision of the Moderator, it shall be his privilege to appeal to the Assembly, and the question on the appeal shall be taken without debate" (SR 8.4). Just remember that what may seem forced and unnatural about all of this will show itself not at all to be as you gain experience in moderating and participating in meetings.

What if you are not in the chair but participating as a member of the judicatory? Address the chair properly; address all comments to the chair or through the chair; never use first names but say "a previous speaker." The purpose of all this is to focus on the issues and not personalities, so that the truth may be honored and so that you may walk in as colleagues and walk out as colleagues. The purity of the church is not to be sacrificed for its unity, but neither is peace and unity to be sacrificed for a misguided purity. We need a good dose of humility, and deliberative assemblies are likely to inculcate it (or else harden us). Be aware of what you can and cannot do in the course of debate. If you see the rules being violated, either by the chair or by a member, rise to a point of order. Appeal a decision that you think would be detrimental if left unchallenged. Do not fail to make a parliamentary inquiry if you do not know how to accomplish your righteous goal.

*Robert's* is not, as some seem to think, some book of unfathomable procedural mysteries. It is really nothing more than applying common sense and logic to the meeting, tempered by Christian sensibilities. General Henry Martyn Robert was a churchman and developed his manual in no small measure to help in church meetings. Thus, as you

study *Robert's*, look for the logic:

Motions that would end, limit, or modify debate (including to "lay on the table") are themselves undebatable. Privileged motions are undebatable.

Motions that would in some way amend, refer, or postpone consideration (either definite or indefinite) are debatable.

Motions that would limit debate (but not, in this case, "lay on the table") require a two-thirds majority. This includes the "objection to the consideration of a question" which must be moved immediately after seconding or the stating of the question before debate has begun. It does not require a second and is undebatable. Pay attention to the other motions that require two-thirds (adopt or amend bylaws; make special orders of the day; close nominations).

Some incidental motions may interrupt the speaker and do not require a second (points of order) while others may not interrupt and require a second (to divide a question).

Once a motion is decided, it is improper to bring it up, unless on reconsideration (which can be done only by someone on the prevailing side).

Dockets for session meetings vary in their construction. Typically it would involve all the kinds of things that we have discussed here, roughly in this order: opening devotional and prayer, call to order and roll call, minutes, correspondence, old business, financial report, diaconal report, pastor's report, new business, committee reports, elders' concerns, membership matters, time of prayer, adjournment. This is a rough order and sessions may wish to add or take away as they see fit. If the meeting is open, the session would likely reserve membership matters to the end when that, and other sensitive issues, may be treated in executive session.

The thought that should be uppermost in the mind of all at a session meeting is that of washing



the saints' feet (John 13). The members of the session should seek to wash one another's feet, i.e., should engage one another in a lowly, servant mode. And the members should remember that they are all called to wash the saints' feet in the place to which God has called them in service. Here's how the thinking should go: We in this meeting ought to consider the other better than ourselves and humbly serve each other in the greater service to which we are all called—humbly serving God's people in this place. While the offices are not the same—ministers administer the Word and sacrament, engaged in leading in the church's central task, worship—both ministers and elders govern the church, and they do so in a servant mode, in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, as head of the church, washed his disciples' feet. If we would keep this in mind and prayerfully seek to act in this way, our differences would be manageable, and likely would be minimized, as we all seek to have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5–8). ©

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## A Portrait of Youth Ministry

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by **Nathan D. Lambert**

What I desire to achieve in this article is to walk a tightrope between principle and application. Of course, you will have to be the judge of whether or

1 [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=385&issue\\_id=89](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=385&issue_id=89).

not it is a success. I hope to show you what youth ministry looks like, at least one model of it, not merely the proper theology that should undergird and shape it.

Thus, perhaps to your disappointment, it is beyond the scope of this article to defend the concept of youth ministry as such, a ministry that some may argue is an oxymoron and has no place in a Reformed and Presbyterian church. Neither is it my intention to offer a thorough critique of the American evangelical model of youth ministry that has existed over the last sixty years or so, though that is somewhat present to the discerning reader, at least by implication. However, it is my prayer that our Lord will encourage your hearts as you continue to read that a vibrant “means-of-grace”<sup>2</sup> youth ministry is not only possible, but can actually be a program that our Lord is pleased to bless with abiding fruitfulness in the hearts and lives of our covenant youth as one aspect of covenant nurture.<sup>3</sup>

### **Reformed and Presbyterian Youth Ministry: Toward a Definition**

It is only fair that I begin with a general definition, or work toward one. A “Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry” is an individual church's intentional program or ministry that primarily serves the covenant youth as an aid to their parents, and secondarily serves other students who may attend. The group I have in mind is made up of teenagers, a label that is here to stay whether we like it or not. However, that is not to say that we gladly or uncritically embrace all of the freight that this term carries, especially the many cultural

2 This term should not sound all that peculiar to any of us, and I am using it here somewhat synonymously with Reformed and Presbyterian. For an understanding of one author's view of how the means of grace relate to youth ministry in one church in the PCA, see Brian H. Cosby, *Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012).

3 I am indebted to Susan Hunt for seeing it this way, at least in part. We have worked out the details differently at Pilgrim where we have both a Christian education committee and a youth committee. For further information see Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a Legacy of Faith for the Next Generation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998).

assumptions, presuppositions, and idolatries that are often involved.<sup>4</sup>

At Pilgrim,<sup>5</sup> we have designated seventh grade, or twelve years old, as our starting point. This is a general rule. There are covenant youth and other students who are ready and happy to join us earlier and some not until later. The opposite can be said for the older teenagers. I don't kick anyone out of the youth ministry programs once they graduate from high school. In fact, having college students participate in youth ministry is a big help and encourages maturity in the younger teenagers. Thus, a typical youth group meeting is made up of junior and senior high students together, sometimes with one or two college-aged "kids." These meetings are separate from Sunday school, and never meet on the Lord's Day so that they neither compete with corporate worship, nor with families who desire to spend time together on this critical day of rest.

Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry is just that, Reformed and Presbyterian! It is an intentional ministry to the next generation of the church where Reformed dogma is the drama, if I might add to Dorothy Sayers's line.<sup>6</sup> It teaches historic Presbyterianism as the biblical understanding of church polity, from its government to its worship and discipline. As Orthodox Presbyterians, this means that youth ministry should take place within the framework of our secondary and tertiary standards, like every other ministry of the local church.

At Pilgrim, we have a six-year curriculum plan so that each "class" of teenagers is receiving the

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4 Let me mention three excellent resources that are available for this study. On the more popular level, a book I have worked through with many teenagers is *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), by Alex and Brett Harris. On a scholarly level, see Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

5 Pilgrim Presbyterian Church (OPC), Bangor, Maine.

6 What Dorothy Sayers said was, "The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama." *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1949), 3. Emphasis hers.

same content and emphasis. I very carefully use a variety of DVD series put out by *Desiring God* and taught by John Piper.<sup>7</sup> These series usually take about two-thirds of each school year which leaves about one-third each year to devote to a theology of service and missions, especially in preparation for our annual trip to the Boardwalk Chapel in Wildwood, New Jersey.

To summarize, Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry is an intentional program of ministry to teenage covenant youth and students within the framework of Reformed theology, Presbyterian polity, and confessional orthodoxy. With this definition in mind, I want to consider two critical questions that have shaped dramatically my understanding and practice of youth ministry. Then we will return in more detail to the practice of youth ministry at Pilgrim.

### The Goal of Youth Ministry

The most important question to ask about youth ministry is, why does it exist?<sup>8</sup> Another way to put the question is, what should be the goal of youth ministry, the aim of everything done in a youth ministry? To put the question more personally, what should teenagers (and for that matter adults!) be living for?

This is one of the many places where belonging to a confessional church is not only healthy, but extremely helpful. We all know what the chief end of man is according to the Scripture and as summarized in our secondary standards.<sup>9</sup> This is

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7 Obviously, Piper is not a minister in the OPC. However, he is a gifted teacher and teenagers connect with him very well. It also gives me many natural opportunities to delve into theological matters that either complement his teaching, or provide counterpoint, even a contrast to it. For those of you who are curious, I use John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2010), DVD; *Battling Unbelief* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2006), DVD; *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), DVD; *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), DVD; *Let the Nations be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), DVD; *What's the Difference?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), DVD; *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), DVD. This last one is the trickiest in my opinion.

8 Again, not indulging the question of should it exist, nor a critique of its roots.

9 WLC 1; WSC 1.

also the chief end of youth ministry in general, and the chief end of youth directors, leaders, volunteers, and individual teenagers. Youth ministry exists “to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”<sup>10</sup>

Where does the power come from to both glorify God and enjoy God? We glorify and enjoy God because “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). Yes, this verse is exegetically significant in its narrow context in Romans, but it is also a text that is hermeneutically as wide as the Bible. God is the source, means, and end of all things, including our glorification and enjoyment of him. He graciously provides all that we stand in need of to glorify and enjoy him. We humbly receive it as we look to and hope in him. He gets the glory as the gracious and generous giver. We get the joy as the recipient of his gifts.

We glorify and enjoy God because we “can do all things through him who strengthens” us (Phil. 4:13), because he is the very one who supplies every need “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Here, the apostle Paul is talking about having learned the secret of being content in every situation and knowing how to face both the peaks and valleys of the Christian pilgrimage, which for him were very high and extremely low. God strengthens! God supplies! He did it for Paul. He will do it for the Philippians. He still does it today for all his people.

Therefore, the goal of youth ministry is nothing less than encouraging and equipping teenagers to glorify and fully enjoy the triune and living God as the source, means, and end of everything they stand in need of to live the Christian life of trusting and obeying. This includes glorifying and enjoying God “now” in increasing measure in every facet of their lives (sanctification in union with Christ). It also includes the “not yet” of forever in the sinless state to come (glorification in union

with Christ)!

Youth ministry should encourage and equip teenagers not merely to glorify God in all things, but also to enjoy God in all things as he meets all their true needs.<sup>11</sup> Youth ministry should encourage and equip teenagers not merely to glorify and enjoy God in the life to come, but also to glorify and enjoy God now. This is the issue of the teenagers’ heart. They may know that they ought to glorify God in thought, word, and deed, but they often have no idea what to do with how unhappy and how unsatisfied they are as they try to do it. And what is more tragic, they often do not know what to do with their failure to glorify God.

### **The Heart of Youth Ministry**

If glorifying and enjoying God is the chief end of youth ministry, and of all those who participate in it, what is to be done with the failure to glorify and enjoy God? For that matter, why could—and why would—the gracious power to glorify and enjoy God even come to us?

It may surprise some that these are exactly the kind of questions that I put to the teenagers in the youth group at Pilgrim. We meet almost every Saturday night throughout the school year for two and a half hours. We give ourselves to study and prayer during most of that time. No matter what series we are working through or topic we are discussing, I continually bring them back to these kinds of questions: Why is God totally for you? Why has he accepted you? Why does he bless you and give you great and precious promises by which to live? What do you do with your joylessness and dissatisfaction? What do you do when you fall short, when you fail, when you dishonor God? What is your only hope for real and lasting change, especially when the fleeting pleasures of sin seem so pleasurable?

I’ll be frank, I like watching them wrestle

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10 WLC 1. This includes having fun together! Personally, I don’t think one can be too serious about God. I do think one can be too serious too much of the time. This is why I have serious and rigorous times of Bible study with the youth group, and also have fun with them doing a variety of monthly activities.

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11 For those who may be wondering at this point, I have no interest in changing “and” to “by” in the catechism’s first question and answer, as John Piper has suggested. I do greatly appreciate his point, however, that joy in God does in fact glorify God, and that God’s glory and God’s being glorified should bring joy to us.

with these questions, but I love hearing them tell me about Jesus, about how they are accepted and received and blessed in him because they have been chosen in him and he loves them with a love that will never let them go. How they have been pardoned in him, counted righteous in him, adopted in him, and will grow to be more like him. How the Holy Spirit makes his home within them and continually brings the things of Christ to them. How all the promises of God “find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Union with Christ pervades youth ministry at Pilgrim. Christ is the heart, the life, and the center of our ministry. He is the pattern to follow, not just the payment by which his people are redeemed.

Youth ministry at Pilgrim is primarily focused on discipleship, not outreach, though it is certainly not opposed to it. We see youth ministry as part of covenant nurture, and we see maturity in Christ at the top of the priority list. Paul suggests this approach when he gives to the Colossians the reason he proclaims Christ and warns and teaches everyone with all wisdom, namely to “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Not only that, but Paul is careful to say that he works hard for this, “struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:29).

That last verse ought to grip all who desire to minister to teenagers. There is not only a “what,” but a “how.” Maturity in Christ is the heart of youth ministry, and he gives the power in which to work toward it by proclaiming, warning, and teaching! Why? Because this glorifies him as the giver of the very power to work to present teenagers mature in Christ, and rejoices in his heart as he does it! Christ provides the end (maturity in Christ) and the means (all his energy) for his glory and our joy and the teenagers’ gracious growth!

Youth ministry, then, is primarily focused on maturity in Christ, because being conformed to the image of Christ is not only what true believers are predestined for (Rom. 8:29), but it is also what enables a disciple of Jesus Christ to increasingly glorify and enjoy God, now and forever. Teenagers who are in Christ can bring all their failures to the throne of grace, confessing their sin, asking and

receiving forgiveness, reveling afresh in Christ’s finished work of atonement. Teenagers who are in Christ can also have the right and privilege as children of the living God to cry out to him, pleading for all the gracious power they need to glorify and enjoy him more and more, knowing that he “is able to make all grace abound to [them], so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, [they] may abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). Why? Because they are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [they] should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Thus, the heart of youth ministry is Christ Jesus. Youth ministry seeks to root and ground teenagers in him who is their life, light, and love, and through “whose fullness” alone they receive “grace upon grace” (John 1:16). As was said above, this serves one end, namely that they may glorify and enjoy all that the Father is for them in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, now and increasingly forever.

### **The Schedule of Youth Ministry at Pilgrim**

Now that we have considered what is the heart and soul of youth ministry in a Reformed and Presbyterian church, a fuller portrait of youth ministry at Pilgrim may now be painted. As mentioned above, we have regular youth group on Saturday nights throughout the school year. This meeting is from 6:00–8:30 p.m., meets at the church, and is for both junior and senior high students together and may sometimes be attended by college “kids.”<sup>12</sup> I lead these meetings and do all the teaching, other than the DVD segments when

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12 Parents and other adults are always welcome at our youth group meetings. However, I do not think it is necessary or essential for them to be there. Some would say that this puts Pilgrim’s youth ministry at odds with the family-based youth ministry model as found in books such as Mark DeVries’s *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) and Jim Burns’s and Mike DeVries’s *Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry* (Gospel Light, 2003). I am not convinced that it does, for the spirit of these books is definitely present in our ministry at Pilgrim. The youth have many other activities in which to connect with older generations of the church, and are incorporated into the worship, life, and ministry of the church as a whole.

we have them.

We also have discipleship groups for both the young men and young women. These currently meet at 10:00 a.m. one Saturday a month and provide the opportunity for accountability and a platform to discuss and interact with matters related specifically to biblical manhood and womanhood. I lead the group for young men, and we have a very capable and gifted woman (a member of the youth committee) who leads the group for young women under my oversight.

The youth committee is a separate committee at Pilgrim church tasked with the immediate oversight of both the youth director and the youth ministry programs. Not only is the committee directly accountable to the session, but an elder sits on the committee, and is both a representative of the session and a liaison between the session and the committee. As the youth director, I am a member of this committee and enjoy the camaraderie and the accountability, especially as I give reports of our Lord's faithfulness to the means of grace that he has established and blesses to the spiritual benefit of the covenant youth. I love seeing their smiles as they pray for and watch the youth mature in Christ.

Throughout the school year, there are also monthly service and fellowship activities. On the second Sunday of the month, the youth group and I eat lunch together at the church and then serve together in an afternoon worship service at a local retirement community. There are also many ways the youth are incorporated into the ministry of the church from teaching and helping in Sunday school, to helping set up for fellowship events, to helping people move. In fact, this is one way we raise money for our annual summer mission trip. I call it "Rent Some Youth" and we do every odd job imaginable, which also helps us get to know many people in the congregation, young and old.

We also have a variety of fun activities that include everything from bowling and Christmas parties, to worldview movie and pizza nights, to outdoor activities like hiking and swimming. In fact, the summer is entirely activity-based and is punctuated by three very important events:

Deerwander Bible Conference, our annual church family camping trip, and our mission trip. It is hard to say which event each teenager enjoys most. By all accounts and by our annual reports to the congregation, our weeklong service at the Boardwalk Chapel seems to be the highlight of the year, in addition to being a time of significant spiritual growth. The teenagers say that this is due to the successful blending of intense personal and group devotions coupled with evangelistic endeavors both on the chapel stage and on the boardwalk. I think this overall balance is important. We study rigorously together. We serve together. We have fun and laugh together. We go on missions together, all in the "strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified in Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:11).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I have sought to paint a portrait of Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry as I understand it, both its principles in some measure and their application to youth ministry as practiced at Pilgrim Church. As you have gazed upon this portrait, I hope your heart is encouraged that a vibrant, means-of-grace youth ministry is possible, and that it can be conducted in such a way that God's grace abounds to teenagers for their increasing maturity in Christ to the glory and enjoyment of the triune and living God who is the source, means, and end of all things. Indeed, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ sustain us as we commend the mighty acts of God to the next generation of Christ's church, and meditate together with them on the "glorious splendor of [his] majesty, and on [his] wondrous works" (Ps. 145:5). ☺

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# ✦ Servant Training

## Organic Officer Training

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by William Shishko

Anyone who undertakes the most worthwhile project of working through Herman Bavinck’s magisterial four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* will soon pick up Bavinck’s frequent use of the adjective *organic* as his way of describing things that grow out of the life of the church. I suggest that we consider the process of identifying, training, and calling out church officers (for our purposes here, elders and deacons) as *organic* officer training, i.e., a process that grows out of the life of a local congregation.

At this point let me say most emphatically that the absence of training of local church officers, or even the careless training of men who are being considered for the eldership or diaconate, should be repudiated. Both the seriousness of the vows that precede a man’s assumption of church office (see Eccles. 5:1–7), and the seriousness the Scriptures attach to ordination (see 1 Tim. 5:22), and the work of church office itself (see 1 Tim. 3:1–14, Titus 1:5–9, and 1 Pet. 5:1–4) should be sufficient to constrain sessions to make every effort to see that this work is done thoughtfully, carefully, and thoroughly.

How, then, should sessions approach officer training organically?

Above all else (although this is often sadly

absent), there must be prayer by existing church officers and within the congregation that God would raise up and form men of his choosing for all church offices—ministers, ruling elders, and deacons. Our Lord mentioned very few specific things that should occupy our prayers, but one of those specifics is for laborers: “Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest” (Matt. 9:38; cf. Luke 10:2). While the primary reference here is to shepherds, i.e., pastors (Matt. 9:36), most certainly we should also be praying for those who labor as evangelists, teachers, ruling elders, and deacons. All have their vital places in the fields that are white unto harvest. If the congregation you serve is in need of more officers, do you pray regularly for the Lord of the church to supply them?

It was the common counsel of older Reformed and Presbyterian writers that time should be provided at every session/consistory meeting for the consideration of men in the local congregation who might be worthy church officers. Many congregations have a formal process by which congregation members submit the names of men whom they believe would be good elders or deacons; but, in most smaller congregations, it would seem that this very formal process would be better replaced by an *organic* one. Elders, do you lead the congregation you serve in encouraging gifted men to “earnestly desire” (1 Tim. 3:1) church office? Do you cultivate church life in which men speak to you about their interest in church office? Has the congregation been taught what it means to look out for men who possess the raw materials necessary to serve as ministers, elders, or deacons? In this climate, regularly allow time at officer meetings so that you can consider men who might well be future elders, deacons, or ministers.

Once such men are identified, sessions should agree on training programs that really train men for church office. Such training must include (for both elders and deacons) sufficient instruction in the church’s doctrinal standards that the men can conscientiously “sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=361&issue\\_id=85](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=361&issue_id=85).

taught in the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup> While the issue of confessional subscription has some difficult aspects, it should be obvious that no man who would serve in church office in a confessionally committed church should disagree with the affirmations of that church’s doctrinal standards. Especially in the training of the initial group of officers in a young congregation, ministers should allow ample time for prospective officers to study the church’s doctrinal standards, and to personally work with them on technical and distinctive issues.<sup>3</sup> Never slight the time for this. It is an investment that will bear much good fruit for any congregation the man may serve.

For the training of deacons, it would be good for the prospective officer to consider the work of the diaconate through the grid of the church’s doctrinal standards.<sup>4</sup> Along with that, ministers should acquaint prospective deacons with the actual work that deacons do in the congregation. It is helpful if these men in training could attend actual deacon’s meetings. In every case, it is imperative that deacons in training should be given ample opportunities for service in the congregation. “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10). This is a divinely given requirement for organic officer training. Congregations should know that this requirement has been honored. Ordination to office does not confer commitments and abilities that were not present before the act of ordination.

In addition to thorough grounding in the church’s doctrinal standards, elders in training must receive instruction in the nature of the work specific to that office. Those two elements are *rule* (1 Tim. 5:17) and *shepherding* (1 Pet. 5:1–5). It

is imperative that both the officer in training and the congregation understand that the serious act of calling out an elder is nothing less than calling out a man who serves with a pastoral role in that congregation. For this aspect of elder training, I recommend the use of material I have developed for the pastoral theology course that I teach for both Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC. It presents the material in accordance with OPC standards and is available in a format that makes it easy to use in elder training.<sup>5</sup>

Officer training for both elders and deacons should not neglect treatment of the specific graces and gifts required of church officers in 1 Timothy 3:1–13, Titus 1:5–9, and 1 Peter 5:1–5. Remember that church office is bestowed, above all else, because of recognized character in a man. It is highly beneficial for ministers to work through these texts carefully (applying them to themselves first), and then to devote at least one full session of officer training to work through these with prospective officers. (It is also a healthy exercise to periodically review these with sessions and boards of deacons.)

In the case of both elder and deacon training, keep in mind that one of the vows an officer in the OPC must take is, “Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?” (FG 25.6.b(3)). In our officer training we require that men in training take an “open book test” that is designed to acquaint them with *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this process, the congregation should be reminded that men are being trained for church office. Congregation members should be urged to pray for God’s work through the training time. They should be encouraged to observe these men (especially as prospective ruling elders are given teaching assignments [1 Tim. 3:2, “able to teach”; cf. Titus 1:9]; and as prospective deacons

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2 *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Form of Government 25.6.b(2) (2011), 70.

3 One helpful approach is the program for training elders developed some years ago by Pastors Gregory Reynolds and William Shishko. It, together with other resources of pastoral theology and officer training, is available through the website of the OPC, Franklin Square, NY: [www.opcli.com](http://www.opcli.com), Officer Training and Pastoral Theology Resources.

4 One model for this is given in the Deacon Training Program which has been used for many years at the OPC, Franklin Square, NY. It is available at [www.opcli.com](http://www.opcli.com).

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5 These items are also available at [www.opcli.com](http://www.opcli.com) under the titles of “Elder Training—Rule,” and “Elder Training—Shepherding.”

6 Available at [www.opcli.com](http://www.opcli.com) under the title of “BCO Exam.”

are given service assignments), asking themselves if they believe that Christ, the king and head of the church, is forming them to be his representatives as elders or deacons. That is the seriousness of this holy process! Further, they should be speaking with these men, expressing to them any concerns they have, and also encouraging them in their training. It is not proper that the expression of these concerns should wait for the congregational meeting at which there will be a vote to call these men to office.

Our standards require that a session certify “those nominees whom, upon examination, it judges to possess the necessary qualifications for office” (FG 25.4). Our session does this during a regular meeting or at a special meeting called for this purpose. I cannot overstate how important this is: It is an aspect of church rule that both prevents unworthy men from being certified, and also declares, with Christ’s authority, that those entrusted with the work of rule believe that a man possesses the biblically required gifts and graces for church office.<sup>7</sup> Prior to this meeting the session should secure some testimonials (usually from a coworker, supervisor, or neighbor) that a prospective elder is “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7), i.e., non-Christians who know the man.<sup>8</sup> (The emphasis on “must” in this passage should alert a session that this is nonnegotiable in its work of certification.)

Once the announcement of the certification of men for office has been announced to the congregation (and this should be announced with some explanation of the process and the procedure that led to this point), a time should be set for a congregational meeting during which there will be an actual vote on these candidates. The congregation should be taught that our model for “voting” is not at all like what we experience in

the civil realm. Voting for church officers is not a popularity contest! It is a solemn recognition that either Christ has clearly gifted and graced a man for the office of elder or deacon—and for service in that congregation—or that, in some way, there has been neglect or fault in the training and certification of the man. Perhaps the highest aspect of “the power which Christ has committed to . . . the whole body,” i.e., to the church, is “the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices” (FG 3.1). When congregations understand that their “vote” is to represent the voice of Christ who has equipped and formed a man for church office, elections to church office are transformed from formalities to festivities. The ordinations become, as they are meant to be, the crowning validation of a man’s call to church office.

Organic officer training is one of the great joys of healthy church life. May the Lord of the harvest give us delightful seriousness as we go about that work to his glory and to the health and well-being of each local church, presbytery, and the church as a whole. ☺

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<sup>7</sup> A session should develop a list of certification questions to use for this critical stage in the work of officer preparation. A sample can be found at [www.opeli.com](http://www.opeli.com) under the title of “Certification Questions for Officer Candidates.”

<sup>8</sup> Suggested form is available at [opeli.com](http://opeli.com) as “Reference Form for Elder.”



# Elder Self-Evaluation

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by **Francis E. VanDelden**

One of the “advantages” of term eldership is that elders get a regular “vote of confidence” from the congregation, and elders who are not living up to their calling are quietly removed from service. This is certainly attractive, although the better way would be to do the hard work of talking to the elder about his service. However, since our congregation has lifetime elders, there is no built-in review or evaluation.

In an effort to stimulate each other to better service, to promote honest communication, to sharpen and encourage each other, and to prevent small frustrations with each other’s work from growing, our elders thought it wise to meet together annually to have a frank evaluation of each elder’s strengths and weaknesses.

The following “Elder Self-Evaluation” was used for each man to reflect on prior to that meeting. At the meeting each elder in turn was asked to evaluate himself, giving several strengths and several weaknesses. The other men were invited to speak to or point out any other strengths and weaknesses. This brought to light areas of praise and areas where that elder needed to grow in the coming year.

The risk in doing something like this is that we can wound one another, and that the meeting can turn into an unloving “attack” on various elders. However, as Christ’s undershepherds we all have the same goal—to take great care of his sheep. And in that spirit, realizing none of us is the “Chief Shepherd” with all the gifts, strength and wisdom, we committed to coming together to serve each other by being honest. May the Shepherd strengthen you as you serve his flock.

## ELDER SELF-EVALUATION

### General

Reflect on your character in light of 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

Do you think people see you more as a “father of the household of God,” “shepherd of God’s flock,” or “ruler in God’s assembly”? (See Matt. 13:52; 1 Tim. 3:5; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Thess. 5:12f.) What needs work?

Do you think people perceive you as a servant? Why or why not?

Are you encouraged in your elder-work or are you tired, frustrated?

Do you feel united/close to the other elders? To the membership?

Are you delegating? Urging others to take up responsibilities and use their gifts?

### Knowing

Do you personally know those in your shepherding group?

Do you know their strengths and weaknesses?

Do you have a strategy for regular, personal contact? How effectively are you using it?

### Feeding

Are you attending worship regularly? Sunday school? Shepherding group?

By what other means are you growing?

How are you spiritually feeding your family? Your shepherding group?

What do you do for spiritual leading in the home (family worship)?

Are you involved in mentoring anyone? Discipling anyone? Teaching?

Do you regularly practice hospitality?

How do you capitalize on interactions with congre-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=362&issue\\_id=85](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=362&issue_id=85).

gants to feed them?

## Leading

Can you replicate from memory the gist of our church's vision statement?

How are you working toward the three goals set by the session at its retreat?

How proactive are you in leading the committee (or ministry team) you're involved in?

Where are you strong in leading by example?  
Where are you weak?

Gives examples of how you lead in personal godliness, family life, church commitments? Where do you need to improve?

Are you counseling anyone?

Do you regularly encourage people by noting God's work in their lives?

Have you noticed the sheep using their gifts? Have you encouraged them to do so?

## Protecting

Are you protecting individuals by warning them of their own sin? Are you involved in any Matthew 18 steps with any of the sheep?

Are you pursuing any wandering sheep? Should you be? What is your plan to restore them?

How have you overseen the preaching? How have you encouraged the pastor in his work? How have you sought to strengthen his weaknesses?

Are you protecting people by guarding your tongue, avoiding gossip/slander? ☺

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# Servant Living

## A Road of Grief

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March, April, May 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Brad Winsted

### **When Sorrow Strikes Home (December 2009)**

The following three articles were written around the illness, death (June, 2010), and my grieving for my wife, Fawn Winsted. We were married thirty-two wonderful years and had eight children. It has been said that we grieve deeply because of our unique capacity to love deeply as humans created in the image of God. Grief is a testimony to our capacity to give a part of ourselves to another human being. When that human being is taken away permanently from us in death, a part of us dies with that person. It is a gut-wrenching, soul-searching, agonizing process of adjustment that we call bereavement or grieving. Being made “one in Christ” in a Christian marriage probably makes it even more difficult in one way, yet it gives us the real hope that we will see this person again and that he or she is in a better place by far.

Every person grieves differently, because we are all so different. Our marital experiences are different, our faith is different, our relationship with Jesus is different. If we have loved deeply for a long time, then it would follow that our grief would also be deep and long. As a famous Christian hymn writer, William Cowper, once said, “Grief itself is a medicine.” A medicine of recovery, and so it is

with me as I wrote these three articles (especially the last one) over a two-and-a-half-year time span, from the discovery of Fawn’s cancer to her death, and then looking back on her death.

The main characters of these articles are not perfect, but flawed. However, God took these two people—Brad and Fawn—and crafted a story of grace, forgiveness, and hope in a Christian marriage. Victor Hugo stated, that, “The supreme happiness in life is the conviction that we were loved.” Fawn loved me like no other, and I, her. I often introduced Fawn as my “dear wife,” playing off the meaning of the word “deer.” It usually brought a chuckle or two. The first article describes my reaction when the news of Fawn’s cancer struck our family. The second article is written at the time of her death, and the third article is written looking back at the first year and a half of grief.

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By the time most people reach sixty or so (like me), they are reasonably familiar with setbacks, personal and financial losses, the deaths of parents and elderly relatives, disappointments, and other disquieting news. This is especially so if you have a large family (I have eight children and six grandchildren) and many friends. As believers we know that man is made for trouble as sparks fly upward; that Christ has never promised us a sorrow-free existence; that sin is pervasive in every relationship, no matter how close or friendly; that Christ suffered mightily for our sins (by his stripes we are healed); and that as believers we are called to share in Christ’s suffering.

Nevertheless, when sorrow truly hits unexpectedly (not the passing away of a beloved elderly parent after a long disease), shock, followed by discouragement, can often set in. Hard times often come in waves or groups and the overall effects can be devastating.

About two weeks ago, I found out that my wife has cancer. Sadly, it is an aggressive type that required the doctors to go immediately to strong chemotherapy rather than operating. Our little family world was suddenly turned upside down

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=352&issue\\_id=83](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=352&issue_id=83);  
[http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=357&issue\\_id=84](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=357&issue_id=84); [http://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=363&issue\\_id=85](http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=363&issue_id=85).

almost overnight, as the effects of harsh chemotherapy became evident daily. Our children's faith is being tested as never before, amidst the sorrow of this discovery in their mother's body. Friends are stunned, and I am understandably rattled and perplexed. Although I have seen similar tragedies in others, I naively thought that it would never personally happen to me.

Most of our lives are spent trying to make things more comfortable for those we love, including ourselves. Most Christians (like myself) work hard to establish nice homes, secure jobs, good health, solid education, loving relationships (especially with our spouses and children), and minister in their local churches (I've been a ruling elder in six congregations). We see God's gracious providence provide for and sustain us daily and give him the glory for it. We see him work out difficult things in a manner that takes our breath away, understanding that God can indeed work "all things ... together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Then ... bang it happens. Suddenly it's not some abstract, far-off event, but personal disaster that can't easily be explained away. God's timing, ways, and plans are not always our plans and ways.

So far, I've taken some solace in that great book of Job. Here is a righteous man who is hit with everything at once. His children were not suffering from some disease, they were taken suddenly—every one of them killed in a horrible maelstrom of circumstances. His response is surprising, telling, and comforting for a father. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). And after his health is gone and his wife has told him to curse God and die, he responds, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10), demonstrating that God is clearly in charge and ordains all things (not just the sunshine, but also the devastating storms).

Job, of course, goes through much doubting, not helped by his misguided and arrogant counselors (presuming to know God's will and judging Job). Job knows that he serves a righteous God and

is clearly baffled as to why such a sorrow has been perpetrated against him. He, who has striven to live a godly life. Job says again in Job 13:15, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him." Yet, Job insists on defending himself before the Almighty. When Job finally gets his day in court with Jehovah, he is never really given a reason for his particular sorrows and struggles, only that God knows what he is doing and that Job must trust him.

Job summarized God's response by saying, "I know that you (God) can do all things; and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.... Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know" (Job 42:2-3). Then God responded, "Hear and I will speak, I will question you, and you make it known to me. I had heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:4-6).

Job had sinned by questioning God's sovereignty, grace, and justice. I sin by saying, "If God is in control, how could he allow this to happen?" My wife and I are locked into time and space, unable to see beyond this day. We are hardly able to discern our own feelings and motives, let alone those of others. We are unable to see how God can use even cancer to further his perfect will in this imperfect world. The ultimate questions always before my wife and me in a time of trial are: "Will we trust God with our lives and future? Does God really (in an eternal perspective) have our best interest and care in mind?"

The psalmist struggles with these eternal questions as I do. But the answer is always the same—yes! God will be glorified and he will provide for his children. "The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?... For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock" (Ps. 27:1, 5). There are many similar psalms. I'm given comfort in the daily reading of the Psalms. I'm given even more comfort in Christ's personally dying for me, protecting me and praying for me (John 17).

As finite and ultimately weak humans, doubts sweep over us (sometimes daily) as we face with

our family this disease of cancer. Thankfully my family, church, and friends are truly comforting and praying for me and my children (not like the false counselors of Job). I will write more as this story unfolds. Please pray for me and my family during this time of testing and sorrow, as we watch someone we love suffer. Pray that my wife will recover and that she will be able to handle the difficulties in treating this dreaded disease. The answer to every struggle and doubt is Jesus Christ, the God-man who lived, suffered, and died for my wife and me. May we see that reality daily.

### **Hitting the Stone Wall: Reflections on a Biblical Marriage (August 2010)**

Last December I wrote a short article, “When Sorrow Strikes Home,” about my wife Fawn Winsted’s diagnosis of a particularly aggressive cancer.

On June 27, 2010, after an eight month struggle fighting this dreaded disease, she passed into the presence of her Savior. She was fifty-six years old. The family, during her struggle, kept thinking that the medicines and procedures had removed the tumor and cancer, but her doctors warned that it would come roaring back. It did. I was actually out of town when my wife called on her doctor and was told the cancer was now in her liver and that she had days to live.

Needless to say, the flurry of events over the next two weeks did not give me time to think about anything, even my grief. We had been married for thirty-two warm, fulfilling years, actually celebrating the thirty-second anniversary in her hospital the Thursday before her death.

We fulfilled our vows daily as God gave us grace to do it. We have eight children, ranging in ages from twelve to thirty. They all walk in faith. And, thankfully, they all were able to talk with Fawn at length before her death. This was no small doing as they were literally all over the world (one in Europe, one in Africa, two had just come home from the Middle East). It was indeed providential that their presence at her bedside worked out as well as it did.

The memorial service for Fawn was extraordi-

nary; she had planned it out in detail the week before. Her favorite hymns were sung; the pastor gave a stirring sermon on the eternal reward of those who love the Lord and contrasted it to the living death that awaits those who don’t know Christ and are not saved.

The testimonials of my wife’s love and faith were breathtaking, as person after person told of how Fawn was a mother, a best friend, a person who was always available, a servant who made the person she was talking with the most important. At the end of the service, the pastor told me it was one of the most remarkable memorial services at which he had ever officiated, and he had been doing them for forty-five years.

But now the relatives have left, the sympathy cards have all arrived and are slowly being answered, much of Fawn’s personal effects have even been cataloged and moved, but what of my sorrow? My grief is real, ongoing, and overwhelms me.

I’ve just put down C.S. Lewis’s book *A Grief Observed*.<sup>2</sup> In the first half of this short book Lewis found that in mourning for his wife he could not think straight; had hard feelings about God; doubted his own faith; was sullen and angry and possessed several other “unchristian” behaviors and thoughts. I can truly relate to him.

Lamentations 3:8–9 sums it up: “Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked.” I often feel like an uncaring God has done his worst, and I have no where to go but into my own sorrow, tears, and remorse. God says in Psalm 56:8 that he records our lament, listing our tears on his scroll—my tear account has exploded over these past weeks.

One thing our marriage had that many don’t anymore, was a written record. Sadly today, most couples have no written record of their love other than an occasional birthday card with little said. I was in the Navy during the first third of our marriage and, therefore, on cruises/deployments/

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2 C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber, 1961).

assignments that took me away from home for long periods of time. Because of that, Fawn and I carried on an active letter writing relationship.

These long, love letters are treasure houses of caring; she was an excellent writer who could express herself well, and boy did she! These letters flooded my heart and caused my passion to soar again, but what to do now that they belong to a dead person? More pain—will it ever end? I am thankful for them, but do they simply cause more anguish?

Her many journals, which were private (I did not see them during her life), held her remarkable notes for her Bible studies and daily devotions, personal reflections, and frustrations. Of course, we hurt the people nearest to us the most. Our marriage was no exception. In reading her journals my heart ached for the pain I had caused her over the years by my churlish, insensitive ways.

I was raised in a critical home, she in a warm, sharing household. Feelings were rarely, if ever, demonstrated in my home while I was growing up, for a variety of reasons; the opposite was shown in Fawn's home. Yes, this took "getting used to" for my warm and affectionate wife in dealing with this "cold fish" of a husband. This was only the beginning of our adjustment problems while married. Therefore, in reading the journals, much remorse set in for me, leading to despondency and more painful sobbing.

These journal comments were, of course, snapshots of feelings, many of which Fawn would later confess to herself were wrong, arrogant, self-centered, and overdone on her part, but they were like stabbing swords into my soul. As I read them and remembered the particular incidents, I continually asked myself between sobs of pain, "How could I have said such things, done such things; why wasn't I more caring, loving, and serving?"

My pastor finally asked me, after I shared with him about the entries, if Fawn would have really wanted me to read these journal entries so close to her death. I shook my head no. He then asked, "Were you able to confess these faults to her over the years?" Yes, I thankfully did ask her to forgive me, and she did on repeated occasions, but the

black and white reality of past sins was too much for me. He followed up with, "Have you asked God to forgive you?" Yes, I had. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The enemy was using these entries to undermine my faith and hope in God. I have put the journals away for now.

Remorse and regret are common characteristics after the death of a loving spouse. I was in full swing with these feelings. She had always told me, even to her deathbed that I was the man of her dreams, that she loved me above all others, and that her heart always jumped for joy when I entered the room. We were in love to the end. But remorse for not living day-to-day for my wife was real and excruciating.

God's comfort is really the only comfort for a pain such as mine—I know this. No, it won't bring Fawn back, but it does give me a new perspective on heaven, where we will eventually be reunited. She has no pain there, and because I would want her to be in paradise with her Lord whom she loved so much, there is comfort in this.

But, I am left behind, a broken man who is a walking, wounded victim of a death I never thought I would see (I was five years older than she was). I know it will take much time to heal my soul. Many who have gone through similar situations confirm this with me. Part of me has died, for we were one in Christ. At the same time, I must take solace in knowing that he will never leave me nor forsake me (Heb. 13:5–6); that he is acquainted with grief and sorrow (Isa. 53); that he is the father of compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3); and that he desires for me to come to him with a broken and contrite heart, casting all my anxiety on him because he cares for me (1 Pet. 5:7).

Yes, this is "head knowledge" at this point; I pray soon it will be heart knowledge. I am in the midst of Psalm 42, panting for God for relief; the roar of the waves break over me and have swept me away; I have put my hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

## Grieving Well (January 2012)

It is now over a year and a half since Fawn's death. Life certainly has moved on. We often say that "time heals"—this is only partially true. I have found in my journey that time *alone* doesn't heal, but, if we lean into our grief, then God can use it as a grateful, sanctifying experience.

This poem (author anonymous) is so apropos:

I walked a mile with Pleasure, she chatted all  
the way.  
But I was none the wiser for all she had to say.  
I walked a mile with Sorrow, and ne'er a word  
said she.  
But oh, the things I learned from her, when  
Sorrow walked with me.

In the weeks and months following Fawn's death, I became increasingly convinced that God might have made a mistake in taking her—it should have been me. After all, she was the better parent, the better person, the better teacher of our children, the better grandparent; surely I should have died and not her. My youngest boy, twenty-two years old, replied to this analysis of mine by saying, "Mom was ready for heaven; God still has a lot more to do with your sanctification here on earth, Dad." I understand that all of this is a part of God's work to shape me into the kind of person who can serve him and others better and more consistently.

I truly want to honor Fawn by "grieving well" as a Christian who believes that there is a God who rules and overrules in the destinies of us all; who ultimately has our best in mind and loves us no matter what the outward circumstances. My bedrock of faith must be that God does all things well for those called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28–29). The horrible alternative is that the universe is random and meaningless; everything being ultimately "out of control," and things just happening without any kind of universal or eternal reason.

I have talked to many people who have gone through similar experiences. I have attended Grief Share weekly seminars: a wonderful, nationwide, faith-based program that helps us through the

grieving process. I have seen a Christian, trained grief counselor for about a year, usually once a month. I have written a book, "My Dear Wife Fawn," about our lives together with much of the information gleaned from the many letters we wrote each other when I was in the Navy and away on long deployments. I have read many books of others who have experienced the same thing I have. I have kept a daily journal of my walk through this "valley of the shadow of death." In this journal I record my daily thoughts after my quiet time in God's Word. All of these things have assisted my leaning into the grief process.

One thing I have gleaned is the role of the various "Ts" of grief recovery: Tears—to shed them openly and often, accepting the reality of our loss and the extent of our feelings. We grieve deeply because we loved deeply. Talking—to God first in prayer and meditating upon his Word (starting with the Psalms and the Gospels), and then to others who have ears to hear, individually or collectively. Turning—to God for the answers, letting him lead me through this dark valley and gaining an eternal perspective—not grieving as people who have no hope since our hope is Christ and eternity. And Time—time does heal if the other Ts are embraced.

There are countless books available on grief, but the one I found most helpful was J. I. Packer's *A Grief Sanctified: Passing through Grief to Peace and Joy*.<sup>3</sup> In this excellent, but largely unknown book, the great theologian tells us how a grief experience, especially one of a beloved wife, can be truly sanctified by God. Here are some summary snippets:

1. Bereavement reminds us of truths we might otherwise forget or not take seriously. Some of these truths are: the reality of God's sovereignty, the reality of our own mortality, and the reality of heaven and hell.
2. Grief should lead us to the exercise of thanksgiving for all that we valued and en-

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3 J. I. Packer, *A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to Eternal Hope* (Grand Rapids: Crossway Books, 2002).

joyed in the other person whom we have lost; and for the believer, the happiness to know that he/she has been promoted. It should also lead to the exercise of submission to God as we resign to him the loved one he has taken from us; and the exercise of patience, which is a compound of endurance and hope, as we live through our bereavement on a daily basis.

3. Do not let your grief loosen your grip on the goodness and grace of our loving God.

4. Tell God your sadness, pray as you can, and don't try to pray as you can't.

5. Avoid well wishers who think they can cheer you up, but thank God for people who are content to be with you and do things for you without necessarily even talking to you.

6. Cry; there is nothing biblical about a stiff upper lip.

7. Talk to yourself about the loved one you have lost.<sup>4</sup>

I recommend this fine book on grieving.

Each person will have a different grief experience. Grief is a jagged road filled with detours, ups and downs, and dead ends. Ultimately this road should leave the valley of the shadow of death for the meadow of thanksgiving to God for the life of the lost one. From this place of thanksgiving, we can look forward to heaven, while called to continue to live and work on earth. ☺

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<sup>4</sup> Packer, *A Grief Sanctified*, 171.



# ✦ Servant Exchange

## Addressing Issues: A Cordial Response to David VanDrunen

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by Ryan McIlhenny

Toward the end of his rather personal response to *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* in a recent issue of *Ordained Servant* (see the review article in this volume), David VanDrunen called for a “cordial engagement” between neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms proponents.<sup>2</sup> In my eager attempt at the outset to avoid a descent into a series of puerile ripostes, I will—instead of addressing specific points in his paper—accept VanDrunen’s invitation. After a few preliminary remarks regarding his description of the book, I will offer points on which neo-Calvinism and the current Two Kingdoms perspective do indeed—at least *prima facie*—diverge, concluding with a note on how to cultivate irenic discussions in the future.

### The Chasm between Language and Intent

My goal as editor and contributor of *Kingdoms Apart* was to engage an important discussion within the Reformed community, not to attack any

one particular person. Central to VanDrunen’s criticism is that the book treats him “as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective.” Admittedly, I may have missed something, having read the manuscript multiple times, but I do not recall even an intimation identifying him as *the* leader of the pack. Yet is VanDrunen a proponent? Well, yes, and the authors treat him as such. If VanDrunen and readers of *Kingdoms Apart* feel or have explicit evidence that we engaged in a personal attack, then I, as the book’s editor, offer my sincere apologies. Language and intent often fail to converge.

Having said that, however, VanDrunen’s language, it seems to me, is a bit overblown—calling at least one author’s argument “tendentious,” agreeing with “98%” or “in essence” (meaning?) with another, using a term like “polemical” or “theoretical” to describe the essays, or attempting to ascertain my own “deep down” thoughts on a particular question I raised about Christian scholarly practice. *Kingdoms Apart* contributors may respond separately as they see fit, but—without sounding pedantic—I humbly challenge VanDrunen’s claim that the book lacked “collegiality,” a word that denotes a debate among equals—in this case, academics interacting with proponents of a particular school of thought who are also brothers in Christ within the Reformed community. *Collegiality* does not mean agreement. There would be no discussion if we all agreed. To say that an academic has not acted in a collegial way may be to misunderstand the meaning of the term.

Addressing VanDrunen’s main concern (the issues), let me highlight what I believe are a few discrepancies with the current Two Kingdoms position. Readers should keep in mind that many of these observations are far from—or seek to be far from—tendentious, misleading, or polemical, words used by VanDrunen to describe portions of *Kingdoms Apart*.

### In Company with Compromisers

In *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, VanDrunen places neo-Calvinists in company with those who

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=368&issue\\_id=86](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=368&issue_id=86).

2 David VanDrunen, “What Exactly is the Issue: A Response to *Kingdoms Apart*,” *Ordained Servant* (March 2013): [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=354&cur\\_iss=Y](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=354&cur_iss=Y). Ryan C. McIlhenny, ed., *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012).0

have compromised aspects of confessional Reformed theology—the doctrine of justification, in particular. (I have addressed this in *Kingdoms Apart*, so I need not spend time repeating myself; readers can consider what I have written.) To be clear, however, VanDrunen does not say that neo-Calvinism *necessarily*—in a strictly deductive sense—leads to a rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith alone; nonetheless, neo-Calvinism *is* in the camp of those who do. I remain unconvinced that it endangers justification.

This is not a matter of taking one orthodox belief and turning it into heresy, but of two different beliefs with no *a priori* causal relationship. I hold strongly to Herman Dooyeweerd’s concept of the heart, for instance, as the “concentration and consummation of being.” In what sense does that lead to a denial of another belief? Admittedly, there are individuals in the Reformed community who, while appropriating elements of neo-Calvinism (viz., a problematic “transformationalist” perspective), hold to a weak (at best) view of justification by faith alone; and there are also those both within and outside of the Reformed tradition who have (at worst) fully compromised the doctrine itself. VanDrunen writes, “All of us who share a commitment to the Reformed doctrine of justification should appreciate the attractiveness of my suggested paradigm.” I, for one, need more convincing, to which I am open. And not to be petty, but one could make a similar argument in light of a recent “conversion.” At least one Two Kingdoms representative, Jason Stellman, has turned to Rome, egregiously compromising a central tenet of Reformed theology in doing so. Yet it would be absurd to say that anyone committed to justification should not find Two Kingdoms attractive.

Related to the alleged undermining of justification is the charge that neo-Calvinists are linked to the moralistic (not Christian) political agenda of the evangelical right. This is an association made by staunch Two Kingdoms advocate Darryl Hart, who, unlike VanDrunen and Michael Horton, seems to be opposed intransigently to even a tincture of neo-Calvinism. In *A Secular Faith*, Hart makes a subtle—but again, like VanDrunen,

unnecessary—connection between evangelical right-wing political activism and the theology of neo-Calvinism, failing to take into consideration the many neo-Calvinists in North America who distanced themselves from the culture wars.<sup>3</sup> Just because the popularity of neo-Calvinism coincided with the emergence of the modern culture wars or even supported it, does not mean the two cannot be separated. Yet even Hart is right when he calls out neo-Calvinists to reevaluate their social commitments in light of changing historical circumstances. “I am waiting to see,” Hart writes, “the neo-Calvinist critique of culture war militancy.”<sup>4</sup> I would echo such a challenge, and encourage neo-Calvinists to reevaluate their commitments beyond the culture wars.

But along with the evangelical political right, neo-Calvinism, for Hart, spills over into Rousas Rushdoony–Greg Bahnsen theonomy. Hart makes the very bold claim that “the neo-Calvinist insistence on biblical politics,” referring specifically to the work of James Skillen, “*paves the way* for theonomy.”<sup>5</sup> Again, necessarily? I would say no (so would Skillen, by the way). Neo-Calvinist discussions of a “biblical” state or “Christian anything” outside the sphere of the church does not lead to theonomy. For Abraham Kuyper, the adjective “Christian” means the “betokening” influence of Christianity, not a theonomic state. Even VanDrunen refuses to make this connection: “Kuyper ... avoided perennial tensions ... by removing enforcement of true religion from the hands of the magistrate.”<sup>6</sup>

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3 Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006), 227–29.

4 <http://oldlife.org/2012/10/not-so-fast/> D.G. Hart’s commentary on Mike Horton’s effort to highlight agreements between the Two Kingdoms and neo-Calvinism at Covenant College.

5 *Ibid.*

6 David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 307.

## Sphere Sovereignty and Two Kingdoms: Compatibility or Redundancy?

VanDrunen admits that Kuyper's sphere sovereignty places "him broadly within the Reformed two kingdoms tradition."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the revival of the Two Kingdoms in its new context is a welcome corrective to those, including those pesky fundamentalist culture warriors, who have confused spheres. If I am closer to the Two Kingdoms position, as VanDrunen suggests, it is because I am a proponent of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. What is the difference, indeed, besides the later formulations, as VanDrunen argues, after Dooyeweerd? When placed together, Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms seem similar. Is this compatibility or redundancy?<sup>8</sup> If VanDrunen agrees (at least with Kuyper), then he is a partial neo-Calvinist. Even Hart seems to be a more consistent neo-Calvinist when he criticizes, for instance, "denominational colleges" for their failure "to meet neo-Calvinist criteria of sphere sovereignty." At the Reformed college that I attended as an undergraduate, chapel attendance was required, meaning students would be punished for not going. Sounds like an unwarranted binding of the conscience and a clear example of a confusion of spheres, particularly for an academic institution.

A problem arises, however, when there is neglect not only of the overlap and interaction of spheres, but, at a higher level, of their coherence. This leads to a false tension between the church and spheres outside the church. While VanDrunen (and Hart) are perhaps better at maintaining the boundaries between spheres than some neo-Calvinists, they say very little about "sphere universality."<sup>9</sup> In his discussion of Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, VanDrunen acknowledges the "richness and diversity of human life," what

Dooyeweerd, following Kuyper, would refer to as the irreducibility of the various spheres in human experience.<sup>10</sup> "Human society is complex," VanDrunen continues, but "not uniform." Yet along with important delineations, there is a fundamental coherence among spheres—hence, universality. L. Kalsbeek defines sphere universality as "the principle that all the modalities are intimately connected with each other in an unbreakable coherence. Just as sphere sovereignty stresses the unique distinctiveness and irreducibility of the modal [ways of being] aspects, so sphere universality emphasizes that every one depends for its meaning on all the others."<sup>11</sup> The coherence of spheres, at root, rests on God as creator and Christ as redeemer. I am not saying this because VanDrunen rejects universality, but to ask him and other Two Kingdoms advocates to clarify the distinction between "sphere sovereignty" and "sphere universality"—functional distinctions yet coherence in and through Christ. In Christ, all things—things that remain part of his good creation, which does not include pornography, war, or any one of Green Day's songs (which will most definitely be part of the cultural immolation)—are made, upheld, and groan for his redemption. My point here is that an understanding of universality may help us to avoid the tendency of seeing spheres as completely separate from one another.

## Morality and Practical Reason

Another issue that needs further exploration on the Two Kingdoms end is whether a biblical and Christ-centered perspective has an advantage in understanding human morality and reason (generally speaking). Is a reliance on natural law to delineate morality and knowledge sufficient without Scripture? In the area of morality, I continue to grapple with the issue, so allow me to distance

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7 Ibid., 290.

8 While agreeing in essence with Kuyper, VanDrunen makes the case that Dooyeweerd and his followers stray from the Reformed tradition of natural law and the Two Kingdoms. See VanDrunen *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 362.

9 VanDrunen mentions "sphere universality" in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 356.

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10 Herman Dooyeweerd, *Encyclopedia of the Science of Law*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Knudsen and ed. Alan M. Cameron (Lewisston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 123.

11 L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy: An Introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1975), 314.

myself a bit on whether we can develop a view of morality that sufficiently rests on a purely natural and universal moral law inscribed on the hearts of all men. There are neo-Calvinists, however, who argue that unbelievers cannot know God's natural law solely from the natural kingdom. This is the thrust of Gene Haas's chapter in *Kingdoms Apart*:

Apart from Christ, sinners do not have a *full* knowledge of the law in general ... but they become forgetful when it applies to their own actions.... In drawing the distinction in Calvin between the spiritual and civil kingdoms, VanDrunen rightly notes that in the former "Scripture [is] the sole standard for the doctrine and government of the church." But in his attempt to distinguish the civil kingdom from the spiritual one, VanDrunen goes too far in portraying Calvin as viewing natural law as the primary, and thus adequate, "standard for life in the civil kingdom." A close reading of Calvin's comments on natural law will simply not support this position ... natural law is much less likely [apart from the Golden Rule] to give a clear apprehension of right and wrong, good and evil, when it is applied to the specific decisions of human life.<sup>12</sup>

Strangely, Haas's "interpretation of Calvin," VanDrunen writes, "is practically identical" with his own. Yet in Haas's reading of Calvin, knowledge of morality along with the practice of it is *insufficient* or *incomplete* without Christ. Natural law is *not* satisfactory for common or universal morality. Thus, if Haas is correct, Christians *should* think about ways to employ a biblical Christ-centered perspective on morality.

Reason likewise is deficient apart from Christ, according to fellow *Kingdoms Apart* contributor Jason Lief:

Calvin affirms the role of reason and conscience in the temporal realm, while at the same time he expresses doubt concerning the ability of reason to know truth with any cer-

12 Haas's quote in *Kingdoms Apart*, 45, 47, emphasis added.

tainty.... [Calvin] refers to the "sluggishness of mind," ... and says the natural gifts [of reason] have been corrupted as the mind is "plunged into deep darkness." Even when he affirms the remnants of "human understanding" that exist after the fall, he goes on to say, "Yet this longing for truth, such as it is, languishes before it enters upon its race because it soon falls into vanity. Indeed, man's mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears. *Thus it betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding truth.*"<sup>13</sup>

Does this suggest that redemption is necessary for a higher or better understanding of the created order? Neo-Calvinists would agree that Christians and non-Christians share truths equally, but on a surface or common (creational, natural law) level only. Anyone digging deeper into a particular area of study will be confronted with anomalies, irony, or just plain mystery that can never be critically and creatively worked out apart from a theoretical interpretive grid rooted in one's religious ground motive.<sup>14</sup> It is the religious heart that reveals the competing understandings of the common. As I mentioned in the book, the neo-Calvinist distinction between structure and direction is helpful on this point. Thus, in both morality and reason, an explicitly biblical approach is better or more advanced, again in theory, than one that rejects or simply ignores the importance of Christ.

Of course, we need to be careful on this point. Although a Christian perspective places a learner on a more advantageous level, he or she may

13 Lief's quote in *Kingdoms Apart*, 233–34.

14 Many Two Kingdoms advocates claim that Christian schools are "good." But what makes them good? Does the Two Kingdom position offer a defense for Christian education? Two Kingdom supporters do not see the need for the Christian modifier when it comes to knowledge. Why "Christian" education then? If a liberal arts education, for instance, is reduced to the now-hackneyed plumber paradigm, which it regularly is, then there is no need for Christian schools of any kind. This is an issue that needs further discussion.

not take the advantage. Developing a Christian perspective vis-à-vis a specific subject or scholarly endeavor is not easy; it is not something prepackaged and hastily attached to what is studied. An integral Christian perspective requires conformity to biblical wisdom; it must incorporate key attributes of wisdom: humility, patience, and submission to authority (to God, first and foremost). Even if there is no empirical difference in appearance (which is questionable, as I argue in *Kingdoms Apart*), there is no reason to reject the integrally biblical motivation behind teaching.

### **Cultural Mandate, Cultural Contingencies**

A clear difference between neo-Calvinists and Two Kingdoms supporters centers on an understanding of the cultural mandate. VanDrunen expressed disappointment that the cultural mandate was mentioned “only twice” in *Kingdoms Apart*. I am also disappointed and, as editor, greatly chagrined. The reason for this has to do with the contingencies of an edited work, which rarely if ever ends up the way an editor/author originally wants it to be. I am willing to accept as “incomplete” my representation of his view on the cultural mandate—I have more questions on his position than anything else—but to say that I am “misleading” readers goes too far, since “misleading” can connote an attempt on my part to deceive. At any rate, I had scheduled a well-recognized author to write a chapter specifically on the issue, but the author was unable to complete the work because of his own commitments. He pulled out of the project after the contract with the publisher was formalized, leaving me in a difficult position. I tried to find someone else; I was unable. Even so, *Kingdoms Apart* was not a comprehensive examination of Two Kingdoms or neo-Calvinism. The conversation is still young and still important.

VanDrunen presents a nuanced view that, for me at this point, lacks cogency. Nonetheless, his position needs consideration. The cultural mandate is part of the created common or natural order, not only as it is “refracted through the covenant with Noah,” as VanDrunen writes, but also as

it was given to man before the Fall. As it relates to the shared realm, humanity has a higher obligation before God to rule over and subdue all of creation, doing so, it seems to me, in a way that conforms to how God designed the world. And while I agree that Christ has completed the work of redemption as the better Adam and reject the eschatological burden that often accompanies cultural engagement, Christians are nonetheless tasked by Scripture to bring “every thought captive” (2 Cor. 10:5) to Christ, to bring word and sacraments through the institutional church, and, for laymen and women, to walk in a godly manner within the common realm in order to “win our neighbors for Christ” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32, Q&A 86). Such directives are the ultimate form of ruling and subduing. We can do all this without reviving a tragically anachronistic theonomic state, compromising justification, becoming part of the emergent church movement, or being swept up in the “status anxiety” that undergirds the wayward “mission” of the evangelical right.

There is one last issue related to cultural renewal that needs clarification—namely, reconciling competing readings of 2 Peter 3. For VanDrunen, the present world, including current cultural products, will be “burned up and dissolved.” But, as Albert Wolters writes in *Creation Regained* “all but one of the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts do not have the final words ‘will be burned up,’ but instead ‘will be found,’ ” which does not mean “annihilation or complete destruction.”<sup>15</sup> Wolters connects the conflagration imagery in this passage to that of the flood in Genesis 6–8; the earth was both destroyed and preserved. When it comes to the common realm vis-à-vis God’s kingship, VanDrunen separates creation from redemption; God’s sovereignty over “every square inch” is that of Creator, not Redeemer. This challenges the neo-Calvinist insistence on the inextricable relationship between creation and redemption. If VanDrunen’s reading of 2 Peter 3 is correct, then creation will *not* be

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15 Wolters’s quote in *Kingdoms Apart*, xxiv.

redeemed—end of discussion. But if, on the other hand, God’s good creation continues, especially in light of Romans 8:19–23, then there must be a connection to redemption.

Saying that our cultural works will not be annihilated, however, does not mean we know exactly what our earthly items will look like in the new heavens and new earth. This is a point on which, as I have tried to make clear, a handful of neo-Calvinists and other evangelical writers overextend themselves.<sup>16</sup>

### A Caveat to Bandwagoners

In writing this I want readers to understand that I am not attacking VanDrunen. I have been supremely edified by his work, and I trust he will continue to challenge me—and the Reformed community—to always engage culture from a biblically robust perspective. Let me also state that I am weary of the factions that so often emerge as a result of these debates. I will steer clear of labeling VanDrunen the chief proponent of the Two Kingdoms position. Concurrently, I refuse to lump him in the camp of those strongly opposed to neo-Calvinism. VanDrunen rejects certain strands of post-Kuyperian formulations of Calvinism (e.g., Dooyeweerd and his followers, especially). In this way, then, he is a neo-Calvinist *partialist* (I am still working on the Latin), but that would describe the overwhelming majority of neo-Calvinists, including those critical of Kuyper (e.g., Klaas Schilder). What neo-Calvinist accepts everything Kuyper or Dooyeweerd have taught (the latter’s position on natural law is not the only problematic issue in his theological repertoire)?<sup>17</sup> And taking into consideration my own disagreements with certain *applications* of neo-Calvinism, which are laid out in the book, I too am a neo-Calvinist *partialist*. The current Two Kingdoms position does well challenging the sloppiness of neo-Calvinism, but this does not

16 See Richard Mouw’s quote in *Kingdoms Apart*, xxvi.

17 I must admit that among the sixty plus neo-Calvinists on the website “All of Life Redeemed,” VanDrunen deals with a small handful in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*; he is even more sweeping in *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*.

require a full-scale assault against it.

When Christians disagree or merely question a position, partisanship often follows. (My articulation of the discursiveness of culture in *Kingdoms Apart* is proving itself to be true.) This is not directed toward the handful of contemporary Two Kingdom or neo-Calvinist proponents who have worked hard to lay out their position, but to the bandwagoners out there. I have interacted with a number of individuals who have no clue how to define neo-Calvinism or Two Kingdoms, but those who associate with a particular side seem dogmatically convinced that when it comes to Christ and his kingdom it is strictly one or the other. Choosing sides in ignorance is irresponsible; partisanship stifles debate. I concur with VanDrunen that a “cordial engagement” is needed—especially, let me add, for brethren and citizens of Christ’s kingdom who are also witnesses of that kingdom to a fallen world. ☺

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# A Response to a Response to a Response

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by David VanDrunen

I thank Ryan McIlhenny for his response to my review of *Kingdoms Apart*. His response is indeed cordial, thought-provoking, and helpful for promoting constructive, Reformed conversation about these issues. I regret that my contribution here must be very abbreviated, due to space constraints.

Since McIlhenny's response is not primarily focused upon the strengths and weaknesses of *Kingdoms Apart* but on a variety of issues related to Two Kingdoms/neo-Calvinism debates, it is appropriate (and agreeable) for me to address the latter rather than to rehash the former. But I do note that I was puzzled by McIlhenny's statement that "central to VanDrunen's criticism is that the book [*Kingdoms Apart*] treats him 'as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective.'" This is not the case, and I am not sure why McIlhenny has this impression. I noted that I was (implicitly) treated as the two kingdoms perspective's chief proponent only to explain why my review speaks so much in the first-person singular and to alert readers that I am very much an interested party in these discussions. I was honored by the attention to my work. But I did fault *Kingdoms Apart* for its frequent misrepresentation of my views and arguments. In my judgment, the book lacked "collegiality" not because it disagreed with me but because of these misrepresentations. Having clarified this, I am now eager to engage the substantive matters McIlhenny raises.

## Unity and Continuity

I wish first to address two topics that McIlhenny discusses separately, but which I think he would

agree are aspects of a larger issue. His questions to me regarding "sphere universality" and the interpretation of 2 Peter 3 seem to express concern that, though two kingdoms proponents have helpfully reminded the Reformed community about the need to make proper distinctions among institutions and activities and to distinguish this age from the age to come, they have not given proper due to the overarching unity of God's work and the elements of continuity between this world and the next. A forthcoming book of mine discusses these issues in some detail,<sup>2</sup> but here are a few thoughts for the present.

I think it proper to say that the new creation is the consummation of this present creation. From the beginning, before the fall, God designed the present world not to remain in its initial form forever but to be consummated in an eschatological new creation. Scripture doesn't teach exactly what this means in detail, but it means at least that the new creation was not to be another creation *ex nihilo*; the new creation was to be the consummation of *this present world*. That remains true after the fall. The story of salvation in Christ ends with the same eschatological new creation that was the first creation's original destiny. The present creation, however, is surely not brought to consummation in its entirety, without loss. The destiny of damned angels and humans in hell proves that when Scripture speaks of *all* things being renewed or reconciled in Christ it does not mean that every individual thing that has participated in God's original creation will be incorporated into the new creation. Such biblical statements point instead to the idea that the new creation is the consummation of the original creation as a whole, in general.

Some reviewers have read page 66 of my book *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* as asserting that every material thing in this present creation except human bodies will be annihilated at Christ's return.<sup>3</sup> That was not my intent, though I under-

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=369&issue\\_id=86](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=369&issue_id=86).

2 David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2014), especially chapters 1 and 9.

3 E.g., Keith Mathison in his review of *Living in God's Two*

stand why they have this impression, and I now wish I had stated some things differently. What I wished to defend, over against certain popular neo-Calvinist writers (from whom McIlhenny also seems to dissociate himself), is that Scripture gives no reason to hope that *any particular thing* in this world—whether natural or the product of human culture—is going to adorn the new creation. To say that this beautiful mountain, this pristine river, this lovely sculpture, etc., will adorn the new creation is extra-biblical speculation. The only *particular thing* in this creation that Scripture teaches will keep its present identity through the coming fire of judgment is the resurrected human body. It is not that other particular things will be annihilated, but that I cannot expect to enjoy *this* mountain, *this* river, or *this* work of art in the new creation. This claim is consistent with Romans 8 and does not depend upon how one resolves the textual question in 2 Peter 3:10.

How do these considerations bear upon common institutions such as family or state? How do common institutions relate to the church now and to the new creation to come? Common and special grace are aspects of a unified plan of God for human history, and this helps us to appreciate how God uses the family, for example, to bring covenant children into the church and how he uses the state to provide physical protection for the church (or how he uses economic life to provide financial means to support the church's ministry, etc.). These common institutions do not exist *only* to serve the church; I agree with Abraham Kuyper that we also ought to acknowledge independent purposes of common grace. But God's putting common institutions/activities to the use of his church seems to be one important way for us to recognize sphere universality.<sup>4</sup>

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*Kingdoms*; see <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/2k-or-not-2k-question-review-david-vandrunens-living-gods-two-kingdoms/>.

<sup>4</sup> Some writers seem to assume that I do not see God's common grace or common institutions as (at least in part) serving redemptive purposes, which in turn fuels accusations about the bogeyman "dualism" and about a failure among two kingdoms proponents to appreciate the holistic character of God's work in this world. Cornelis Venema, for example, sees my appeal to the

Yet, in the context of sphere universality, McIlhenny writes that all things remaining part of God's good creation groan for redemption. Does he mean by this that all such things are redeemed? If so, I must strongly disagree. Take marriage as an example. God instituted marriage at creation and upholds it for the entire human race through his common grace. It remains part of his good creation. But marriage relationships end at death, and there will be no new marriage ceremonies in heaven. Marriage will not exist in the new creation—this is why Scripture never speaks of marriage as an institution of the redemptive kingdom of Christ. If this is the case, we should not speak about marriage being *redeemed*. Redemption is an improper category to apply to marriage. We hope that redeemed people will carry out their responsibilities as husbands and wives better than the unredeemed, but the institution of marriage itself is not being redeemed—only preserved. And similar things must be said about the state and other common institutions. I think this is one of the great benefits of the two kingdoms doctrine: it provides a way to say, with Scripture, that common institutions such as marriage are good and honorable, but also temporary—designed for *this world*.

### Questions Regarding Natural Law

McIlhenny asks some questions about natural law and its relation to a Christ-centered perspec-

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Noahic covenant, as the formal establishment of the common kingdom, as "an interesting illustration of the lack of integration in its conception of the relation between creation and redemption." Though acknowledging with me that the Noahic covenant was "a covenant of preservation," Venema seeks to counter me by claiming that "it is not a covenant that is wholly unrelated to the covenant of grace and God's purposes in redemption," for it "serves the purposes of redemption by maintaining the creation order, and also by sustaining the nucleus of the new humanity redeemed through Christ." See "One Kingdom or Two? An Evaluation of the 'two Kingdoms' Doctrine as an Alternative to Neo-Calvinism," *Mid America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 116–17. But where have I ever denied that? Of course the Noahic covenant serves the purposes of redemption in these ways. To say that the Noahic covenant is not a redemptive covenant (which I have said and continue to affirm) is not equivalent to saying that God does not use the Noahic covenant to serve redemptive purposes, in fulfillment of his larger plan for world history. God puts all sorts of common things to use as he builds his church through the covenant of grace.



tive. To try to answer them briefly, I believe it is crucial to make a basic distinction between, on the one hand, natural law itself as an aspect of God's objective natural revelation and, on the other hand, the subjective response to natural law on the part of sinful human beings. As objective revelation, natural law is sufficient for the purposes for which God gives it. The same is true for all divine revelation: whether special or natural, God's revelation is sufficient for the purposes for which he gave it and insufficient for other purposes. One purpose of natural law, I think we would all agree, is to hold all people accountable before God's judgment for their violations of his moral law. This is explicit in Romans 1 and implicit in many other biblical texts, such as Amos 1. This means that the substance of the moral law is revealed in natural law; otherwise, many people could stand before God's judgment and legitimately claim excuse for their sins. Therefore, natural law must objectively reveal sufficient moral knowledge for a human being to live a blameless life in the present world. But immediately one must add that, subjectively speaking, no sinner could possibly respond to this revelation blamelessly. Natural law reveals God's perfect law but does not convey the ability to respond without sin. Fallen sinners distort the truths that they *know* through natural revelation, as Romans 1 also teaches. So in response to McIlhenny's questions regarding an advantage for Christians: Christians do not have, objectively, an information advantage with respect to the moral law; Scripture reveals the same substance of the moral law that natural law reveals.<sup>5</sup> But Christians may be said to have a moral advantage in that Scripture clarifies many aspects of natural revelation for our dull minds and in that Christians' sanctified hearts

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5 As Francis Turretin puts it, the natural law and moral law are the same as to "substance" and "principles" but differ in "mode of delivery." See *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 6. These sorts of statements do, of course, require further nuances in order to be most helpful and accurate. For example, careful distinctions need to be made among different covenantal contexts within which the moral law is revealed and at times differently applied.

should be less prone to distort natural revelation.<sup>6</sup>

## Two Kingdoms and Partial Neo-Calvinism

McIlhenny also raises a number of interesting issues concerning the identity of neo-Calvinism, its relationship to the two kingdoms, and the similarity of some of their characteristic ideas. With the very little space remaining, I offer a few thoughts.

One question he asks is whether I am a "partial neo-Calvinist." The suggestion has a certain logic to it: If Kuyper is regarded as a neo-Calvinist, and if I express considerable appreciation for Kuyper's thought, then it seems I'm a partial neo-Calvinist. The more expansively a term is used, however, the less useful it becomes as an identity marker. If "neo-Calvinist" can describe nearly everybody in the broader Reformed community then it may not serve a helpful purpose. As I am sure McIlhenny would agree, it's ultimately not terms that matter, and it's unfortunate when terminological confusion causes unnecessary disagreement. At the same time, it's also difficult to proceed efficiently in academic discussion without having terms to identify views and schools of thought,

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6 In some other recent pieces evaluating my writing on the two kingdoms there is a lot of speculation, presented as fact, about what my constructive view of natural law is, particularly with regard to its relationship to special revelation, its function governing the common kingdom, and unbelievers' response to it. I have actually published very little on these subjects; *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* does not discuss natural law at all and *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* is a historical work and does not present my own constructive views in any detail. Yet Jeffrey Waddington and Cornelis Venema, for example, think they know a lot about my views and offer bold critical comments; see Waddington, "Duplex in Homine Regimen: A Response to David VanDrunen's 'The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine: An Explanation and Defense,'" *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 192–93; and Venema, "One Kingdom or Two?" 106–11. I'll mention just one issue among several they raise: the unbeliever's ability to profit from natural law. Waddington (193) states: "Clearly Dr. VanDrunen's understanding of the efficacy of natural law/natural revelation is significantly different from the clear and unambiguous statement made in the Canons of Dort [3/4.4]." Similarly, Venema (108–9) also implies that I am at variance with Canons of Dort 3/3.4 and writes: "in the two kingdoms paradigm, non-believers are almost as apt as believers to profit from their discernment of the natural law." Neither of them cite a single example from my writings to prove these claims; nor could they, I am quite sure. I agree entirely with the statement in Canons of Dort 3/4.4 and have never argued against it. And I cannot think of where I have said anything along the lines of Venema's charge.

and so it's understandable that we speak of "neo-Calvinists" and "two kingdoms proponents," and hope these will be useful shorthand for capturing certain convictions.

What is most important to me is that the Reformed community reaffirm the basic distinction between God's two kingdoms—his common providential rule and his special redemptive rule—whether or not one agrees with all the ways I personally apply this distinction in exploring the Christianity-and-culture issues. This distinction is biblical and has very deep roots in the Reformed tradition. I would deem it a great blessing from God were the Reformed community as a whole to re-embrace it, and I see my efforts to defend the distinction as something I can do to serve the Reformed churches I love. The thing is, I struggle to think of any contemporary figure I have read or spoken to who either calls himself a neo-Calvinist or is commonly identified by others as a neo-Calvinist who does not speak of God's kingdom in the singular. Possibly my own experience is just quirky, but ever since I began thinking seriously about this I have understood a one-kingdom view to be of the essence of what "neo-Calvinism" is. Thus, I do not consider myself a neo-Calvinist. To me, the thought of a "two kingdoms neo-Calvinist" is like the thought of a "libertarian socialist." It's paradoxical, even contradictory.

But that doesn't mean there aren't other features of neo-Calvinism that are consistent with maintaining a two kingdoms distinction, at least potentially. I can think of many (and have identified some in previous writing). McIlhenny suggests that the familiar neo-Calvinist idea of sphere sovereignty is similar to the two kingdoms idea. I appreciate his raising this issue, and I am sympathetic to his thoughts. The ideas of two kingdoms and sphere sovereignty are indeed both concerned with making proper distinctions among institutions and activities in this world. Yet I see the two kingdoms distinction as addressing a foundational biblical issue, while I see the idea of sphere sovereignty as working out a more detailed social theory (which requires intellectual labor beyond theology and biblical exegesis). A theory of sphere sover-

eignty is indeed very useful, I believe, as long as it is anchored in a two kingdoms doctrine.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Again, I thank McIlhenny for his cordial and thoughtful response. I hope that this exchange will be of some small use to the Reformed community and be a positive stimulus for productive discussion in the future. ☺

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<sup>7</sup> This is an issue on which I am hoping to do a lot more research and writing in the years to come. I am eager to hear more constructive thoughts on this issue from McIlhenny and others with interest in the topic.

# ✦ Servant Humor

## *From the Back Pew*

Eutyclus II continues the tradition of Eutyclus I, Ed Clowney's pen name in the initial issues of *Christianity Today* (1956–1960). As Clowney explained in his later anthology, *Eutyclus (and His Pin)*: “Eutyclus was summoned to his post as a symbol of Christians nodding, if not on the window-sill, at least in the back pew.” Like his namesake, Eutyclus II aims at “deflating ecclesiastical pretense, sham and present-day religiosity.” This nom de plume will remain a cover for this ecclesiastical sleuth—to maintain his anonymity, and thus his freedom to poke fun.

## Looking for Islam's Luthers

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Eutyclus II

“Looking for Islam's Luthers” was the title of Nicholas D. Kristof's *New York Times* column a few years ago. He argued that the rigidity, oppression, and violence of Islamic fundamentalism cry out for a Reformation, and all that is waiting is a Muslim Martin Luther to light the fire: “The twenty-first century may become to Islam what the sixteenth was to Christianity, for even in hard-line states like Iran you meet Martin Luthers who are pushing for an Islamic Reformation.”<sup>2</sup>

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=396&issue\\_id=90](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=396&issue_id=90).

2 Nicholas D. Kristof, “Looking for Islam's Luthers,” *New York*

Kristof was not the first *Times* columnist to draw an analogy between the state of militant Islam with the medieval Roman Catholic church. Shortly after 9/11, Thomas Friedman predicted in the *Times* (prematurely, it now appears) that a “drive for an Islamic reformation” was at work in Iran.<sup>3</sup>

According to other voices in the media, Luther has already arrived. Although Mustafa Kemal Ataturk formally disavowed the title, that did not dissuade others from pinning the label on him back in 1923, when he established the secular republic of Turkey. In 2002, Hashem Aghajari pleaded for an “Islamic Protestantism,” which he defined as “a rational, scientific, humanistic Islam. It is a thoughtful and intellectual Islam, and an Islam.”<sup>4</sup> Aghajari, a wounded war hero from the Iran-Iraq war, was rewarded by being sentenced to death in the Islamic Republic of Iran for apostasy. (His sentence was later commuted, and he was released from prison in 2004.)

But no one has been bestowed the label as often as Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss Muslim who has authored the recent *To Be a European Muslim*. Ramadan often waxes Lutheresque in reflecting on Swiss politics, arguing, in effect, that he would rather be ruled by a wise Christian than a foolish Turk.

Of course, these sightings stop at vague resemblance to the sixteenth-century Reformer. As Luther himself watched Suleiman the Magnificent gathering Ottoman forces on the doorstep of Vienna, his views on Islam were vocal and decidedly unecumenical. Indeed, the original version of his popular hymn “Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” contained the petition, “Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk.” Instead, the *Times* and other voices have a greater yearn for a Muslim secularist. What is really needed is someone coura-

*Times*, October 15, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/15/opinion/15kristof.html>.

3 Thomas L. Friedman, “An Islamic Reformation,” *New York Times*, December 4, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/04/opinion/an-islamic-reformation.html>.

4 Quoted in *An Islamic Reformation*, Charles Kurzman and Michaelle Browers, eds. (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004), 1.

geous enough to dismiss the Qur'an as unscientific silliness out of touch with Enlightenment values. It is not the sixteenth century we want to invoke, but the humanism of our more progressive times. Simply put, can Islam come to terms with modernity?

If the Luther metaphor is a Protestant version of early modern history, it should come as no surprise that other pundits find analogies in other quarters of Christendom. *National Review* columnist Jonah Goldberg writes, "What the Muslim world needs is a pope. Large, old institutions such as the Catholic Church have the 'worldliness' to value flexibility and tolerance, and the moral and theological authority to clamp down on those who see compromise as heresy."<sup>5</sup> This suggestion has yet to gain traction within the editorial department of the *Times*.

Skeptics will counter that the desperate search for the elusive Muslim moderate is a feature of Western naiveté that is at least three decades old now. I don't pretend to have the foreign policy expertise to assess that claim. But what fascinates is the frequent allusion to Luther. And it leads me to wonder, can Calvinists join this discussion? That would at first seem implausible. The grim-faced theocrat of Geneva does not work as a convenient metaphor for the secular Western press. And remember that H. L. Mencken, in his deeply appreciative obituary for J. Gresham Machen, referred to Machen as a "follower of the Genevan Muhammad."

Still, there is an "Islamic Calvinism" at work in the Muslim world. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan may not be Islam's Calvin, but James Bratt ends his biography of Abraham Kuyper with the provocative suggestion that a form of Kuyperianism is taking root in Turkey of all places, as Erdogan combines strong Muslim roots with "the separation of mosque and state." His economic and diplomatic success "redounds to the nation's well-being, just as Kuyper proposed for Calvinism in the Netherlands."<sup>6</sup>

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5 Jonah Goldberg, "Now What? Islam Needs a Central Authority—Such as a Pontiff," *USA Today*, April 2, 2011, 23A.

6 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist*, *Christian*

While the West remains mired in economic stagnation, Istanbul's economy is booming, and some have attributed its success to an emerging "Islamic Calvinism." Just as sober, hard working Calvinists, eschewing ostentatious displays of wealth, prompted the revolutionary spirit of Geneva, a similar "Puritan work ethic" is at work in Istanbul and other booming metropolises in Turkey.

The prospects of political and economic freedom in the Muslim world don't mean we should expect to see the Hagia Sophia restored as a place of Christian worship. Still, maybe these Reformation yearnings and alleged sightings, however desperate and far-fetched they may seem, are useful at least as reminders that a two-kingdom social theory may not be such a bad thing after all. Dare we confine it to the Muslim world? ☺

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*Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 382.

# ✦ Servant Reading

## Book Reviews

### Little One Lost

by *Glenda Mathes*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*  
Online March 2013<sup>1</sup>

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

*Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss*, by Glenda Mathes. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2012, 139 pages, \$10.00, paper.

Infertility, miscarriage, still birth, infant death—these are issues which are rarely discussed within the church. Yet they are a reality for some of the members of your congregation. Are you prepared to support those in your congregation who experience these personal tragedies?

A friend of mine, a pastor in a different denomination, learned of the miscarriage of a prominent young couple in his congregation. Their first pregnancy was widely known in the church and the community. They had already picked a name for their little one. So the pastor suggested that they have a funeral. The couple was uncomfortable with this, but agreed to a brief memorial following a regular worship service. The young woman suggested that they open the service up to anyone who wanted to share a similar experience. It was agreed and announced to the congregation.

That next Sunday there were more than the usual faces in the congregation. After the worship service concluded, they took a few minutes for coffee and a snack, and then reconvened for the memorial. Most remained. This memorial began with the appropriate formalities and a focus on the love of God for this young couple. Then it was opened to others to share. More than three hours later, the pastor felt compelled to bring the service to a close. Dozens of women, young and old, had shared their stories. Some were sharing information which had never been heard by anyone except their doctors and their immediate families.

Glenda Mathes shares the stories of eight couples whose experiences cover the broad range of loss surrounding childbirth. Their stories are poignant and come with the ring of authenticity, drawing you in so that you share in their turmoil. Mrs. Mathes has done a wonderful job interviewing these couples and then bringing us their stories in an engaging way. One warning: have a box of tissues nearby, as there will be no dry eyes for those who read these stories with an open heart.

Overwhelming sadness, guilt, shock, fear, questioning, tears, frustration, anger, moral struggle, emotional confusion, coming to the brink of despair, disbelief, a mind-numbing fog, shattered dreams, life-and-death struggles, questioning God's love, spiritual distress, overwhelming helplessness, emptiness, deep and desperate longing, isolation, financial burdens, and sometimes a very dark hour—this is the emotional roller coaster of those who face the loss of their littlest ones. The openness of these couples in sharing their struggles and their deepest emotions is striking and most commendable, providing a service to any couple going through similar experiences and to pastors who would rightly shepherd all of the flock of God.

Glenda Mathes writes from a distinctly Reformed perspective. This is evident from the early chapters, which affirm her strong pro-life stance, to the chapters on covenantal and confessional comfort. There is much comfort from God's Word offered here, and it is carefully presented by one who has wrestled as much with the Scriptures as with the issue of miscarriage and infertility. The

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=353&issue\\_id=83](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=353&issue_id=83).

covenantal character of her theology permeates the entire book and is shared by all the couples whom she has interviewed. It is rare to find a book on healthcare issues of any kind which is so thoroughly Reformed in its perspective.

This is a book which you can share with couples, confident that they will be comforted by the grace of Christ conveyed in God's Word. But this is not the wise counsel she brings to pastors and elders. In a chapter entitled "Compassionate Care" (129–32), which should be required reading for every pastor and elder who seeks to comfort others in times of suffering, she allows the couples to tell us what is really helpful in a pastoral visit. She cautions that it is not always necessary to say something, describing one visit from "a man who didn't say much, ... but simply sat with me and cried." They share another visit where an elder simply prayed with the couple. She cautions about the wrong things to say, and then encourages visitors to become compassionate listeners, affirming the loss, affirming the suffering, being available to the couple, allowing them to share the amount of information they want to reveal, giving them the freedom to express their true feelings, letting them know that you will be available to them when they are ready to talk. Your compassionate presence can be a gentle reminder of God's love. Without saying a word, you remind those who are struggling that "God is in control of every minute detail of ... life." (Nowhere in the chapter does she suggest giving the couple a book to read. It may be helpful to do so with the suggestion that it be read at a later time, when the couple is ready.)

If this review doesn't prompt you to add this short book to your library and read it so that it helps shape your pastor's heart, then go online and read the fine review by the Rev. John W. Mahaffy.<sup>2</sup> His one concern, regarding a counselor quoted in the book on the subject of dealing with anger toward God, should not in any way deter you from benefitting from such a fine book about a subject which is so rarely addressed.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Mahaffy, "Living with Early Infant Loss," *New Horizons*, 34, no. 3 (Mar. 2013): 12–13.

Many who endure suffering experience feelings of anger toward God. You may have experienced these difficult feelings yourself, if you are willing to admit it. The couples interviewed for this book were no exceptions. They felt the broad range of emotions, including anger and doubt; yet God brought each through their struggle to a new and, I dare say, more mature faith in him and in his sovereign grace. One of the women, Stephanie, initially "questioned God's love," saying "We had prayed for a healthy baby, why [has] God chosen to answer us with a dead baby?" (45). Near the conclusion of the book, Stephanie brings perhaps the greatest comfort for hurting couples: "God is with you in this tremendous pain, you are not alone. Rest in the sovereignty of God and His love and care for His own. He will restore your soul and fill the void in your life with Himself" (132). How she had grown!

Many couples in your congregation never experience the pain and suffering described in this book. They conceive and bear covenant children who are then baptized and grow up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. But a few couples know the distress which is so ably described by Glenda Mathes. Pastoral care for these couples will require the sensitivity and compassion which Glenda and the couples she interviewed provide us in these pages. ☺

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# Lost in Transition

by Christian Smith with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2013<sup>1</sup>

by T. David Gordon

*Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, by Christian Smith with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. New York: Oxford, 2011, 284 pages, \$27.95.

Two of Christian Smith's previous volumes have been reviewed here in *Ordained Servant*.<sup>2</sup> Smith, a sociologist and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Notre Dame, has emerged as one of the premier students of adolescents and "emerging adults," eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, though the focus of this volume is on the eighteen- to twenty-three-year-old age range. The two previous volumes addressed the religious/spiritual character of young people; this volume deals with more general realities. In all three, Smith et al. join others<sup>3</sup> in noting the phenomenon of delayed adulthood; adults "emerge" later than they once did, and most marry at about five years later than they did just a generation ago (from 1960 to 2006, women's marital age went from 20.3 years to 25.9, men's from 22.8 to 27.5).

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=358&issue\\_id=84](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=358&issue_id=84).

2 *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, by Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), reviewed by Gregory Reynolds in OS 16 (2007): 136–39; and *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, with Patricia Snell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), reviewed by John Muether in OS 20 (2011): 100–103.

3 E.g., Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Emerging adulthood is at heart about postponing settling down into real adulthood....

Emerging adulthood as a social fact means not making commitments, not putting down roots, not setting a definite course for the long term. (231)

This volume is not alarmist, nor does it deny the good traits of this demographic group:

And many emerging adults we have studied are interesting, creative, and sometimes very impressive people. But the happy part of emerging adulthood is already well documented and only part of the story. There is a dark side as well ... the truth we must report is that underneath all of that is for many a dark underbelly of disappointment, grief, confusion, sometimes addiction. (3, 228)

Methodologically, Smith et al. employ what they call "sociological imagination," an approach that

seeks to understand the *personal experience of individual people*, on the one hand, and *larger social and cultural trends, forces, and powers*, on the other, by *explaining each in terms of the other*. (4, emphases original)

The book is the result of surveys that were conducted first with 3,290 individuals aged thirteen to seventeen (followed by personal interviews with 267 of them) in 2001, and follow-up surveys and interviews with the same individuals (insofar as possible) in 2007–2008. Based on their surveys and interviews, the authors are persuaded that "to be in one's twenties today is not the same experience as it was decades ago" (227). Values-wise, Smith et al. deny that such a study can be value-free, so they name five "goods" that inform their evaluation of emerging adults, to each of which a chapter is devoted:

1. To be able to think coherently about moral beliefs and problems.
2. To have values that transcend material acquisition.
3. To avoid routine intoxication.

4. To have healthy sexual relations.
5. To be aware of the broader social, cultural, institutional, and political world.

The “dark side” of emerging adults in America is that these five goods are remarkably lacking, and the authors believe that some of these areas “without exaggeration, are matters of life and death” (17). Many readers (such as myself) will not be at all surprised to learn that the first, third, and fourth are significant issues for emerging adults, but I was both surprised and chagrined by the second and fifth categories.

As a baby boomer myself, reared in the sixties and educated at college in the mid-seventies, I recall my generation’s fairly self-conscious suspicion of “the system,” which certainly included suspicion of the economic/commercial system. Though many of the ideals championed by young people in our generation (free love, communalism, seeking “enlightenment” via drugs) may have been unwise or immoral, they were at least ideals, and “the good life” was self-consciously sought outside of mere material/consumerist well-being. If anything, our parents regarded us as too idealist, as too unconcerned with the pragmatic realities of material well-being. Current emerging adults are the mirror opposite; their primary (and, in some cases, only) goal in life is materialist/consumer well-being:

Few emerging adults expressed concerns about the potential limits or dilemmas involved in a lifestyle devoted to boundless material consumption. Most are either positive or neutral about mass consumer materialism. Only a few have reservations or doubts. (71)

While each of the major chapters in the book is disturbing, this one (“Captive to Consumerism”) was surprisingly so, and bleak at that.

Equally surprising was the fifth chapter, “Civic and Political Disengagement.” Regarding their engagement with the broader culture and its institutions around them, the survey revealed six categories: apathetic (27%), marginally political (27%), distrustful (19%), uninformed (13%), dis-

empowered (10%), and genuinely political (4%). These figures are even more disturbing when one considers how generously “marginally political” was defined: “In most instances, it appears that their definition of being ‘involved’ mostly means watching the news on television or reading the paper” (206). Only 4 percent of emerging adults are “genuinely political,” or interested in the broader public beyond their circle of friends or family. Contrast this with our 1970s protests, sit-ins, bra-burning, flag-burning, etc., and the difference is staggering.

The more predictable chapters (moral confusion, routine intoxication, sexuality) are not more pleasant for being more predictable. Though the chapters are written with the necessary clinical detachment required of sociologists, for the reader they are nonetheless bleak and often heart-breaking. Beneath all the frenetic texting, partying, and mall-hopping is a disturbing amount of pain, disappointment, and emptiness.

Not surprisingly, these sociologists describe six “macrosocial” changes (13–15) in the last several decades that have retarded the emergence of adulthood and contributed to the near-absence of the five goods noted above:

1. The dramatic growth of higher education.
2. The delay of marriage.
3. Changes in the global economy that undermine stable, lifelong careers.
4. Parental support continues well into the twenties.
5. Widespread and reliable birth control technologies have disconnected human sexuality from procreation in the minds of many.
6. The powerful influence of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking.

There may be other cultural changes at work here also; the authors expressly deny that their work is (or could be) entirely comprehensive: “We do not pretend to have it all figured out, and we certainly are not prophets or reformers” (231). When they say, “One of the striking features of emerging adulthood is how structurally disconnected most emerging adults are from older



adults” (234), I immediately thought of digital media, for instance, because, as Mark Bauerlein has demonstrated, the digital media have effectively “ghetto-ized” adolescents.<sup>4</sup> I have observed the same trend anecdotally, as someone who has been involved in higher education for almost thirty years. I could not agree more with Smith:

Most emerging adults live this crucial decade of their life surrounded mostly by their peers—people who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do. It is sociologically a very odd way to help young people come of age, to learn how to be responsible, capable, mature adults. (234)

The five chapters that constitute this work disclose a disturbingly “dark side” of emerging adulthood. As a parent of two emerging adults (and a college professor who deals with them daily), I experienced many sharp pangs of sympathetic pain as I read about how bleak their generation’s experience and outlook actually is. As a Christian, I was grateful at how directly, almost prophetically, the authors challenged the hegemony of mass consumer capitalism in our culture, a force that parasitically feeds off of American individualism while also exerting its own tyranny, so that

one form of external authority (“the obligations of town, church, extended family, and conventional morality”) has been displaced by another, much more insidious and controlling external authority—all done in the name of individual self-determination. (235)

While this book is interesting and illuminating to anyone interested in contemporary American culture, it is nearly imperative reading for educators, parents, and churchmen (especially those who work with youth). We have not (as a culture) served emerging adults well; but we can begin to repair some of the damage by understanding them now, in order to serve them later. Good diagno-

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<sup>4</sup> *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).

sis always precedes good treatment; if we desire to serve emerging adults well, we will find such diagnosis here. ©

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## 7 Toxic Ideas Polluting Your Mind

by Anthony Selvaggio

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2013<sup>1</sup>

by David A. Booth

*7 Toxic Ideas Polluting Your Mind*, by Anthony Selvaggio. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011, 126 pages, \$11.99.

God cares about our minds and calls us to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Yet, while Christ is renewing our minds with his Word, the world is polluting our thinking through words and ideas of its own. What makes these worldly ideas so dangerous is that they are frequently taken for granted. Anthony Selvaggio, an RPCNA minister and visiting professor at Ottawa Theological Hall, wants to put an end to that. He has written this short book to expose the toxic ideas of our culture to the light of God’s Word. The seven toxic ideas that he examines are technopoly, neophilia (an inordinate love for what is new and a disregard for history and tradition), egalitarianism,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=359&issue\\_id=84](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=359&issue_id=84).

individualism, materialism, consumerism, and relativism.

Selvaggio writes in an engaging manner and peppers the text with apt quotations and illustrations. The book rightly maintains that the root of worldliness is in our minds and emotions:

While external behavior practices do matter, the real battle to avoid worldliness occurs internally, in our hearts and minds. While we have been consumed with external matters, worldliness has gained a foothold in our thought processes. Satan has been very successful in getting us to *think* like the world. (11)

The chapters on technopoly and consumerism are particularly strong, and all of the topics addressed are worthy of careful consideration. Every congregation would benefit from grappling with the subject matter of this book.

Regretfully this work bears the marks of being hastily written and contains occasional, presumably unintentional, theological lapses. For example, Selvaggio asserts that “our present earthly bodies are not as important as our souls because they have different destinies” (86). By contrast, historic Christianity confesses the resurrection and glorification of the body rather than its disposal and replacement. Our bodies and souls share identical ultimate destinies. This book also reflects an eighth toxic idea which is polluting our minds: the belief that complex subjects can be treated in ever shorter and simpler ways. Trying to address topics like neophilia or egalitarianism in less than ten minutes may comfort the already convinced, but it is unlikely to bring about meaningful change in anyone’s thought or behavior. Furthermore, this approach easily moves from simple to simplistic with the result that opposing viewpoints are distorted beyond recognition. For example, Selvaggio asserts that “egalitarians genuflect before the idol of equality. For them, equality is all that matters, even if equality must be enforced by the iron fist of the state” (53–54). While that may describe some egalitarians, it is difficult to imagine prominent Christian egalitarians, such as Gordon Fee, F.F.

Bruce, and Roger Nicole, being so sanguine about “the iron fist of the state.” Due to these shortcomings, it is difficult to commend this book as one to be handed out or placed on a literature table in the back of the church.

In spite of the above reservations, this book provides an excellent framework to help a minister or elder teach through these well chosen topics. It would be extraordinarily time consuming and utterly unnecessary to prepare a series on these topics from scratch simply because this tool is less than perfect. It would be even worse for a congregation to leave these topics unexamined while waiting for a better book on the subject to come along. The pastor or elder who lightly edits the contents of this book and then supplements that with the Larger Catechism’s teaching on the Ten Commandments will bring great blessing to those he teaches. ☺

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## Sacred Bond

by Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online May 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Andy Wilson

*Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explored*, by Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele. Grandville, MI:

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=364&issue\\_id=85](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=364&issue_id=85).

Reformed Fellowship, 2012, 168 pages, \$16.00, paper.

One of the great benefits of covenant theology is that it helps us to see the unity of Scripture while also giving due attention to its remarkable variety. This dual benefit is demonstrated throughout the pages of *Sacred Bond*, an introductory-level text on covenant theology by ministers Michael Brown (URCNA) and Zach Keele (OPC). The book is both clear and well organized, making it ideal for use in an adult Sunday school class or small group study. *Sacred Bond* contains chapters on eight biblical covenants: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. Each chapter follows the same basic outline, with the following sections: (1) a brief theological description of the covenant under discussion, (2) an examination of the biblical evidence for that covenant, (3) an explanation of how that covenant has been expressed by Reformed confessions and theologians, and (4) a consideration of how this covenant is relevant for the Christian life.

After an introductory chapter in which the concept of covenant is defined, the authors focus upon the three overarching covenants that are at the heart of covenant theology: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. In these chapters, Brown and Keele carefully examine the key biblical texts that led the church to formulate these overarching covenants. This is extremely helpful, because it is sometimes argued that the Reformed schema of covenant theology is artificially imposed upon the Bible. For example, one biblical scholar contends that

although “Reformed” or “covenant” theology has correctly underlined the centrality of the covenant concept in biblical theology, it has tended to go beyond the exegetical evidence. The primary example of this tendency is the introduction into the discussion of non-biblical terminology and ideas (e.g., covenants of redemption, creation, works, and grace). Such

hypothetical covenants are without solid exegetical support, and primarily serve to bolster the unnecessary premise that all God’s actions must be understood within a covenantal framework.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with this kind of argument is that it fails to see the importance of the principle of “good and necessary consequence” (WCF 1.6) in the formulation of biblical doctrine. Not all of the doctrines revealed in the Scriptures are set forth explicitly in the Scriptures. Some need to be inferred and pieced together from a number of passages, as with doctrines like the Trinity or infant baptism. The same is true when it comes to covenant theology. The writers of *Sacred Bond* convincingly argue that the Bible needs to be understood through the lens of covenant because it is built on a covenantal framework. Covenant theology is not a matter of trying to make all of God’s actions fit within a man-made framework. On the contrary, it is necessary because “covenant is the very fabric of Scripture. It is God’s chosen framework for the Bible” (11).

In the remainder of the book, Brown and Keele explain the unique aspects of the individual biblical covenants while also showing how they relate to the overarching covenants that summarize the plan of redemption. The chapter on the Noahic covenant explains that it is a nonredemptive, common grace covenant with all creation that provides the stage upon which the drama of redemption is carried out. The chapter on the Davidic covenant explains how it connects the conditions that were laid down in the earlier Mosaic covenant with the promise of a King who will fulfill those conditions on behalf of God’s people. And the chapter on the new covenant explains that this covenant is new in relation to the Mosaic covenant, with which it is contrasted in Jeremiah 31:31–32: “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the

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2 P.R. Williamson, “Covenant,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D.A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 420.

covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke.” In other words, the newness of the new covenant centers upon the fact that it is a covenant of promise rather than a covenant of law (137).

This relates to a key emphasis in *Sacred Bond*: the significance of the distinction between the unconditional and conditional elements in the various biblical covenants. Not all biblical covenants are gracious in nature. While it is certainly true that God’s dealings with man before the fall were completely unmerited on man’s part and free of any obligation on God’s part, the covenant of works promised God’s blessings to man if he fulfilled the condition of perfect performance of what God commanded. The operative principle was not grace but merit. By way of contrast, the distinguishing feature of the covenant of grace is that it has God bestowing his blessings upon those who have only merited his wrath and curse.

This distinction is also seen in Brown and Keele’s treatment of the Mosaic covenant, which they understand to be in one sense a “republication” of the covenant of works. Because the Mosaic covenant made Israel’s tenure in the Promised Land dependent upon their performance of the covenant stipulations, it served as a typological picture that God set up to demonstrate the futility of trying to obtain his blessings through the covenant of works. This is how the Mosaic covenant led God’s people to Christ. It is important to clarify that Brown and Keele are not saying that the Mosaic covenant taught that salvation could be obtained on the basis of works. The Mosaic covenant was ultimately an administration of the covenant of grace, but it also had a works principle. Brown and Keele explain this by saying that the Mosaic covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace in its *broad* sense and an administration of the covenant of works in a *narrow* sense. They write:

The means by which God led Israel to Christ was through his demands of obedience to the terms of the covenant upon which physi-

cal blessings or curses were received.... The Mosaic covenant is God’s law covenant with Israel, wherein he graciously leads them to Christ by showing them the perfect righteousness that only Christ could fulfill to redeem sinners. (103, 106)

While not everyone who embraces covenant theology is comfortable with the notion of republication, there is no getting around the fact that the Mosaic covenant had a conditional element that stands in contrast to the unilateral promise found in the earlier Abrahamic covenant, a contrast that Paul sees as extremely significant in Galatians 3 and 4. It should also be noted that republication is consistent with the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (see WCF 19.1–2) and that many Reformed theologians have held to some version of republication. John Owen said that the Mosaic covenant “is no other but the covenant of works revived” (111). And Robert Shaw concluded that “the law, therefore, was published at Sinai as a covenant of works in subservience to the covenant of grace.”<sup>3</sup>

*Sacred Bond* is made even more useful by the inclusion of study/discussion questions at the end of each chapter, a glossary of key terms, and a Scripture index. I cannot think of anything negative to say about this book, except that it might have enjoyed a broader readership if it had been published by a better-known publisher. That being said, thanks are due to Reformed Fellowship for giving us such a fine introduction to covenant theology. ☺

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3 Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus), 256.

# The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* May 2013<sup>1</sup>

by Pam Malkus

*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*, by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2012, 154 pages, \$12.00, paper.

A little more than ten years ago, Dr. Rosaria Butterfield was a tenured English professor and head of the women's studies program at Syracuse University. She was a leader in the lesbian and gay communities and an articulate spokesperson for their causes. Ken Smith is a grandfather to several children and pastor of the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanter). How and why would they ever meet? Only the Lord knew and planned it! My husband and I know Ken and Floy Smith, and if we had been asked to comment on the title of Rosaria's autobiography, we might have changed the subtitle to "Converted via an Unlikely Witness."

Rosaria tells the reader her conversion was not the stuff of "church testimonies"—she was happy and a successful leader of others in her alternate lifestyle. She was not feeling a desperate need or looking for change. In fact, her editorial in the local newspaper about the hypocrisy and awful verbiage of the evangelical right was the mechanism that God used to draw the local pastor to send a letter to her with a gentle offer for "clarifying discussion" face-to-face.

She threw away the expected letters of evangelical vitriol and others that were "atta girls" by gay correspondents generated by her editorial. Pastor Smith's reply, however, was different. It was characterized by a peaceful tone and a spirit of compassion and love. She couldn't throw it away, and it stared at her from her desk top for weeks. Finally, her curiosity about him and his letter drove her to contact him. He invited her to his home for dinner and further discussion with his wife as well. She *finally* came ... and that was the first of many meetings. The rest of her book is about her "train wreck" conversion (like the apostle Paul's) and the joy, surprise, and pain that proceeded from that conversion.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways" (Isa. 55:9), the Lord tells us. No church program was involved in the conversion and discipleship of this very highly visible personality in Syracuse, New York. It was only an alert and compassionate pastor and his wife, along with other similar members of his congregation who were used mightily—and, as Rosaria writes, "gratefully"—in her new life.

She became an astute observer of "regular church life" and an articulate and at times humorous commentator on her own stumblings and bumbings in the Christian "walk." She is now a pastor's wife with a surprising and amazing family of her own, no biological children among them.

Many of her "secret thoughts" which followed conversion were theological queries and meditations. One of these concerned what she learned about repentance.

I learned ... that repentance requires greater intimacy with God than with our sin.... Repentance requires that we draw near to Jesus, no matter what.... And for many of us, intimacy with anything is a terrifying prospect.

During one sermon, Ken pointed to John 7:17 ... 'If anyone is willing to do God's will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from myself.'... Obedience comes before understanding. I wanted to understand. But did I actually will to do his

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=365&issue\\_id=85](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=365&issue_id=85).

will? (21–22)

As she continued to read the Bible, she made further discoveries:

These passages also convicted me that homosexuality—like all sin—is symptomatic and not causal—that is, it tells us where hearts have been, not who we inherently are or what we are destined to become.

These passages forced me to see pride and not sexual orientation as the root sin. In turn, this shaped the way that I reflected on my whole life, in the context of the word of God. (32)

A final sample of her secret thoughts:

Biblical orthodoxy can offer real compassion, because in our struggle against sin, we cannot undermine God’s power to change lives.

Healing comes through God’s work ... How did the Lord heal me? The way that he always heals: the word of God got to be bigger inside me than I. My natural inclination was to resist, so like a reflex, I did this. God’s people surrounded me. Not to manipulate. Not to badger. But to love and to listen and to watch and to pray. And eventually instead of resisting, I surrendered. (24–25)

Read her story, and you won’t be sorry. You may even find that it will enrich your own story! ©

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## The Church

by *Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark E. Dever*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online June–July 2013<sup>1</sup>

by **John R. Muether**

*The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, by Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken, and Mark E. Dever. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004, xi +146 pages, \$9.99, paper.

Awash as we are with books that (1) claim the church today is in crisis and (2) prescribe the means for its reinvention, it is easy to overlook this modest collection of essays. Based on addresses delivered at a 2003 meeting of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, this review of the attributes of the church, as confessed in the Nicene Creed, is well suited for a short adult Sunday school series.

The authors concede that the contemporary church, by schisms rent asunder and by heresies distressed, rarely shines in its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. But Philip Ryken reminds us that to confess that “we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” is to acknowledge that the church and her attributes are articles of faith. Often defying empirical evidence, unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are at once gifts with which the Spirit of Christ has endowed the church and goals to which we are called to aspire.

*Ordained Servant* readers might be tempted to dismiss the treatment on the catholicity of the church, because it comes from a Baptist contributor, Mark Dever, who pastors Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. But they should resist that temptation. Dever is that rare breed of “high church” Baptist (in the best sense of that

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=370&issue\\_id=86](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=370&issue_id=86).

term), and many Presbyterians would be better Presbyterians if they read more from his pen. Here he demonstrates that catholicity is a rich and robust term; “universal” does not serve as an adequate synonym. (This suggests that “catholic church” should replace “global church” in our vocabulary.) Dever writes that catholicity means that “each Christian has concern for all other Christians elsewhere.” This claim has more significance than we realize. Concern for other Christians extends to *reforming* them, and so commending the Reformed faith is an act of catholicity. Proclaiming the doctrines of sovereign grace from our pulpits, honoring the sanctity of the Lord’s Day, catechizing our children in the Reformed faith—in these and other practices we are witnessing both to a watching world and to other Christians. This is not sectarian isolationism; it is Reformed catholicity.

A book of this size will inevitably frustrate a reader who wants to see themes further developed. I wished for greater reflection on the value of church discipline in reinforcing the attributes of the church. And Phillips’s plea for an “evangelical unity” based on unspecified “essentials” seems to diminish the function of confessions in defining our unity. Still the authors write with clarity and succinctness, as, for example, in drawing helpful distinctions between catholic and *Roman Catholic* (the latter literally being a contradiction in terms) and in explaining why apostolicity demands neither apostolic succession nor the continuation of apostolic gifts. This refresher course serves to remind us why we can and should continue to recite the Nicene Creed in public worship.

In the framing of the book, the four attributes receive a chapter apiece, sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion. This is fitting, as it allows Christ to have the first and last word in this discussion of the church. In the introduction, Phillips ties Christ’s “great promise” (“I will build my church”) to the “great principle” of the church that immediately follows in Matthew 16: “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (v. 21). Here is an insight

that is universally absent in new recipes for the church: the path for the church is the way of the cross. In its weakness it proclaims the power of God unto salvation, and in its suffering the church maintains its one, holy, catholic, and apostolic witness. ☺

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## God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment

by *James M. Hamilton, Jr.*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* Online June-July 2013<sup>1</sup>

by **David A. Booth**

*God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, by James M. Hamilton, Jr. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, 640 pages, \$40.00.

The desire to see the Bible as a unified whole, where Scripture is taken on its own terms, has produced a flowering of biblical theology over the past century. Regretfully, many of these theologies should carry warning labels regarding how they subvert particular biblical truths, ignore the history of theological reflection, or require formal theological education in order for the reader to profit from engaging them. What is needed is a biblical theology that is reliable, robust, committed to the

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=371&issue\\_id=86](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=371&issue_id=86).

absolute authority of God's word, and accessible to nonspecialists. James M. Hamilton Jr., associate professor of biblical theology at the Southern Baptist Seminary, has given us just such a book.

The conviction that God is the author of both history and Scripture naturally leads us to search out the Bible's plot line. As Professor Hamilton puts it, "If the Bible tells a coherent story, it is valid to explore what that story's main point is" (39). So what is the Bible's main point? This apparently simple question has received a bewildering variety of proposed answers, each of which has generally been found wanting. The failure of so many proposals to attain broad acceptance has led some scholars to suggest that we search for a cluster of central themes in Scripture rather than a solitary unifying center. Nevertheless, James Hamilton is unwilling to give up the quest. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* is Hamilton's attempt to both identify the central plotline of the Bible and to demonstrate how this central point unifies the message of God's Word.

The Bible-believing, Reformed tradition has placed great emphasis on both the glory of God and, particularly over the last generation, understanding Scripture in terms of the history of redemption. Orthodox Presbyterians will therefore naturally appreciate how Professor Hamilton combines these two emphases in crafting his proposed center, which is also the title of the book, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. Yet, how can we know whether this is a central theme or *the* central theme of God's word? Professor Hamilton reasonably suggests "that all the Bible's themes flow from, exposit, and feed back into the center of biblical theology" (53). He then skillfully walks the reader through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation demonstrating "that God's glory in salvation through judgment is the *heart* of the Bible, the idea being that it is the muscle that pumps life-giving blood to the whole body" (556). Among this engaging book's many strengths are its clarity, sober exegesis, cogent reasoning, helpful use of tables, and thoughtful application of the truths it is expounding to the life of the local church. The book concludes with two short but valuable

chapters. The second to last chapter involves an interaction with objections to the book's thesis raised by I. Howard Marshall and Ben Witherington. The final chapter addresses how the book's thesis impacts ministry in the local church. Hopefully future works of theology will follow this example.

Professor Hamilton's stated aim was "to allow the biblical text to set the agenda for the contents of this book" (553). I believe that he has largely succeeded in this quest, but I do have a few reservations. If "the biblical text set the agenda for the contents of the book," why does it spend as much time discussing 1 Peter as it does discussing Job, Ezra, and Nehemiah combined, even though the latter books are approximately fifteen times larger? In a similar vein, given that the primary content of our Lord's own preaching was the "kingdom of God," Hamilton gives this theme less attention than it seems to merit. Perhaps the book's thesis could be improved by balancing its emphasis on God glorifying himself through acts of judgment and rescue with God glorifying himself through the consequences of these acts. Such an approach might more fully explain the amount of Scripture dedicated to wisdom, moral law, sanctification, and the church as God's family. Professor Hamilton recognizes that this book is not the final word on biblical theology (558). Those who wish to appropriate and extend his proposal should find it fruitful to integrate Hamilton's insights with those of Meredith Kline and Greg Beale.

We should not allow this book's failure to provide the definitive grand theory of biblical theology to blind us to its many admirable qualities. Most Christians who pick up this work simply want help understanding the Bible better. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* is an excellent tool to help with that quest. This is far and away the best organized and clearest of all the biblical theologies that I have read. While lacking the profundity of Greg Beale's massive *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, this book is dramatically more accessible to those who lack seminary training. Early in the book Professor Hamilton tells us what he hopes this work will accomplish: "The goal is not a return to an imaginary golden age but to help



people know God” (38). Professor Hamilton is entirely successful in achieving this lofty goal. The admirable clarity and robust orthodoxy of this book makes it my top choice in biblical theologies for thoughtful laypeople and for those beginning formal training in biblical studies. Highly recommended. ⑤

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## In Search of the City on a Hill

by *Richard M. Gamble*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2013<sup>1</sup>

by **Darryl G. Hart**

*In Search of the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth*, by Richard M. Gamble. New York: Continuum International, 2012, 224 pages, \$24.95.

Richard M. Gamble’s latest book, *In Search of the City on a Hill*, is an odd one to recommend to church audiences where titles in theology, practical Christian living, and biblical studies are most popular. Gamble’s book is both an example of intellectual history in which he follows the history of an idea—in this case, “city on a hill”—and a version of political history that examines the construction of American exceptionalism—the notion that

the United States has a unique mission in world history. Although this book does not even qualify as church history, it is essential reading for American believers precisely because of the overlap between the Bible’s popularity with Americans and the mythology of American nationalism. Indeed, one of the specters that haunts this superb book is the way that U.S. Christians allowed presidents and statesmen to transform a biblical metaphor into a tagline for American greatness. A remarkable aspect of this transformation is that few if any believers objected to the misappropriation. Instead, most Christians welcomed the exchange, fully convinced, in the lines of “God Bless America,” that God had shown his face on their nation.

Gamble’s aim is to explain how Jesus’s words from the Sermon on the Mount entered American political discourse and became so common that even a British Prime Minister (Gordon Brown) as recently as 2009 would tell the United States Congress that the world looked to Washington, D.C., “as a ‘shining city upon the hill,’ lighting up the whole of the world” (1). Gamble’s story is, in effect, “the unmaking of a biblical metaphor and the making of a national myth” (5). As it turns out, the appropriation of Christ’s words had a lot more to do with the United States’ battle with Communism during the Cold War than the pious hopes of either the original European settlers in North America or the mixed religious motives of the American Founders.

The classic invocation of the “city on a hill” for Americans was, of course, John Winthrop’s “Model of Christian Charity,” the words that in 1630 inspired the Puritans who settled in Massachusetts Bay. When originally written, as Gamble shows, little distinguished Winthrop’s exhortation to mercy and charity from a host of addresses and sermons from other Puritan leaders. It was simply an exposition of biblical standards for God’s kingdom that should inform the community the New England Puritans planned to establish—nothing more—no dreams of an empire, military might, or even constitutional provisions for the state. The “Model” was a churchly document that only made sense in the context of a people who believed what

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=376&issue\\_id=87](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=376&issue_id=87).

the Puritans believed. In fact, Winthrop's use of Matthew 5:14 came only in passing toward the end of the discourse when he compared the Puritan's project to the Israelites' crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. As such, Winthrop, following the example of Moses, reminded the Puritans of the terms of the covenant—what would happen if they obeyed, and the consequences of disobedience. The “city on a hill” was not a call to national greatness, but a warning about what would become of the Puritans' endeavor if they failed. Gamble supplies useful contexts for how the “city on a hill” was interpreted through church history and among Puritans, with some debate over whether any modern society could claim the status of the Old Testament Israel. Either way, Winthrop's original “Model,” the urtext of American identity, was hardly what it later became in the hands of American nationalists and statesmen.

For almost two centuries, the “city on a hill” was a metaphor about which only preachers wrote. Until 1838, when Winthrop's manuscript was first published, the only traces of commentary about the metaphor's meaning came in discussions about the place of the New World in the plan of redemption. (Gamble features Jonathan Edwards's sermons about New England as the New Israel, for instance.) But even when antiquarians discovered Winthrop's manuscript, “No scholar or statesman left any record of experiencing such an ‘aha!’ moment when he saw the Model in print” (92). What did happen, as Gamble shows, is that throughout the nineteenth century, the Puritans emerged as the “founders” of the United States (even if 150 years separated the “Model” and the Declaration of Independence), with Winthrop emerging as the model for later statesmen. Older notions of the United States as a nation with a special relationship to God also prevailed and secularized into a full-blooded nationalism. But the image of “city on a hill” remained untapped.

This would change in 1960 after a turbulent set of decades that firmly bequeathed to the United States, now the leader of the free world, a global footprint. Perry Miller, a Harvard University professor, who almost single-handedly refurbished the

image of Puritanism, gave careful readings to Winthrop's “Model” and recognized the power of the “city on a hill” as a metaphor for national identity and mission. Then in 1961, president-elect John F. Kennedy, a Harvard graduate, and the nation's first (and so far only) Roman Catholic president, gave an address to the General Court of Massachusetts that became known as his “City on a Hill Speech.” Kennedy described Americans as “beacon lights for other nations.” “We do not imitate—for we are a model to others,” he added. He also invoked Winthrop explicitly and quoted directly from the first governor of Massachusetts' talk—“we shall be as a city upon a hill—the eyes of all people are upon us” (135).

From there, a metaphor first used by Jesus to describe the church became a phrase associated almost exclusively with the United States and its superpower status. Ronald Reagan virtually turned the “city on a hill” into a brand by adding “shining” to it. He first used the metaphor in 1969 as governor of California and continued to employ it at pivotal times in his career. While for Kennedy “the city” had meant good government and public service, for Reagan it signified the American ideals of economic and religious freedom and the nation's global opposition to tyranny (read: Communism). The Gipper used it so frequently and successfully that Democrats felt compelled to take it back. Mario Cuomo gave a stirring speech at the Democratic Convention in 1984 that questioned whether all Americans had access to the “shining city.” Michael Dukakis, the Democratic nominee for president in 1988, also invoked Winthrop. By that point, Gamble argues, “city on a hill” had become as inseparable from American identity as the Stars and Stripes, the Battle Hymn of the Republic, and the Statue of Liberty. The number of presidential candidates who have used the metaphor grows: Bill Clinton, John Kerry, George W. Bush, and, most recently and vociferously, Sarah Palin.

Christians who worry about conflating faith and patriotism will likely find this narrative disturbing. More harrowing is the silence from conservative American Protestants, who generally voted

for Reagan and took inspiration from his speeches and never objected to such a crass misrepresentation of either Winthrop or Jesus Christ. But Gamble is not silent. He argues that Christians should have guarded their metaphor vigilantly. But they did not. Instead, Christians wrangle over which “national values the politicized city should stand for and miss the fact that they have lost their metaphor” (179). They miss that “Jesus’ city on a hill was never the American, or any nation’s, mission in the first place” (180). But thanks to the popularity of the metaphor, the American nation has assumed “the calling of the apostles” and “the Body of Christ” (181). To illustrate how scary this is, Gamble writes the following:

In Christian theology, it is simply not true that America is the city on a hill, not now, not ever. To seek to protect America from this falsehood is not to do her any dishonour. Quite the opposite. It spares her from delusion. Proper love refuses to cooperate with the effort to divinize America. We would not indulge any friend’s fantasy that he is the Messiah. We would get him the help he needs.... Likewise, it would be healthy for America to see itself—and if that goal is too ambitious, then for Christians in America to see their nation—as part of the kingdom of this world, called in the Providence of God to fulfill its earthly purpose but not called to be the Saviour of the World. (183)

Insights like these are what turn a history of national mission and political discourse into a must read for anyone who wants to teach and faithfully defend God’s Word. Far too often Christians in the United States have let partisan politics obscure their higher commitment to Scripture. That is why evangelical Protestants, for instance, overwhelmingly supported Republican candidates who, despite the misuse of biblical language, appeared to be defending traditional American ideals. Of course, as Gamble shows, those ideals were not Jesus’s or Winthrop’s. But patriotism proved to be a more forceful influence than Scripture’s own teaching. That is a lesson, no matter how difficult,

that conservative Protestants who consider themselves political conservatives need to learn. ©

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## Practically Human

*edited by Gary Schmidt and Matthew Walkout*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2013<sup>1</sup>

**by Leland Ryken**

*Practically Human: College Professors Speak from the Heart of Humanities Education*, edited by Gary Schmidt and Matthew Walkout. Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 2012, 171 pages, \$12.00.

The moment I opened this book and saw the table of contents I felt an adrenaline surge. It was obvious that the book belongs to the same genre as a Festschrift that twenty-five of my Wheaton College colleagues authored on the occasion of my retirement in the spring of 2012. That genre is a book of essays written by professors at the same college commending the value of their respective disciplines and academic passions to college students. The goal is to make a Christian liberal arts education be all that it can be for students, and in fact to make the Christian public see a liberal arts education as sufficiently valuable as a foundation for life that it becomes the preferred choice.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=375&issue\\_id=87](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=375&issue_id=87).

The first stroke of genius is the book's title. *Practically Human* plays off the common cliché about something being “practically” something, with the word *practically* carrying the force of “nearly” or “almost.” In this case, “practically” reverses that connotation and means “having practical usefulness.” This is a double comment about the book. On the one hand, the authors make the case for the humanities being practical and useful. But it is also a comment on the envisioned audience for the book. In a preface entitled “About this Book,” the editors delineate a broad range of potential readers, including college students, parents, guidance counselors of youth groups and high schools, and high school teachers.

The word *human* in the main title signals that the focus of the book is the academic disciplines that have traditionally been known as the humanities. The subtitle tells us that the authors have written as experts immersed in their respective disciplines, but also that they have written “from the heart,” that is, about their respective intellectual and professional passions.

The context for the book is highlighted in the editors' introduction. That context is our culture's obsession with utilitarian goals for education and anxiety about whether a liberal arts education is likely to lead to a satisfying career. From start to finish, this book has an apologetic slant as the authors make a case for the importance of the humanities in their constituent disciplines. This apologetic slant lends a nice unity to the book and validates the thesis that the humanities are useful, partly because they are humanizing.

Nothing delights me more as an academician than to see one or two professors mobilize members of their own faculty to produce a book of essays that showcases the intellectual excellence of their college. Part of my gratification stems from the excitement that I sense about the communal nature of an academic community. But I am also gratified to see how projects like this one elicit the best from the contributors. Everything in *Practically Human* is well thought out, aptly stated, and marshaled in a persuasive direction. I cannot imagine the topics being handled more expertly than

they are in this anthology of essays. In keeping with the practical aim of the book and the envisioned audience, the essays are eminently readable.

The academic disciplines that receive their defense in this book are as follows: philosophy, music, history, art, literature, writing, rhetorical studies (speech), foreign languages, classics (ancient texts), and biblical studies. I was gratified to see that the book is dedicated to Calvin College literature professor Clarence Walhout, my contemporary, with whom I enjoyed interactions early in my career and with whom I once coedited a book. ©

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

## Galatians for You

by Timothy Keller

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*  
Online August-September 2013<sup>1</sup>

by T. David Gordon

*Galatians for You*, by Timothy Keller. Purcellville VA: The Good Book Company, 2013, 199 pages, \$22.99.

Full Disclosure: candor requires me to state two things to the reader of this review. First, Tim Keller is an old friend whom I've known for thirty years.

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=377&issue\\_id=87](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=377&issue_id=87).

It would be difficult for me to find fault with him, even if he were ever to commit one. Second, I just recently finished writing a five-hundred-page monograph on the reasoning in Galatians 3 and 4, in which I argue (as I have argued for thirty years in print and in the classroom) that neither the traditional approach to Galatians (which Keller adopts) nor the New Perspectives approach will work. So, I write from the (preposterous) point of view that the reasoning in Galatians has not yet been correctly understood, whether by Luther, Calvin, Keller, et al.

Tim Keller is one of the most able men I know, and one of the most cooperative. The editors of this series asked for his notes from a study he had done many years ago on Galatians, and Tim graciously provided them. I wish I had the unedited notes, which, I am confident, would have been rich with insight. The editors have edited those notes to satisfy the purpose of their series: “Each volume of the *God’s Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart” (7). The specific goals of each book in the series are four: to be Bible-centered, Christ-glorifying, relevantly applied, and easily readable. Now, these four cannot, of course, be equally achieved. The Bible is an ancient book written in ancient cultures and languages, so it cannot be easily readable, so the criteria of Bible-centered and easily readable cannot be equally attained. But I believe that last criterion of easily-readable is the determinative criterion.

To achieve this end of readability, the volume reads almost more like a webpage or a teen magazine than a book: summary statements in large font appear on many pages, questions for reflection occur about every two or three pages, the fonts are sans serif, important words are in bold type, and others are gray. There is a glossary in the back that includes abbreviated definitions of words that may need them, e.g., “incarnation,” “egalitarian,” “epistle.” But the glossary also informs us that “barren” means “unable to have children,” that “affections” are “the inclinations of our hearts,” and that “subjective” means “something which is based on feelings and opinions,” definitions that many of

us have known since we were nine or ten years old. The overall purpose is to create a series of books that are “welcoming” to those who ordinarily do not read (and “emerging adults,” in the ages of 18–29, only read printed matter for forty-nine minutes per week). The editors have probably achieved that purpose, but for those of us who read, the presentation is entirely too distracting and busy.

At some point, one reaches Malcolm Gladwell’s “tipping point,” where, in the effort to make something easy you make it simplistic. I think this series does so. One page on the historical background to the letter? Three pages on the New Perspective on Paul? It might have been better to have said nothing about these matters than to have said so little. Indeed, there is little here that could not be gleaned simply from reading an English translation of Galatians thoughtfully.

Keller’s approach is a fairly standard “dominant Protestant” approach, that regards the problem at Galatia to consist in the Judaizers teaching that people must obey the ceremonial law of Moses in order to be saved. I published my reasons for disagreeing with this view many years ago, so I will say no more about that here (if interested, see my “The Problem at Galatia,” *Interpretation* 41 [January 1987]: 32–43). As such, Keller’s approach is entirely “safe,” theologically, and is characterized by his always-clear declarations about salvation being an entirely free, unmerited gift from God. Considering the series of which it is a part, the book is fine. Keller’s love for the gospel is evident throughout the book; his capacity to make refined distinctions, however, is less evident, because the editors have tried to make the volume approachable to those who would probably fail to catch anything that was nuanced or refined. Insofar as Keller’s thoughts can be found here, they are fine, orthodox, and encouraging; but they have been somewhat concealed behind a cloud of simplification.

The poet Oliver Goldsmith once physically assaulted Thomas Evans for a negative review, and then Goldsmith published an apology for the assault in the *London Chronicle*. When James Boswell asked Dr. Johnson about the apology, John-

son replied, “He (Goldsmith) has, indeed, done it very well; but it is a foolish thing well done.” I am inclined to think the editors of this series have also done a foolish thing well; they have skillfully produced a book for non–book readers. But should such a thing be done at all? If people cannot read thoughtful, sustained, adult prose, perhaps we should just leave them alone and let them Tweet, Text, or Instagram. I really do not know what kind of a recommendation to make about a book like this: readers will find its visual presentation distracting and its content simplistic; nonreaders will probably find it to still be too wordy, too “booky.” I doubt that even Goldilocks could find someone for whom it is “just right.” ☺

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## The Rhythms of the Christian Life in Bible Reading, Prayer, and Poetry

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

Lives without rhythm are not worth living, and I’m not talking about dancing. Busy lives in the modern world often lack the most important rhythm

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=379&issue\\_id=88](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=379&issue_id=88).

of all—spiritual rhythm rooted in the formative exercise of Scripture meditation and prayer. By meditation I mean the prayerful, thoughtful study of Scripture.

Even more neglected than this is the reading of sacred poetry. By this I mean poetry outside of the canon of Scripture written by Christians on biblical topics. The texts of the hymns we sing from *Trinity Hymnal* are poetry. Among the famous poets included in our hymnal are George Herbert, William Cowper, John Milton, Christina Rossetti, and Christopher Wordsworth, nephew of the famous William. George Herbert is no doubt the most popular sacred poet since his posthumously published book of poems *The Temple* was published in 1633.

The two books reviewed briefly below encourage the spiritual rhythms of the Christian life from two different angles. The first is designed to encourage prayerful Bible reading by providing a prayer for each chapter of the Bible. The second is designed to encourage meditation on some of the finest poetry ever written in English and based on biblical truth and devotion—the poetry of George Herbert.

*A Book of Prayers: A Prayer for Every Chapter of the Bible*, by Stephen C. Magee. North Exeter, NH: Stephen C. Magee, 2010, 267 pages, \$11.89, paper, Kindle edition \$0.99.

Pastor Magee has given the church a unique resource to encourage prayer and Bible reading in tandem. Writing a prayer for all eleven hundred and eighty-nine chapters in the Bible is almost inconceivable, but Pastor Magee accomplished this in a season of great grief and growing dependence on the Lord. Even the genealogical sections of the Old Testament are graced with excellent prayers.

The theology of these prayers is soundly Reformed; the spirit of these prayers is a *cri de coeur* from one who sees his life and the life of the church through the lens of Scripture, and the lost world around him as in desperate need of the gospel. Consciousness of sin, the idolatry of the fallen human heart, the sovereignty of God and his amazing grace—all form the fabric of these

prayers. The style exhibits an elegant clarity characteristic of the best Protestant prayers.

Having used this book for some time, I have found that reading the Bible chapter and then the prayer is the most effective use of the book, because the content of the biblical chapter is essential to receiving maximum benefit from the prayers. When reading more than one chapter, the prayers may, of course, be read all at once after the Bible reading, or better still, after each chapter, thus instilling a prayerful attitude in the reading of Scripture.

Pastor Magee is the pastor of a PCA congregation in Exeter, New Hampshire. He has been a friend since we both began to be involved in planting churches in the mid-nineties. Because the book is self-published, it exists largely under the radar. But this is a sleeper that may be profitably used along with prayer books such as *The Valley of Vision*. I highly recommend it in either the paper or Kindle formats.

*A Year with George Herbert: A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems*, by Jim Scott Orrick. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 159 pages, \$20.00, paper.

Professor Orrick has given us an incalculable gift—a devotional guide to the poetry of George Herbert. Herbert himself wrote his poetry to aid Christians in their understanding of Scripture and in devotion to the Lord and his church. Herbert's poetry has been a favorite of Christians like C. S. Lewis, C. H. Spurgeon, and Richard Baxter. Of course, in Herbert's day, when metaphysical poetry and Shakespearean theatre elevated Elizabethan English to its apogee, poetry was a highly popular form of entertainment and an intrinsic part of the fabric of public thinking. In our day, poetry has reached its nadir. Hence, the importance of a book like Orrick's. If literary criticism and wearying college course analyses have helped poison the public's appetite for poetry, books like this provide at least a partial antidote.

Free of technical jargon and analysis, Orrick's book aims at Christian devotion and an appreciation of Herbert for the sheer beauty of what

he wrote, a beauty inseparable from its content. Rather than writing a commentary on a poem for each day, he has wisely given us a week to search the meaning of each poem. Hence, the subtitle *A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems*. This reminds us that good poetry, like any worthwhile text, takes work, and thus time, to understand. In the age of "wit," poets like Herbert, Richard Crashaw, and John Donne worked at what Alexander Pope said of poetry in general,

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;  
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.  
As shades more sweet recommend the light,  
So modest plainness sets off spritely wit.  
*An Essay on Criticism*

Herbert expected his readers to take time to fathom what he wrote and thereby enter the riches of his sparkling soul. Orrick assists us in this endeavor by explaining each poem, in usually two to four pages, under the following headings: Topic, Thesis, About this poem, Footnotes to explain the text, Poetry notes, and Ponder. "About this poem" locates the poem in the ministry and circumstances of Herbert. "Footnotes" explain the text, where the seventeenth-century language may be obscure, or point out theological and biblical references. "Poetry notes" explain poetic elements that make the poem successful, without the burden of academic language. While I might like a bit more explanation about rhyme, meter, and poetic types, Orrick errs on the side of winsome engagement with those who may be encountering serious poetry for the first time. Finally, he asks us to "Ponder" the poem in terms of our individual lives, the church, and the world. These are very thoughtful. For example, in response to "The Alter," which deals with sorrow for sin and repentance, Orrick asks if there is a place for such sorrow in modern worship.

Professor Orrick has spent a lot of time with Herbert and it shows. I highly recommend this

book. It would be perfect for an adult study in church or in high school.

### Suggested Reading

Summers, Joseph. *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Slater, Ann Pasternak, ed. *George Herbert: The Complete English Works*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Wilcox, Helen, ed. *The English Poems of George Herbert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. ⑤

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# Christ's Churches Purely Reformed

by Philip Benedict

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by David A. Booth

*Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, by Philip Benedict. Wheaton, New Haven, and London: Yale University Press, 2002, xxvi + 670 pages, \$40.00.

Historical theology is frequently the most helpful form of practical theology. Reformed Christians in

North America are currently wrestling with many challenging questions. How orthodox does a local church or a denomination need to be in order for someone to commit his family, time, and treasure there? Should we work for reform within larger denominations with important institutions or depart into the wilderness with a tiny band of like-minded believers? How much diversity is good or acceptable in faith and practice? And, what should the relationship be among Christianity, church, and the civil magistrate? Because Reformed Christians have been grappling with such questions for five centuries, reflecting on our past is an essential aspect of pursuing faithfulness to Christ in the present. Philip Benedict's *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* is a brilliant and delightful aid to doing just that.

Benedict masterfully conveys the broad social, political, and economic upheavals that were sweeping through Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, without swallowing up the distinctive contributions of individual leaders or theologians. As he repeatedly demonstrates, individuals are not only shaped by history, they also shape it in unexpected ways. He writes:

Clearly, the small corners of the European continent that had embraced Reformed worship by 1555 would not have assumed the importance they did had they not become home to several talented and deeply committed theologians, men who were capable of writing a body of treatises that won them admirers and disciples across national and linguistic boundaries. (115)

In a similar vein, while many historians have assumed that the acceptance or rejection of Calvinism by European princes can largely be explained in terms of political expediency, Benedict plausibly argues that:

Rather than attempting to link the enactment of second reformations to calculations of functional utility, a more illuminating approach might recognize that many rulers tried to act as conscientious Christian princes and then

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=382&issue\\_id=88](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=382&issue_id=88).



undertake to identify the conditions under which some found the arguments for such changes convincing. (227)

A second distinctive contribution of *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* is that it pays far more attention to the development of Reformed ecclesiology than is common among histories of the Reformation era. Particularly striking are the glimpses into how the experience of exile and marginalization profoundly shaped the development of Reformed Christianity. For example, while serving as a pastor to the immigrant community in Strasbourg, Calvin was able to gain experience in exercising church discipline. Neither the civil magistrates in Geneva nor the ones in Strasbourg were willing to allow their established city churches to engage in such discipline (95). Benedict also traces the development of Presbyterianism in France and regularly reminds the reader that:

Although the Presbyterian-synod system ultimately came to be justified in biblical terms, it began as an improvised solution to the problem of maintaining unity among scattered congregations established without government support, and it operated somewhat differently in each country. (283)

These are helpful reminders that Christ's work of building and refining the church is not hindered by the apparent marginalization of his servants.

This volume is also a wonderful reminder of both the diversity and the essential unity of the early Reformed churches. Benedict rightly points out that the Reformed churches never became entirely uniform in their approach to worship:

The English knelt to receive communion from a surplice-wearing minister; the French filed by their minister, who was dressed in a simple gown; the Dutch and Scots sat at a table as the elders passed around the bread and wine. While the Scots uncompromisingly eliminated all holy days, they continued to abstain from meat on Fridays and marrying during Lent. (282)

Yet, such diversity rarely prevented Reformed Christians from recognizing each other, and political as well as theological concerns drove them to express their fundamental concord. This unity was underlined in 1581 through the publication of the *Harmony of Confessions* in Geneva. Rather than crafting a new confession that all the churches could agree to, this project sought to highlight all the areas of agreement which were already exhibited in eleven existing confessions of faith. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Lutheran confessions in this Harmony reminds us that "the boundaries of the Reformed community were fuzzy around the edge" (290).

There are surprisingly few lapses for a work of this scope. Benedict does refer to Abraham Kuyper as "neo-orthodox" where he should have indicated that he was an advocate of "neo-Calvinism" (298). A more significant misunderstanding involves Benedict's presentation of Scripture as understood by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. He writes: "Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin had not argued that every word of the Bible was divinely inspired; they simply believed that the essential salvific message and key historical details of the Bible were unarguable and assured" (301). Those familiar with the primary sources, such as Calvin's treatment of 2 Timothy 3:16 or how he spoke of the Holy Spirit "dictating" Scripture, will find it more difficult to drive a wedge between the early Reformers and post-Reformation formulations of the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. That such lapses are so rare in a work of such extraordinary breadth is a testament to Benedict's meticulous scholarship.

*Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* will rightly replace John T. McNeill's *History and Character of Calvinism* as the standard introduction to the origin and development of the Reformed tradition. Not to be overlooked is how this fine work of scholarship is simply a delight to read. Give your friends a copy for Christmas and remember to treat yourself to a copy as well. Highly recommended. ☺

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# Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?

by John Fea

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by Darryl G. Hart

*Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction*, by John Fea. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011, 340 pages, \$30.00, paper.

What does it mean for a nation to be Christian? John Fea's book, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* obviously has the United States in view. But other nation-states have religious identities that demonstrate how difficult is the task Fea has undertaken (even if some readers think the answer is obvious). For instance, England is a constitutional monarchy in which the crown is the head of the Church of England. Does this mean that England is an Episcopalian (or Anglican) nation? And what does this identity mean for the other parts of the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland)? Some cultural conservatives may think the affinities between contemporary Anglicanism and England's cultural decay fitting. But England's case makes the United States' status all the thornier since we have no constitutional connection between the nation's government and a specific Christian communion.

Or take the example of Turkey. It is officially a secular nation. Its founding in 1922 brought an end to Islam's dominance in the former Ottoman Empire. Turkey's constitution guarantees religious freedom and reserves no special protections for Muslims. And yet, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs provides oversight of the nation's mosques and pays for the services of Turkey's

imams and muezzin. Though Turkey is legally a secular republic, it is also formally a Muslim nation, given its official support for Islamic institutions.

Compared to England and Turkey, the United States resembles more the latter than the former (which makes sense, considering America's War for Independence). The nation that in the 1770s emerged from the British colonies in North America adopted a republican form of government and explicitly refused to use religion as a basis in setting up a federal government. Unlike England, the United States has no monarch and no established church. Even here, the United States is less religious legally than Turkey since the American government (and all state governments after 1833, when Massachusetts disestablished its churches) provides no financial support for religious institutions.

And yet, the notion that America is a Christian nation lives. Polls reveal that close to eighty percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian. This statistic likely accounts for the approximately seventy percent of adults in the United States who think that America is a Christian nation. To answer the title of Fea's book in the negative is a sign of disloyalty within some sectors of American society. The book is more an attempt to clarify the sets of issues that go into an answer than it is an argument about the religious character of the United States. Fea builds on years of experience as a student of the American founding and a teacher of pious undergraduates with preconceived ideas about a Christian America. Some may become frustrated that Fea takes a simple question and complicates it. But as the examples of England and Turkey suggest, "Christian nation" status is not a simple matter.

Fea breaks the question of his title into three aspects. The first includes a historical overview of Protestants in the United States who have asserted and promoted the notion that America is a Christian nation. For instance, modernist Protestants and fundamentalists both operated on the assumption that their country was Christian and fought threats to it. William Jennings Bryan and Billy

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=383&issue\\_id=88](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=383&issue_id=88).

Sunday became influential among conservative Protestants at least in part through their appeals to preserve the nation's Christian civilization, whether by supporting Prohibition or opposing evolution in public schools. In this respect, they followed the Social Gospel minister, Washington Gladden, who hoped for the United States that "every department of human life—the families, the schools, amusements, art, business, politics, industry, national politics, international relations—will be governed by the Christian law and controlled by Christian influences" (37). Of course, Christians' aspirations for their nation do not prove that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. They could be wrong. But as Fea explains, throughout American history "there have always been believers who have tried to promote this idea" (245). At the same time, as the example of fundamentalists and modernists shows, the idea of a Christian America has generally devolved into a form of moralism more congenial to liberal Protestantism than to historic Christianity. The measure by which most Protestants evaluated Christianity's health within their nation was a virtuous citizenry, not church membership or orthodox beliefs.

A second part of Fea's book—arguably worth the price of the book—is a search for the place of religious interests in the political crisis that led to the founding of a new and independent republic in North America. As he concludes, "It would be difficult to suggest, based upon the formal responses to British taxation between 1765 and 1774, that the leaders of the American Revolution were driven by overtly Christian values" (245). So, for instance, in 1765 when Virginia responded to the Stamp Act (a provision to raise revenue for Parliament by requiring colonists to purchase only newspapers that been specially stamped) with the "Virginia Resolves," a document that Patrick Henry strongly advocated, "no reference to God, the Bible, Christianity, or any religious reason" for political resistance was part of the argument (98). Indeed, between 1765 and 1774, as the colonists became increasingly alarmed by Parliament's "tyranny," delegates to the Continental Congress "seldom explained their views in religious terms"

(106). Silence about Christianity extended, of course, to the Constitution, where "it is clear that [its] framers ... were not interested in promoting a religious nation of any kind" (162). Fea rightly observes that a majority of the states in the union retained established churches. But if the Constitution defines the American nation legally and politically, its silence also informs Christianity's place in the American nation.

The last part of Fea's book addresses the beliefs of the founders themselves. He features George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, but includes a chapter on three "orthodox founders," John Witherspoon, John Jay, and Samuel Adams. This is a subject where Christian nationalism has often turned the founders into devout and orthodox believers, partly at least to justify a reading of America as a Christian nation. Fea is not so sentimental, however. On Washington, he concludes that Christians may laudably celebrate his leadership, courage, civility, and morality, but not his Christianity. Washington's "religious life was just too ambiguous" (190). Adams "should be commended ... for his attempts to live a life in accordance with the moral teachings of the Bible," but was finally a Unitarian who denied the deity of Christ (210). Jefferson, likewise, was a great statesman who strived to live a moral life but "failed virtually every test of Christian orthodoxy" (215). Although a successful businessman and patriot, Franklin "rejected most Christian doctrines in favor of a religion of virtue" (227). Meanwhile, in the case of the orthodox Christian founders, Fea concludes that "Christianity was present at the time of the founding" but "merged with other ideas that were compatible with, but not necessarily influenced by, Christianity" (242). The best that can be said of Christianity's influence on the American founding was that "all the founders believed ... that religion was necessary in order to sustain an ordered and virtuous republic" (246).

The value of Fea's book is not simply the careful historical questions he puts before readers that break through received religious and patriotic pieties. He also inserts sufficient distance between the United States as a political manifestation and

the Christian religion, so that believers can entertain the notion that America is good even if it is not explicitly or formally Christian. Too often the categories used by Christian apologists for America lack a middle term. For them, the nation can only be Christian or opposed to it. Fea allows for a different category that is neither holy nor profane, one by which Christians may recognize the United States as valuable, wholesome, and virtuous (with admitted defects) without turning the nation into a Christian endeavor. Fea himself does not answer the question of his title explicitly. But his deft handling of some of the issues involved in sound historical answer will help readers be as careful as is his book. ☉

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## Luther and the Stories of God

by Robert Kolb

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2013<sup>1</sup>

by David A. Booth

*Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*, by Robert Kolb. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012, xx + 188 pages, \$24.00.

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=390&issue\\_id=89](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=390&issue_id=89).

When two couples want to get to know each other, they don't fill out questionnaires; they tell each other the story and the stories of their lives. Because the Lord has chosen to reveal himself both through story (the main redemptive-historical plot of Scripture) and through stories (where we encounter the concrete realities of life, sin, faith, and grace), a great deal of recent scholarly attention has been focused on narrative theology. A critical insight from this research for pastors and other Bible teachers is how the stories we tell not only explain but also shape our identities. Modern scholars have come to recognize that internalizing a community's stories, so that they become our own, is a large part of how we become assimilated and identified with any particular group.

The retelling became a key tool in what contemporary communication theorist Charlotte Linde calls 'narrative induction': "a process of being encouraged or required to hear, understand, and use someone else's story as one's own." She defines this as "the process by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as *their own* story." (xv)

Martin Luther grasped the importance of this truth five centuries ago. Luther was not only a brilliant theologian, but also a master of communication. Luther sought, through God's grace, to teach and proclaim God's Word in such a way that it would reform the totality of his hearers' lives. To use the expression made famous by Richard Hays, through the skillful retelling of biblical stories, Luther pressed for "the conversion of the imagination." With this thin scholarly volume, Robert Kolb reminds us that we still have a great deal to learn from Luther about how to engage Christ's people with Scripture.

Lest we romanticize the congregation that Luther preached to, we should take Kolb's words to heart:

The medieval age is often called an age of faith, but a closer glimpse at records of all kinds indicates that that was not the case. The population of medieval Europe may seem

gullible and superstitious to modern eyes, as we also may appear to a later generation. But most people were hardheaded survivors, forced by the exigencies of disease, weather, and other human personalities to calculate carefully how the family and the village might survive the near future. In that day as well as in the twenty-first century, heaven could wait. (xvii)

Luther captivated congregations with his preaching. Yet, Luther wasn't interested in cultivating a personal following, but in leading people into a right relationship with Jesus Christ. The stories of God from Luther's mouth and pen "cultivated the Christian way of living, providing instruction and direction for his hearers' and readers' participation in the unfolding drama of God's governance of human history" (x).

The book begins with a discussion of Luther's metanarrative, which Professor Kolb identifies as the whole life of the Christian being one of repentance. Yet, instead of focusing on this idea alone, the chapter ranges broadly over key Lutheran emphases such as the relationship of law and gospel, the nature of the two kingdoms, justification by faith, and Luther's understanding of the inspired Word as the power of God. The second chapter focuses on Luther's use of individual stories, including the techniques he used as a storyteller, in light of modern narrative criticism. The remaining five chapters detail Luther's use of stories to shape the Christian life from baptism until death. The chapters on "Affliction as Part of Daily Life" and "The Completion of the Christian Life" are particularly strong and will aid modern pastors in rightly preparing our congregations for these challenging realities. Professor Kolb writes:

Luther did not indulge in romantic pictures of death as a sweet escape. Death had invaded God's good creation as part of the curse upon sin. Luther frequently added death to his list of the enemies of the sinner and the believer, alongside the devil, the world, the sinful inclinations of the sinner, guilt, and other evils. Luther's refusal to mitigate death's threat may,

in part at least, have been a reaction against the monastic ascetic contempt for the body he had experienced earlier in life. It was also part of Luther's affirmation of the goodness of the natural order that God has created and called good, an attitude engendered by his deepening engagement with the Old Testament, his increasing distance from Platonic ideas, and his Ockhamist tendency to see reality in earthly, created things. (170–71)

Luther's use of stories was, in part, a response to his sense of what the church of his youth had lost. "The concreteness of much of the biblical record had been placed into abstract forms shaped by Aristotle and others, who had not learned to define reality with the person of the speaking Creator God at its center. Luther strove to change that" (181). In our own age, which is torn between amusements and abstractions, Luther has a great deal to teach us about embracing and proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

Robert Kolb is one of our foremost living experts on Luther. His scholarship is impeccable. We could hardly hope for a better guide to Luther's thought. Nevertheless, the book is disappointing in a rather surprising way. Professor Kolb chose to write about *Luther and the Stories of God* in an abstract and academic manner, which drains much of the life and joy out of the subject. Pastors, homiletics professors, and scholars on Luther have much to gain from this erudite work. Regrettably, those who are seeking a book that is not only "good for you" but also a pleasure to read will need to look elsewhere. ☺

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# Calvinism

by D. G. Hart

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Online November 2013<sup>1</sup>

by John V. Fesko

*Calvinism: A History*, by D. G. Hart. New Haven:  
Yale University Press, 2013, 339 pages, \$35.00.

One of the ailments of contemporary Christianity, Reformed or not, is the tendency to view one's place in the world as having little historical antecedent. In the broader evangelical world Christianity begins with one's profession of faith, and in the Reformed church *Reformed* is typically associated with one's personal experience or upbringing. Historically, however, Reformed churches have been shaped by two chief factors: the confessions and history. The confessions (the Westminster Standards for the Presbyterians and the Three Forms of Unity for those from the Continental tradition) have typically fared better than history, whether because parents catechize their children, congregations recite their confessions and catechisms, or ministers subscribe to these doctrinal formulae. History, on the other hand, can be tedious, and to some—far worse than being heretical—history is boring. But history is as much a factor in shaping the theological convictions of a denomination as its confessions. This is not to say that history is somehow normative, but rather that it explains how and why denominations write their confessions—it provides context.

For the past generation, if Reformed Christians wanted to study a survey of their historical past, its origins, debates, and significant figures, they had to turn to John T. McNeill's *The History and Character of Calvinism*. But now, D. G. Hart has written *Calvinism: A History*, a book that will surely serve well as a replacement for McNeill's

earlier volume. As tedious and boring as some histories can be, Hart writes in an engaging style and covers a lot of ground, from the Reformation's inception in Zurich with Ulrich Zwingli to the growth of the Reformed churches in South Korea. As with any survey of a large swath of several hundred years of history, Hart peers over the various events like a jet airliner at 30,000 feet. He moves briskly, noting the various contours, passes, rivers, and theological valleys of the geography. He does, however, drop down for a closer look at the landscape from time to time. Another of the book's strengths is that Hart pays attention to the complex nature of history. Far too often historians engage in hagiography—they present the Reformation as if simply preaching propelled it and no other factors had a role. As important as theology and preaching were to the Reformation, politics was an equally influential factor. In a word, history is messy, and there are seldom silver-bullet answers as to how and why things happen. Hart avoids hagiography and offers a sober and insightful analysis of the development of the Reformed tradition.

Despite the book's many strengths, there are two minor areas for further consideration. First, there are a few theological imprecisions in Hart's presentation. He claims, for instance, "Dutch Reformed Protestantism gave to Calvinism its memorable mnemonic TULIP ... also known as Calvinism's five points" (79). Yes, the Synod of Dordt (1618–19) responded to the five Remonstrant articles, but the acronym TULIP did not arise until the nineteenth century. Hart detects cleavage between Calvin and Beza on election, because the latter "developed the notion that God had predestined those whom he would save and those whom he would condemn before the beginning of time" (80). Whether one is an infra- or supralapsarian, both argue that God predestined before the beginning of time. He claims that the Westminster Assembly "followed Dort on the atonement" (88), yet the Standards do not mention the common sufficient-efficient distinction present in the Canons of Dordt. Hart also identifies Herman Hoeksema as an infralapsarian (245), which undoubtedly will raise the hackles of the Protestant

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=388&issue\\_id=89](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=388&issue_id=89).

Reformed Church.

Second, my chief question concerns the title of the book, *Calvinism*. At numerous points Hart rightly recognizes that Calvin was one of the foundational theologians for the Reformed tradition, but certainly not the only one. At several points he notes how others, Bullinger and his Second Helvetic Confession (74), the Reformed *Harmony of Confessions* (75), which combined numerous Reformed and Lutheran confessions, Guy de Bray and the Belgic Confession (59), and Ursinus and Olevianus through the Heidelberg Catechism “supplanted Geneva as the leading provider of Reformed theological training” (48). There were a host of other contributors to the development of the Reformed tradition, and unlike the Lutheran tradition, which actually codified several of Luther’s personal writings into their confessional corpus, the Reformed tradition has never elevated any one theologian to the level of fountainhead status. The Reformed churches have always been defined, not by the theology of one man, but by their confessions and catechisms. Moreover, as much as some might try to label certain doctrines as “Calvin’s doctrine of man,” or his doctrine of predestination, or his doctrine of God, there was very little unique to Calvin’s formulations that could not be found in the earlier church or among his contemporaries. The whole point to Calvin’s letter to Cardinal Sadoletto was that the Reformed church was not sectarian but catholic in the best sense of the word. Hart even has a section in his book entitled “Calvinist or Reformed?” where he acknowledges that Reformed Christianity existed before Calvin became a Protestant, “So calling the churches to which he belonged Calvinist is anachronistic” (20). Nevertheless, Hart decided to title his book *Calvinism*. Why not title the book *The Reformed Churches*, or something similar? In all fairness, Hart is in good company. As noted above, McNeill’s earlier volume employs the term, as do recent volumes by Philip Benedict (*Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, Yale, 2002) and Dewey D. Wallace (*Shapers of English Calvinism*, Oxford, 2011). It may be impossible to extricate this term from the

popular theological and cultural lexicon, even from academic titles. My own preference, however, would be that the term should be scuttled to reflect the theological ethos of our tradition—we are Reformed Catholics, not the disciples of one man.

These quibbles aside, Hart’s book should be required reading, not merely for seminarians, but for anyone who is a member of a Reformed church. Pastors would do well to offer Sunday school instruction based upon Hart’s book. In the same way that we might trace our family history so we have a better understanding of who we are and where we are going, the same can be said about our own theological heritage and identity. Not only will it inform them about the past, but it will help people in the church understand who they are, or should be. Moreover, I believe that this book will be an encouragement to many in our churches. In a day when Reformed Christians make up a mere fraction of the world’s so-called professing Christians, the impression one might have is that the Reformed churches are all but dead. But Hart’s book ends on quite a sunny note. As criticized as Hart is for his views on the doctrine of the two kingdoms and his perceived antipathy to transforming culture, he notes that the Reformed faith, despite its small beginnings, buffoonery, and hubris, has become a global phenomenon (304).

Hart does not use the imagery, but in the sixteenth century one of the emblems for the Reformed faith was the burning bush of Exodus 3. Rather than using the symbol to signify God, sixteenth-century Christians applied it to the Reformed churches: though they were engulfed in the flames of persecution and weakness, they were not consumed, because of God’s faithfulness and kind providence. Hart’s book is certainly this—a testimony to God’s faithfulness to the Reformed churches, and a series of Ebenezers, which should give us hope that the Reformed faith will only continue to grow, even if its adherents are weak and at times persecuted. Hart’s book, therefore, should be read and studied. It is definitely worth the time. ☺

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# Quiet

by Susan Cain

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by John R. Muether

*Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain. New York: Crown, 2012, 333 pages, \$26.00.

A recent Internet post by a popular evangelical blogger came in the proverbial form of good news and bad news. On the plus side, “Seven Tips for Introverted Pastors” offered the assurance that it is possible to minister the gospel effectively as an introvert. On the other hand, this will happen only when the antisocial pastor is willing to face up openly and honestly with his, well, handicap. Introverts run the risk of presenting themselves as “unfriendly and uncaring.” They tend to avoid small talk and so are disinclined to mingle with people. But if you come out of the closet, and especially if you can establish some accountability with an extrovert, your flock may be forgiving of your “more annoying habits.” All this advice comes from one who describes himself as an introvert who has managed to overcome his condition.

A more helpful resource for the introverted

pastor is Susan Cain’s book, *Quiet*. Ms. Cain is not a Christian author; she is a lawyer who writes from a Jewish background. She notes that there is a great deal of debate in the psychology literature about how to understand introversion and extroversion. The former is drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling; the latter to the outer life of people and activities. The one is renewed by being alone and reducing social stimulation; the other finds that socializing “recharges the batteries.”

What is particularly striking in Cain’s research is the changing public perception of these traits. Over the course of the previous century, introversion, once considered a positive character trait, has devolved into a personality disorder. A “quiet” personality is now often associated with an inferiority complex. The introverted youngster is a “problem child,” and fear of public speaking now qualifies as a disease, “social anxiety disorder.” In contrast, the talkers become leaders. Cain notes that the triumph of personality over character as a cultural ideal weighs heavily in this transition. Early twentieth-century self-help guides, she explains, urged young people to cultivate character traits such as duty, work, honor, reputation, morals, manners, and integrity. Newer advice promotes the development of qualities with these modifiers: magnetic, fascinating, stunning, attractive, and energetic.

When Cain ventures occasionally into the Bible, she tends to over-psychologize the text. So she describes patriarchal sibling rivalry in Genesis as pitting the cerebral Jacob against the swash-buckling Esau, whereas in Exodus the retiring and stuttering Moses is perfectly complemented by the extroverted Aaron when presenting his appeal before Pharaoh. Yet episodes of eisegesis are vastly outnumbered by the commonsense wisdom of her book, as in this insight: “Love is essential; gregariousness is optional” (264).

What is at once most insightful and frustrating in *Quiet* is Cain’s treatment of contemporary evangelicalism, which, in her words, takes “the Extrovert Ideal to its logical extreme” (69). She interviews a mainline Presbyterian minister, Adam McHugh, who describes his struggles as an introverted pastor: “The evangelical culture ties

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=391&issue\\_id=89](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=391&issue_id=89).



together faithfulness with extroversion,” because “every person you fail to meet and proselytize is another soul you might have saved.” Thus, for conservative Protestants in America, the healthy Christian life demands “participating in more and more programs and events, on meeting more and more people” (66).

What is frustrating about this insight is Cain’s failure to develop it as far as she could, so let me suggest ways of extending her argument. There is no coincidence, it seems, between the rise of the evangelical “extrovert ideal” and the collapse of classical Christian disciplines and practices, such as patience, waiting in silence, and even Sabbath-keeping. A former colleague of mine once argued that if Christians took seriously the biblical requirement to engage in acts of mercy on the Lord’s Day, it would become the busiest day of our week! This is a far cry from the Large Emden Catechism of 1551, which warned against the violation of the Sabbath when we “intentionally disquiet the day” (Q/A 45).

To be sure, the Bible does not commend idleness in the Christian life. And we are not saved by the contemplative life any more than by our works of activism. But our attachment to the extrovert ideal may tempt us to forget that in our service to God we are told to “aspire to live quietly.” Pauline emphasis on quiet may challenge the prevailing assumptions in the “missional” movement that often stresses the church’s calling to cultural activism. In contrast to that activist impulse, one might argue that the apostle Paul expressed his preferential option for something quite different when he directed the Christian to “lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim 2:2). A recent call to cultural transformation from a prominent evangelical theologian accounted for Paul’s commands by explaining that the apostle intended to remind us that “there should be a place in the church for believers who are less energetic.” Introverts, take comfort: you will be tolerated!

In the end, quiet is important in the Christian life, not because it exalts Christian passivism, but because it underscores that our hope lies in God’s activism, not ours. He is mighty to save. He rescues

us from our afflictions because he is no longer silent. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and he is not content until he has conquered all his and our enemies. Perhaps a fitting way for us to register our confidence in the God who performs mighty acts for his people is for the church to quiet down a little bit. ☺

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## Preaching Christ from Daniel

by *Sidney Greidanus*

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2013<sup>1</sup>

by **David A. Booth**

*Preaching Christ from Daniel: Foundations for Expository Sermons*, by Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, xv + 440 pages, \$34.00.

Preaching that exalts Christ is vital for the well being of the church and is an essential element in carrying out the Great Commission. Faithful preaching that consistently engages our congregations with the central message of Scripture is also demanding. Even the best preachers sometimes flop, and every preacher needs all the help he can

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=395&issue\\_id=90](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=395&issue_id=90).

get in this sacred task. We have been blessed with several excellent books on preaching over the past few decades that tell us how to better engage in this work. With the *Foundations for Expository Sermons* series, Professor Greidanus moves beyond telling to showing us how it is done. We could not ask for a better guide on this journey.

*Preaching Christ from Daniel* opens with an introductory chapter on “Issues in Preaching Christ from Daniel,” which includes a brief discussion of authorship, the original audience, the unity and rhetorical structure of Daniel, and the purpose of this prophetic book taken as a whole. All of the introductory materials are conservative and traditional. The heart of the book consists of eleven chapters corresponding to the literary divisions that Greidanus finds in Daniel. Each chapter contains a rudimentary exegesis of the passage, a discussion of the pericope’s literary features and plot line, as well as chapter-specific items such as the nature of apocalyptic literature, New Testament references, and character description. Greidanus then identifies what this passage teaches about God (the theocentric theme), along with themes that are specific to the passage under consideration. The chapter then moves to discussing how to faithfully preach Christ from this passage. Instead of simply showing one way of preaching Christ from each passage, Greidanus explores different ways of preaching Christ from each particular text before explaining why he chooses one or more for his exposition. Preachers will appreciate the nuance and care that Greidanus demonstrates in approaching this task. Rather than trying to pick Christ-centered themes like rabbits out of a magician’s hat, Greidanus seeks to show that these themes develop organically from rightly understanding each portion of Daniel in its original context. Every chapter concludes with a sample exposition of the passage that is being examined.

There are many things to commend in this work. All preachers will benefit from seeing an expert on homiletics attempting to put his theory into practice as they rethink their own approach to crafting a sermon. The text is particularly strong in analyzing the plot line and literary features

of a passage in a manner that is superior to most technical commentaries on *Daniel*. Inexperienced preachers will also benefit from the examples Greidanus gives on how not to preach a passage. Learning to avoid just one of these common mistakes is worth the time and effort of working through this volume. Paradoxically, even the most obvious weakness of the book may actually provide significant benefit to the working preacher. Professor Greidanus is so committed to preaching entire literary units that he occasionally chooses impossibly long passages to preach. For example, Greidanus attempts to treat Daniel 10:1–12:4 in a single sermon. Few, if any, congregations can keep that large a section of Daniel in mind during the sermon. Using such an approach means that the preacher will not have time to refute faulty interpretations of these chapters, which many members of our congregations are likely to have been exposed to. Furthermore, several of the divisions which Professor Greidanus has made contain so many verses that the resulting expositions tend toward being extended paraphrases of the passage, lacking in specific, concrete application to his hearers. Most experienced preachers will recognize that developing smaller portions of the text more fully would provide a greater blessing to their congregations. This shortcoming in the book is a useful reminder that those Christ sends out as heralds must be more zealous to communicate and apply the King’s message to his people than they are for any particular theory of homiletics.

This fine work will be far more useful to those who work through it while preaching through Daniel than to those who read it as a stand-alone work. In addition to this volume on Daniel, Professor Greidanus has also blessed the church with similar volumes on Genesis and Ecclesiastes. I highly recommend that the next time you preach through one of these books you take along the corresponding work by Professor Greidanus as your companion and guide. ☺

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# ✦ Servant Reading

## Review Articles

### Alone Together: The Great Irony of Modern Communication

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Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2013<sup>1</sup>

by T. David Gordon

*Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, by Sherry Turkle. New York: Basic Books, 2011, xvii + 360 pages, \$28.95.

Sherry Turkle has written a thorough and interesting analysis of our curious relationship with electronic and digital technologies. The entire book examines the paradox contained in the subtitle: that we expect (even long for) human relationships with our technologies, while contenting ourselves with subhuman relationships with humans. As she says in the preface, “I leave my story at a point of disturbing symmetry: we seem determined to give human qualities to objects and content to treat each other as things” (xiv).

This is no mere editorial or screed. Turkle is Professor of Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, a licensed clinical psychologist, the director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, the editor of two books, and the author of four

other books. Turkle studied under the late Joseph Weizenbaum in the mid-1970s when he was working on his famous ELIZA program. This particular volume functions as the third part of a trilogy that includes *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1997) and *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (2005). It is the result of a fifteen-year study that included interviews with over 450 individuals. The book is 360 pages long, and includes 290 footnotes spread across forty-one small-type pages. The book is divided into two parts, and the two parts disclose the paradox that constitutes the book’s thesis. Part One (chapters 1–7) is entitled “The Robotic Moment: In Solitude, New Intimacies,” and Part Two (chapters 8–14) is entitled “Networked: In Intimacy, New Solitudes.”

When Turkle refers to ours as “the robotic moment,” she explains that she does “not mean that companionate robots are common among us; it refers to our state of emotional—and I would say philosophical—readiness” (9). She traces the development of social/companionate robots since Weizenbaum’s ELIZA, discussing Tamagotchis, Furbies, Paros, My Real Baby, AIBO, Cog, Kismet, Domo, and Mertz. Her observations of these devices and our usage of them lead to her basic conclusion that “now, instead of simply taking on difficult or dangerous jobs for us, robots would try to be our friends” (xii). “The robot, for some,” says Turkle “is not merely ‘better than nothing,’ but better than something, better than a human for some purposes” (7). Robots are now being developed to care for the young and the elderly, and some of each appear to be content with the circumstance. One elderly woman said of her robotic dog, “It is better than a real dog.... It won’t do dangerous things, and it won’t betray you.... Also, it won’t die suddenly and abandon you and make you very sad” (10). Indeed, the fifth-graders Turkle studied “worried that their grandparents might prefer robots to their company” (118), and in one case she observed such an event: “Edna’s attention remains on My Real Baby. The atmosphere is quiet, even surreal: a great grandmother entranced by a robot baby, a neglected two-year-old, a shocked mother,

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=344&issue\\_id=81](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=344&issue_id=81).

and researchers nervously coughing in discomfort” (117). And though the young people did not like being overlooked by (great) grandparents or parents, many of them also preferred robots to people, as one young girl said: “In some ways Cog would be better than a person-friend because a robot would never try to hurt your feelings” (93). After fifteen years of observation, Turkle noted, “children want to connect with these machines, to teach them and befriend them. And they want the robots to like, even love, them” (86). Indeed, both young and old alike, while acknowledging verbally that these robots are just machines, continued to cover and make excuses for their obvious mistakes, a trait that Turkle refers to as “complicity” (131).

Turkle is not an alarmist, but she writes the book with genuine concern over what she perceives as a profoundly dehumanizing tendency to expect and desire robots to replace human companionship: “Many roboticists are enthusiastic about having robots tend to our children and our aging parents, for instance. Are these psychologically, socially, and ethically acceptable propositions? What are our responsibilities here?” (17). Turkle shares the concern of one young girl who said, “Don’t we have people for these jobs?” (76). Towards the conclusion of Part One, Turkle says, “My Real Baby was marketed as a robot that could teach your child ‘socialization.’ I am skeptical. I believe that sociable technology will always disappoint because it promises what it cannot deliver.... A machine taken as a friend demeans what we mean by friendship” (101).

In Part Two, Turkle discusses how the network has altered our social structures in similarly dehumanizing ways, referring to “the unsettling isolations of the tethered self” (155), and citing research that “portrays Americans as increasingly insecure, isolated, and lonely” (157). In this section, she discusses social networks such as Second Life and Facebook, and the communications technologies of instant messaging, texting, and cellphones. Even though young people show traits of virtual addiction to their digital technologies (Turkle is aware that multitasking “feels good because the body rewards it with neurochemicals that induce a

multitasking ‘high,’” 163), they also share candidly with Turkle their misgivings and anxieties about them. They are very aware that they are, as Turkle says, “always on” (151, and Turkle also refers to “the anxiety of always,” 260), constantly producing and managing their digital *personae*, fearful that they will project a “self” that others will not like and fearful that they cannot erase from these websites mistakes that can injure them both now and in their futures. As one young woman said to her, “I feel that my childhood has been stolen by the Internet. I shouldn’t have to be thinking about these things” (247). Many young people also appear to be aware of the addictive tendencies of these technologies: “I think of a sixteen-year-old who tells me, ‘Technology is bad because people are not as strong as its pull’ ” (227).

Turkle shares the concerns others have expressed about the tendency of social networking sites to become a substitute for real human community. For many of the individuals she studied and interviewed, the online “life” was as important as their actual life: “Pete says that his online marriage is an essential part of his ‘life mix.’... He makes it clear that he spends time ‘in physical life’ with friends and family. But he says that Second Life ‘is my preferred way of being with people’ ” (160–61). Many log on to anonymous “confessional” sites to acknowledge their transgressions without actually having to do anything about them face-to-face with anyone: “I ask her if online confession makes it easier *not* to apologize. Her answer is immediate: ‘Oh, I definitely think so. This is my way to make my peace ... and move on.’ I am taken aback because I did not expect such a ready response” (233).

Perhaps the most surprising result of Turkle’s interviews was the intensity with which her subjects (both adult and youth) avoid/evade landline telephones and, increasingly, even cellphones (many use their cellphones exclusively for texting). They regard telephones as intrusive, and express anxiety that they will not know what to say or how to end the conversation, so they prefer texting or IM-ing, where they can compose what they wish to say without the anxiety of immediacy. Referring to

this tendency, Turkle expresses again the paradox that constitutes her thesis: “We work so hard to give expressive voices to our robots but are content not to use our own” (207).

Though trained in psychoanalysis, Turkle writes as a true media ecologist, observing “not what computers do *for* us but what they do *to* us, to our ways of thinking about ourselves, our relationships, our sense of being human” (2, emphasizes mine). “We make our technologies, and they, in turn, shape us” (19). “Technologies live in complex ecologies. The meaning of any one depends on what others are available” (188). Turkle’s voice is joined to that of Maggie Jackson (*Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, 2009), Winifred Gallagher (*Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*, 2009), Mark Bauerlein (*The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future (Or, Don’t Trust Anyone under Thirty)*, 2008), and Nicholas Carr (*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, 2010).

We can no longer afford the conceit that our helpful and powerful technologies—for all their help and all their power—come without remarkable human costs. “But these days, our problems with the Net are becoming too distracting to ignore.... The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are ties that preoccupy. We text each other at family dinners, while we jog, while we drive, as we push our children on swings in the park. We don’t want to intrude on each other, so instead we constantly intrude on each other, but not in ‘real time’” (294, 280). If there are any solutions, they will not be easy: “This is hard and will take work. Simple love of technology is not going to help. Nor is a Luddite impulse” (294). What Turkle suggests, instead, is what she calls “*realtechnik*” (294f.), as we assess the results of the networked life and “begin with very simple things.... Talk to colleagues down the hall, no cell phones at dinner, on the playground, in the car, or in company” (296).

Turkle is evidently a humanist, but she does not disclose whether she is a theistic humanist or a secular one (she does make passing reference to

her Jewish heritage). Readers of *Ordained Servant*, therefore, will not find a theology of technology here nor a theological critique of our current technologies. But readers will find here many insights about how and “why we expect more from technology and less from ourselves.” *Tolle, lege.* ☉

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## Form and Message: A Response

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by **T. David Gordon**

*Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective*, by Theodore Turnau. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012, xviii + 346 pages, \$19.99, paper.

The typical review of a book takes the book on its own terms and describes its basic content and contributions, and I would be happy to do so for Theodore Turnau’s *Popologetics*. Others have undertaken such general reviews, and if I were to write one, it would be largely favorable, because I had so appreciated Turnau’s articles in *Christian Scholar’s Review* and *Calvin Theological Journal*,<sup>2</sup>

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=347&issue\\_id=82](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=347&issue_id=82).

2 “Reflecting Theologically on Popular Culture as Meaningful: The Role of Sin, Grace, and General Revelation,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 270–96; and “Popular Cultural Worlds as Alternative Religions,” *Christian Scholars Review* (Spring 2008): 323–45.

and I also benefited significantly from this recent book. In the tradition of William Edgar, T. M. Moore, and Aaron Belz, Turnau has provided a volume that greatly assists believers who wish to learn about reality from the artistic products of unbelievers. Turnau's instructions on this point are extremely helpful and extremely judicious.

One part of the book, however, consists of a critique of other Christian approaches to the arts, and on this point I was not only unpersuaded; I was troubled that three "schools" or "approaches" to pop culture appear to have formed, whereas I would have preferred three "perspectives," or complementary approaches. I was especially disappointed in Turnau's critique of Ken Myers.<sup>3</sup> I found little in Turnau's critique of Myers that had not appeared already in William Edgar's review in the *Westminster Theological Journal*,<sup>4</sup> and each shares three problems (Turnau adds a fourth and a fifth):

1. Each appears to misunderstand Myers's reference to C. S. Lewis's distinction between the idea of "using" art and "experiencing" it, found in his *An Experiment in Criticism*.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Myers should not have assumed people knew Lewis on this point, and perhaps he should have explained the matter further, but both Turnau and Edgar appear to think that Lewis and Myers object to any "using" of art; neither of them did. Rather, each described a fundamentally different *approach* to art-in-general (not to any specific work). Lewis would not have objected to "using" the singing of a hymn to rock a child to sleep; he only objected to those whose approach to art-in-general excluded the desire or ability to "experience" art.

2. Each claims that Myers's view is "elitist," without giving any compelling reason to find elitism objectionable from a theistic point of view. A plain reading of Philippians 4:8 would appear to commend elitism: "Finally, brothers, whatever

3 *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989).

4 *Westminster Theological Journal* 53, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 377–80.

5 C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

is true, whatever is *honorable*, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is *lovely*, whatever is *commendable*, if there is any *excellence*, if there is anything *worthy of praise*, think about these things." Especially in light of the fact that Myers quotes this passage, I would have preferred that at least one of them (if not both) engaged in an exegetical or theological argument with him. I am self-consciously elitist, vigorously and vocally so. If one definition of "elite" is "the best or most skilled members of a group," why wouldn't all humans aspire to be their best and most skilled? I realize that, in an egalitarian culture, the terms "elite" and "elitist" have become pejorative, but they need not be so, and especially not thoughtlessly. Plato seriously argued (in his *Republic*) that the wisest members of society should rule it, and I still have difficulty finding an error in his reasoning. So if one definition of "elitist" is "someone who believes in rule by an elite group," then Plato was an unquestionable elitist. If I am wrong, someone needs to explain to me why it is wrong to pursue (or approve) what is better and what is best. Further, in one of his essays, Myers actually argues that it is pop culture that is elitist; a very small group of people make the decisions about what they believe will be financially successful, and they impose these on the unsuspecting market: "For the most part, popular culture rarely comes from the people. It comes from elites more decisively than does high culture."<sup>6</sup>

3. Turnau does not appear to notice that Myers's view is formalistic; Myers engages the *forms* of particular aspects of pop art, and the sensibilities those forms encourage. Edgar does recognize the matter, but (naively?) seems to reject McLuhan/Postman/Myers outright: "Christians need to realize that the problem is not the medium, but the way it is used" (379). I will say more about why I regard this as naive below.

4. Turnau refers to his labeling the Myers view the "We're-Above-All-That" view and notes that

6 Myers, "Is 'Popular Culture' Either?," accessed at <http://www.modernreformation.org/pub/mr/mr97/1997.01.JanFeb/mr9701.km.popular.ht>.

some may object, to which he offers the following explanation: “I use these labels because they are easy to remember. They nicely sum up the attitudes of their proponents.” (133n53). Well, this simply won’t do at all, on two grounds. First, one is not entitled to misrepresent a viewpoint in the interests of mnemonics. Myers’s approach is a formalist approach; he believes that certain forms of art have different capacities and potentials, and therefore (ordinarily) certain affects that differ from other forms. This view may be right or wrong, in part or whole, and is certainly a matter for public discussion. But it simply is not accurate to describe the view as “We’re above all that.” Myers’s view is not a view about Myers; it is a view about pop culture, and it misrepresents the view to suggest that it says anything about the author. Further, how does Turnau know what Myers’s *attitude* is? What he should describe is Myers’s position, reasoning, or evidence, not his attitude. Those of us in the Westminster tradition observe that our Larger Catechism (Q. 145) regards as a violation of the ninth commandment (among other things): “misconstructing intentions, words, and actions,” and I would suggest that guessing about someone’s intentions/attitudes virtually guarantees that one will occasionally misconstrue them.

5. Turnau simply misrepresents Myers by suggesting that Myers made a comprehensive claim where he made only a potential and qualified claim. Here is what Turnau says Myers said:

After all, popular songs, movies, and television shows ‘are not capable of being enjoyed; their only power may be to titillate and distract.’ Popular culture as a whole is clearly something that we are to grow up and out of. (109)

But Myers actually said:

Books, plays, films, painting, television, music, and sports can all be better appreciated once we approach them as we ought. Of course, we *may* find that *some* of the more popular songs or television programs or books are really not capable of being enjoyed; their only power

may be to titillate and distract. (183, emphases mine)

I do not suggest that Turnau’s misrepresentation is intentional; to the contrary, I believe he is simply a little tone-deaf to formalism. Some people seem to be simply resistant to the idea that certain artistic forms have certain strengths/weaknesses, certain competences/incompetences, certain assets/liabilities. Such people are very resistant to formalist criticism, because they wish to “redeem” every art form equally.

Some who function in the redeem-the-culture paradigm appear to be ideologically unwilling to appreciate what it means that God made the created order materially, and that different materials have different properties. Myers and those like him do not ordinarily refer to “redeeming” creations, but to “creating” creations—not to *redeeming* art, but to *creating* art. The redeem-the-culture paradigm, by contrast, is defective, because even the redemptive paradigm in Scripture restores the created order (or aspects thereof) to their original created purpose and intention. That is, artistic activity is perfectly justifiable on a *creationist* paradigm; it does not need a *redemptive* paradigm. Humans, as *Imago Dei*, create analogously to God’s creating, not analogously to God’s redeeming. We do not need to “redeem” sonnets; we just need to write them. We do not need to “redeem” plays; we need to create them. We do not need to “redeem” novels; we need to write them. We would have created, had we never fallen; as God’s image, we would have made things that were “pleasing to the eye and good for food” (beautiful and practical, artist and artisan) just because God had done so and made us like him on a creaturely scale. So a Christian aesthetic is much better grounded (in my opinion) in creation than in redemption. And even a Christian criticism or critical theory (also in my opinion) is better grounded in creation than in redemption; the goal of criticism is to observe what is in a given artistic work, and a proper understanding of creation permits that adequately. If we observed a particular work of art, and if the artist who produced the work happens to have been an

unbeliever, and if we learned something about reality from that artist, I suggest that the ordinary language for such an event is this: “I learned a good deal from that work of art.”

The creationist paradigm of art tends to be formalist. It acknowledges and submits to God’s created order, and acknowledges therefore the material properties of the various aspects of God’s order as “good.” These material properties are not “limiting” until/unless we attempt to make them do more than they are capable of doing. It is not “limiting” that the dolphin cannot fly or that the hawk cannot swim; this is simply a reflex of the material properties God gave them. God gave fins to one and feathers to the other. Similarly, the various material properties of the various human arts that have developed are not plenipotentiary. We can never make a dynamic/kinetic art out of statuary; but statuary is three-dimensional in a way that painting or film is not.<sup>7</sup> The material properties of a given art form need not be thought of as limits; they may be thought of as potentials, and it is the human creator’s duty to discover and explore these (divinely-given-in-creation) potentials. To deny the differing potentials of water color painting and oil painting is to deny the created, material difference between oil and water. God made both, as properties inherent in the material order, and the artist’s duty is to do with each what can best be done with each.

Discovering and exploring the various material properties of various art forms, however, necessarily makes one a formalist. The kazoo has different acoustic properties than does the pipe organ, for instance, and the kazoo cannot be “redeemed” to play Bach’s *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor* (nor would the organ ordinarily be as appropriate to play at a five-year-old’s birthday party). The trumpet will not be able to do justice to the Brahms *Cello Sonata No. 1*, and the cello will not do justice to Clarke’s *Trumpet Voluntary*. Nor do we need to “redeem” the one to do what

7 Frederic Remington, curiously and interestingly, created bronze statuary that “froze” kinetic activity. Using a non-kinetic form, he created fascinating sculpture of kinetic activity.

its material properties do not permit it to do; we need merely understand their respective acoustic properties and respect their material distinctives.

If we return to the critique of Ken Myers, then, “redeemers” just do not appear to understand “creators.” They appear unwilling to accept the material limits/potentials<sup>8</sup> that God has invested the created order with. Some art forms have different creative potential than others. Commercial television, for example, cannot do some of the things film can do, because film is not interrupted by commercials every six minutes. Therefore, a skilled screenwriter can work with pacing, whereas a television writer really cannot do much with the same (imagine writing a symphony that has interruptions every six minutes and you’ll get the point). So one can write for television or one can write for film, but one cannot do everything with commercial television that one can do with film. Think of the languishing pace of so much of the film, “A River Runs through It,” and imagine how frustrating it would be to watch the same film disrupted by commercial messages. Television cannot be “redeemed” to morph into film; it simply has different properties.

Listening to pop/rock music in the 1970s, we realized that commercial radio had similar limitations. Due to the demand for commercials every six to nine minutes, longer pieces were never aired on the radio, and we had to purchase LPs in order to hear things such as Traffic’s “Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys.” The very *form* of commercial radio limited the *length* of music that was composed for it (this has largely changed now, of course).

Ken Myers’s critique of pop culture is a formalist critique, a critique that takes into con-

8 I often say “limits/potentials” or “potentials/limits,” because, for me, the two are merely two sides of a coin. Whatever an art’s peculiar potential is “limits” it from doing what other art forms can do better; but the converse is also true. Whatever “limits” an art form from doing what another art form does better becomes its distinctive potential, to be explored and appreciated. The car-chase scene in Steve McQueen’s 1968 film *Bullitt*, for example, reaches its potential in film projected in a theater. A novelist could not make one’s stomach jump, and an iPhone’s screen is simply too small. So film displayed on a large screen simply has different potential than novel or poem (and the converse is true).



sideration the forms of pop culture (not merely its content, and not merely the creator's intent to "redeem" the form), including those forms essential to commercial success. Such formalist critique may surely be augmented by other critiques (and Myers does acknowledge them), but the converse does not appear to be so. The Edgar/Turnau/redeem-culture approach does not appear to recognize the validity of the formalist critique, and it is therefore shortsighted. I regard it as almost breathtakingly naive that a pianist with the skill of Bill Edgar can say, "Christians need to realize that the problem is not the medium, but the way it is used." Edgar must surely realize that the vast literature of piano music cannot all be played on the harpsichord. Indeed the piano-forte was invented/developed precisely to avoid/evoke the perceived dynamic limits of the harpsichord, to permit an expressiveness unattainable on the harpsichord. So the problem, in this case, is precisely the medium; the harpsichord simply cannot do some of what the piano can do.<sup>9</sup> Its limits/potentials simply differ, because the material properties (plucked strings versus hammered strings) of the two instruments differ. The world's most skilled harpsichordist simply cannot produce Debussy's *Clare de Lune*. Only if one rejects the material nature of created reality, or if one rejects that such material nature is "good," does one regard the varying potentials of varying materials as a limit to be overcome ("redeemed") rather than a potential to be explored.

At this moment, I perceive three "schools" of evangelical approaches to the arts (and especially to pop art), which I call "content analysis," "intent analysis," and "formal analysis." The first was/is largely concerned with the content of art, and was/is largely negative: too much violence, profanity, or sexuality. The second was/is largely concerned with the intent of the creator or viewer to perceive reality properly through the art form; Turnau's

book<sup>10</sup> is an excellent (and extremely helpful) guide to this approach. The third was/is largely concerned with addressing the formal properties<sup>11</sup> of a given art form and how this determines what can be done with that art form. In my judgment each is legitimate, and each corresponds, roughly, to John M. Frame's tri-perspectivalism. Content criticism is normative, intent criticism is existential, and formal criticism is situational. From my point of view, then, each is legitimate, and each is necessary to a comprehensive critique. I have no interest in entering what I regard as a bit of a skirmish between the content critics and the intent critics, who appear to have little to do with one another. And I have no interest in saying which of the three types of analysis is better or more important, because I believe all three are important. Theodore Turnau, William Edgar, T. M. Moore, Aaron Belz, and many others have demonstrated ably in their essays the keen insight into the human condition that can often be gleaned by the artistic endeavors of unbelieving artists; and I am genuinely grateful for their labors. Similarly, I join nearly all Christian parents in wishing that pop culture did not so frequently glorify violence, casual sex, and profanity. I also have gained much insight from formal analysts such as Ken Myers, who have aided me in learning to appreciate from any art form what it is likely to do better or best. So I embrace and employ all three analyses, and only object when one or the other of those three appears unwilling to recognize the value of the other two. ☺

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9 Though the potential runs better the other way. Murray Perahia's piano interpretation of the Bach *Goldberg Variations* for harpsichord is lovely.

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10 And his equally stimulating earlier aforementioned articles in *Calvin Theological Journal* and *Christian Scholars Review*.

11 These formal properties are themselves, of course, often determined by commercial considerations; and no analysis of pop culture is complete without considering the commercial interests that drive it.

# The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Part 2

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by **Dennis E. Johnson**

*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Volume 4: *The Age of the Reformation*, 2002, 556 pages, \$52.00. Volume 5: *Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*, 2004, 620 pages, \$55.00.

I may as well start with the confession: when Part One of this review appeared in the August-September 2012 issue of *Ordained Servant*, I seriously expected to be able to read, digest, and then review the final four volumes in H. O. Old's majestic series in a single, second installment, within a timely schedule. That hope proved utterly unfounded. So *Ordained Servant's* patient and flexible editor has again responded graciously to my plea to renegotiate our "covenant treaty," allowing me to review volumes 4 and 5 now, and then to submit a third installment a bit later. As it turns out, this unanticipated three-installment format means that each part will treat about a third of the material in Old's seven volumes: volumes 1–3 (covering roughly 28 centuries) contain about 1,400 pages of text; volumes 4–5 (covering about three centuries) contain about 1,100 pages; and volumes 6–7 (covering a little more than two centuries) contain just over 1,600 pages.

Themes and perspectives introduced in the first three volumes reappear and are reinforced in volumes 4 and 5, which explore Christian preaching and worship in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Preaching God's Word is the

central event of the church's corporate worship. Preaching should, indeed, responsibly exposit and pastorally apply the text of the Bible to the spiritual needs of listeners. Although festal preaching on appropriate biblical passages and the use of lectionaries in text selection have their place, Old generally commends the *lectio continua* approach of preaching through biblical books, practiced by Fathers such as Chrysostom and Reformers such as Bucer and Calvin as a way of giving God's people a consistent, contextually informed grasp of God's Word. Preaching has a doxological objective, fostering adoration of God for his glory and his grace. Preaching in the context of the church's worship should be evangelistic, not only with a view toward calling unbelievers to repentance and faith, but also with a view toward grounding believers' pursuit of holiness in the gospel, motivating obedience through grateful assurance rather than insecure fear or bare duty. Catechetical preaching has proven its value in establishing recent converts and all the faithful, generation after generation, in the cardinal truths revealed in the Bible. With respect to language and style, either simplicity or literary polish, extemporaneous delivery or prepared manuscripts, may effectively convey God's message to human hearts. Yet a plain style does not have to be devoid of vivid imagery and illustration, and biblical illustrations and images are particularly powerful when employed appropriately. Effective preachers find ways to bring the truth home to hearers' hearts intelligibly, persuasively, and movingly. The reading of substantial portions of Scripture in the church's worship liturgy is a legacy worth recovering, a virtue deserving emulation by the twenty-first century church. The consistency of a preacher's character with his gospel message of humbling love is a key to the congregation's ready reception of the Word from his lips.

Volume 4 narrates developments in preaching, theology, and worship in the tumultuous sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its focus is on the Western Church, specifically in Germany, Switzerland, France, England, and the Netherlands. Six of its chapters are devoted to preaching in the churches arising from the Reformation. First-generation Re-

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=348&issue\\_id=82](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=348&issue_id=82).

formers (Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Calvin, Latimer, and others) are profiled, as are the pulpit ministries of the Puritans in England and the non-Puritan wing of seventeenth-century Anglicanism, and the flowering of Protestant orthodoxy in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Two chapters describe preaching developments associated with the Church of Rome: the polemical response of Counter-Reformation spokesmen (Jesuits and others), and the sometimes daring, sometimes diplomatically cautious, confrontation of decadence by French prelates during the reign of Louis XIV.

As its title suggests, volume 5 surveys a variety of theological and ecclesiastical movements that developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (although the brief chapter on Russian Orthodoxy discusses preachers from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries). The focus of attention is on the English-speaking world, old and new, although the German-Lutheran roots of pietism are discussed, and chapters are devoted to the ministry of the Word in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Spanish California, Romania, and Russia. Old shows that the themes and tone of Protestant preaching were subtly reconfigured in the generations following the flowering of Protestant orthodoxy by tensions inherited from the past and pressures exerted by developments in the wider cultural and intellectual milieu. The tensions from the past included the sometimes violent religious-political conflict between Rome and the Reformers and among competing parties within Protestantism, painful and embarrassing expressions of doctrinal extremism that moderating preachers such as the Anglican Latitudinarians sought to avoid. With the church, preachers also confronted the challenge of reviving spiritual vitality and commitment in second- and later-generation heirs of the Reformation, who formally assented to the gospel of grace that they had inherited but seemed to evidence little of its life-transforming power. Externally, the influence of the Enlightenment and the rise of romanticism encouraged subtle shifts in homiletic strategy (from heralding divine revelation to invoking human reason) and thematic focus (from the objective realities of Christ's

redemptive accomplishment and God's justifying verdict to the subjectivity of conversion experience and moral reformation).

Old's herculean endeavor to survey the history of Christian homiletical and liturgical practice as comprehensively as possible means that at certain points only general summaries can be offered, such as when few sermons have survived from preachers who were lauded by their contemporaries as heralds of the Word. These sections help to fill out readers' sense of the great company of preachers worldwide and through the ages, but pastors seeking to learn from past mentors may find these historical surveys informative but minimally helpful.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, our author capitalizes on the abundance of available resources by leading us through a reflective engagement with one or several sermons from particular preachers. Here is where I find Old's discussion most illuminating and edifying. For example, Puritan John Flavel's sermon series, gathered and published as *Seaman's Companion*, exemplifies the application of profound biblical themes—prayer, divine providence, humility—to the concrete living conditions and challenges confronting a specific congregation (seafaring families in the English port city, Dartmouth) (4.319–26).<sup>2</sup> Old invests 16 pages in reflection on the sermon series by Thomas Shepard, a Massachusetts Bay Colony pastor and a founder of Harvard College, expounding Jesus's parable of the ten virgins awaiting the bridegroom (4.194–209). Shepard's exposition and application of the parable sometimes wanders into allegory. However, we have much to learn from his pastoral boldness and skill in addressing the spiritual lethargy threatening American colonists whose living conditions had improved from a dire struggle for survival to a degree of comfort and security. I found it spiritually refreshing to be guided through sermons by Scotland's Robert Walker (1716–84) on providence (Heb. 13:5) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 11:28), with extensive quotations from the

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2 In this review citations from *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures* are identified simply by volume and page. Thus "4.319–26" is volume 4, pages 319–26.

latter sermon (5.465–77). It was a feast for the soul to sample the formidable gifts of Thomas Chalmers as he answered the intellectual challenges of the Enlightenment and expounded the transformative beauty and power of the gospel from Romans 5 in his classic message, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” (5.514–38).

I mentioned in Part One of this review that readers may differ at points with how and where Dr. Old draws lines between faithful and less-than-faithful gospel proclamation, and volume 4 presented such a case to me. Old is convinced, as I am, that Christ, his cross, and God’s grace to us in this crucified and risen Son, must be central to the preaching of the Word. Yet that conviction seems to be applied inconsistently in his assessment of those whose sermons have centered elsewhere. Those of us who would insist that the Reformation is not “over” will be frustrated, for example, by the ambivalence of his discussion of Rome’s Counter-Reformation preachers. On the one hand, he opens the chapter with the frank observation, “For the most part Counter-Reformation preaching quite intentionally moved in the opposite direction” from the preaching of the Protestant Reformers (4.160). He notes that Jesuit champions such as Robert Bellarmine “found the Augustinian concept of grace repugnant,” preferring “a salvation achieved by a decision of the free will followed by a life of virtue and good works” to “the idea that one is saved by grace through faith” (4.197–98). Having surveyed sermons in which Bellarmine portrays salvation “in terms of an *imitatio Christi* rather than as a vicarious atonement,” Old expresses regret over “the Pelagian tendency of these sermons” (4.204). Yet his irenic ecumenism prompts him to opine that, despite such critiques, “we still want to recognize that Christ was preached and, through the preaching of the Counter-Reformation, many came to faith. For that, we must recognize these preachers as brothers in the service of the gospel” (4.160). One wonders: What sort of faith? Which gospel? By contrast, Old highlights the centrality of the atoning work of Christ on our behalf in John Calvin’s Holy Week sermons (1558):

The burden of preaching the cross for Calvin is not to exhort his congregation to take up their cross and follow Christ; although that theme is not absent from Calvin’s preaching, it is not primary.... The primary theme of Calvin’s preaching is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. (4.125)

I finish these volumes stimulated to seek out and sample sermons from some of the past preachers to whom Dr. Old has introduced me. My curiosity was piqued as well about homiletics manuals that Old mentioned in passing or summarized: the Lutheran Andreas Hyperius’s sixteenth century homiletical handbook (4.371); the Huguenot Jean Claude’s essay on the composition of sermons (4.445–46), later included by Charles Simeon in his collection of over 2,500 sermon outlines, *Horae Homileticae* (5.467–69); F. A. Lampe’s “classic of Dutch homiletics,” *Homileticarum Breviarum* (4.460); and others. I suspect that Dr. Old will be pleased that his work has whetted others’ appetites to read more fully and learn more deeply from the company of preachers who have preceded us. ☺

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## The War in Words

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by **Allen Tomlinson**

*Letters from the Front: J. Gresham Machen’s Correspondence from World War I*, transcribed and

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=349&issue\\_id=82](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=349&issue_id=82).

edited by Barry Waugh. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012, xxvi + 342 pages, \$24.99, paper.

I began reading Dr. Machen's books in earnest about twenty-five years ago. Because there is a limited literary heritage of works written by J. Gresham Machen, at a certain point I began to allow myself only one new book of his annually. I saw early on that I would soon read all of his works, and finding an enormous amount of enjoyment in reading Machen, I tried to make the experience last, like savoring a sip of a really good wine. Alas, some time ago now all his books and all the published anthologies of his writings were completed, so for the last year I have been reading his *Presbyterian Guardian* articles on line. I will run out of those soon.

My great pleasure in Dr. Machen's writings is first a theological/biblical pleasure. I happen to agree with him in almost all that he has to say, as far as his works as a New Testament scholar and Christian apologist are concerned. Even in those few places where I might not be in total alignment with him, I am always challenged and strengthened as far as my own reflections on the subject or text. His more political articles have also greatly influenced that aspect of my thinking as an American living in the twenty-first century. His concerns were at times almost prophetic, as far as seeing the logical consequences of policies enacted sixty to eighty years ago. Finally, his style of writing is extremely engaging. His use of logic, as a handmaiden of, and not a lord over, truth, is compelling, persuasive, and instructive. Whether I agree with him or not, politically or theologically, I have a hard time "putting it down." I find an aesthetic enjoyment as I savor how he says what he says and how he argues his case, as well as being challenged by the content itself.

That is why I was excited to find that this collection of his World War I correspondence had been published. When I have enjoyed the writings or preaching of an important historical figure, I like to read an account of the life of the subject. Now the kinds of biographies I most enjoy are those that do not spend most of their time "preach-

ing" to me, but those that give me the hard, cold facts. If it is an ecclesiastical figure, I already get my "sermon" from their preaching or writings. What I want in the biography are some details of the author or preacher's life that help me understand the individual himself better. For example, one thing I really appreciated about George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*<sup>2</sup> is his attention to the details of Edwards's life. Though appreciating thoughtful but short evaluations by the biographer, I would rather he stick to his work as a historian instead of doing the work of a preacher or moralist.

Now the reason for my seeming digression is this: in a book of collected letters by an individual, the reader has access to all kinds of great details about the person—even the really minor details that a biographer does not have time to fool around with. In the process, I feel like I really get to "know" the great person. That is how this collection of Dr. Machen's letters made me feel about this professor-author-preacher from whom I had found such great help and pleasure as I have studied his extant writings. I feel like I know the great man himself a little better, which I believe will contribute to my profit and pleasure in re-reading his articles and books. So, it is some of the personal details I want to catalogue in this review. With a view to whetting the readers' appetite to obtain and read the book itself, I will make very brief comments regarding the following aspects of J. Gresham Machen's character manifested in this WWI correspondence: his relationship with his mother, his work ethic and ability to work with others, his adaptability, and his response to both serious and small trials.

Machen's close relationship with his mother comes out in his letters to and about her. Most of the letters in the collection are actually to his mother; a few are to other family members or friends. It is evident that this celibate bachelor maintained a great emotional dependency upon his mother. This, to the reviewer, seems very natural and important. If masculinity and feminin-

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2 George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

ity both reflect important aspects of God's image, and if woman was created for man because it was not good for man to be alone, then where it is not God's plan for matrimony, it would seem important that one's relationship to mother or father or to a brother or a sister would be important for a kind of "completion" of personality. As Machen did not have a wife, his godly mother would have helped round out his personality in a way necessary for us all. In the midst of really horrible and even very dangerous circumstances, this great scholar manifests an ongoing concern for his mother, being greatly concerned about her health and her personal enjoyment of life. For both her emotional and her physical well-being, for example, he beseeches her to carry through on a planned holiday away from home. When her Christmas package to him was lost, so that it arrived long after the holiday, and when some of her letters were sent to one wrong address after another, so that they arrived out of order and very delayed, and when he wrote about rereading her letters multiple times, it is obvious from his comments how much he depended on her love for emotional strength.

Machen's high standard for his personal labors is seen in his initial frustration with his YMCA assignments.<sup>3</sup> At his first main post, the French codirector appears to have taken over and micro-managed Machen. How maddening this was to the Princeton scholar is a main theme in several letters. At least in part, this may have been due to Machen being accustomed to less direct supervision in his work as a professor, so that he had to get used to being "bossed around." However, more to the point is the high standard he set for his daily labors, wanting to be really useful and not redundant. Later, when he was the "boss" of other

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3 Machen was thirty-seven years old when he arrived in France in 1918, having volunteered for one year with the YMCA. He had been opposed to America entering the war at first, but once his fellow Americans were risking life and limb, he wanted to be helpful in a non-combative capacity. It is interesting that as he sees more and more of the war itself, in his letters to his mother his views seem to adapt to the point where he acknowledges the necessity of America being involved.

YMCA stations, he worked incredibly long hours at very hard, physical work, and seemed to enjoy a great relationship with whatever assistant he was given.<sup>4</sup> At a later period of his overseas service, he worked in immediate conjunction with other YMCA volunteers, and appears to have worked well and zealously with them, even when, by any stretch, he was not in complete theological agreement with them.

One interesting aspect of his work was how at first he enjoyed the more physical tasks, which he saw as a sort of break from his normal scholarly activities, as something that would help him have a greater appreciation for his normal calling when he returned to Princeton. However, after about three-quarters of a year into his service, he was ready to put aside the more physical labors and do some serious preaching and teaching. One sermon, in particular, was especially used by the Holy Spirit, in spite of Machen's preaching supposedly being too deep according to YMCA standards. This part of the material is very interesting and thought-provoking. One suspects that if they had turned men like Machen "loose" to preach the real gospel, the "whole counsel of God," there might have been more lasting and even more widespread spiritual fruit. Most of the YMCA work appears, from remarks made by Machen to his mother, to have been mainly outward, social help and not genuinely biblical, ministerial work.

After the war was formally ended, he was given many opportunities to give lectures, but these were often not well attended, at least partly due to other competing activities, including some sponsored by other YMCA officials. However, Machen did not allow poor attendance to hinder him from doing his best at reaching out with the gospel and with biblical doctrine to those few who showed any interest.

I was very impressed with Dr. Machen's ability to adapt. At first, from his expressed struggles while working with the first French YMCA director, I

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4 One assistant, a French soldier named Monti, remained in contact with Dr. Machen after the war, and some of his letters to Machen are given a special chapter at the end of the collection.

wondered about the adaptability of this Princeton scholar.<sup>5</sup> However, as he later explained his many frustrations and difficulties, including his inability to get any time alone for devotions and study (for days and weeks on end), his inability to even bathe (for months on end!), the nearly criminal lack of supplies or misappropriation or misdirection of such by administrative error, and his regular disappointment over the (at the very least apparent) lack of sound religious priorities on the part of the leadership—I became very impressed with his ability to adjust to the situation.

For example, here is a convinced Sabbatarian *per* WCF 21, and yet for weeks on end he is unable to worship publicly and barely able to get even a minute for private devotion. However, seeing much of what was going on in this war setting as a work of necessity or mercy, he does not complain and makes the most of his situation, eagerly serving these French and American soldiers. Another example would be his sleeping arrangements, which were manifold and varied, but very rarely really comfortable or even warm. Yet he recognizes that his arrangements are often superior to those of the soldiers, and so he expresses gratitude for every blessing, instead of grumbling.

Finally, I want to close with a few remarks regarding Machen's response to trials. Some of the trials were major: his position being overrun by enemy soldiers and warning coming almost too late, so that his life was in grave danger for many hours; his being sent to the front lines to render help with refreshments and such, again being in very serious danger; and his flight from danger through thick mud, which destroyed his shoes and socks and left him exposed to the elements. Regarding the last example, he had to rummage through a wounded soldier's abandoned backpack to find a warm pair of wool socks. He expresses to his mother his willingness, if possible, to find the true owner to

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5 A very interesting part of the earlier letters is his spiritual struggle, which he recognized, at maintaining a godly attitude when working with some very difficult people. What do you know! This "hero" of the Reformed faith had the same spiritual struggles that most of us experience! This aspect of the earlier letters is very edifying.

reimburse him many times over for these socks. This was a very personal view of the great Greek scholar that I never received as an undergraduate struggling through his *New Testament Greek for Beginners*.

When being sent to the front lines under great danger, he did not beg off, in spite of the fact he probably could have as a YMCA volunteer who was not a soldier, though we do find him being very careful in his crawling through ditches and hiding behind broken walls. When he was almost captured by the Germans, with only a few minutes to try to salvage a few of his belongings, he was ordered to throw his very hastily packed suitcase onto the back of an army truck. Many months and letters later, he was still trying to find the suitcase and having to do without important personal items.

Another trial was that he had severe dental problems while in France. Due to the war and to differences in American and continental standards, he had a hard time getting the necessary work done so as to be without pain and discomfort. Again, he "practices what he preaches" and, instead of complaining, merely expresses to his mother these concerns for her prayers.

I have purposefully not footnoted the particulars of Dr. Machen's letters to which short mention has been made. This was with the hope readers might read *Letters from the Front* for themselves for a fuller view of the personality of this great American Reformed "Valiant for Truth." Reading letters such as these, especially from the viewpoint of the man himself, opens up his thoughts and personality to us in ways not seen in his published works.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Dr. Waugh has done us great service in preparing this collection of letters, and by his short footnotes and very helpful "people" index at the back.

# What Exactly Is the Issue? A Response to *Kingdoms Apart*

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by David VanDrunen

*Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, edited by Ryan C. McIlhenny. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012, xl + 284 pages, \$24.99, paper.

*Kingdoms Apart* is a collection of eleven essays from ten contributors. The book's subtitle indicates that it will engage the "two kingdoms perspective," and the introductory essay by editor Ryan McIlhenny promises that it will do so "collegially" as it seeks "to defend . . . the continued relevance of neo-Calvinism" (xvii). I should note up front that this review has an unusual first-person character. *Kingdoms Apart* treats me as the chief proponent of the two kingdoms perspective, citing me in every chapter and, in many chapters, interacting with my work at length. It references a few other authors as representatives of the two kingdoms view, but only occasionally. So my review is more of a response.

Following an introduction by the editor, *Kingdoms Apart* consists of three parts. Part 1, "Kingdom Reign and Rule," includes two essays on John Calvin, by Cornel Venema and Gene Haas, and an essay on Herman Bavinck by Nelson Kloosterman. In Part 2, "Kingdom Citizenship," readers first find two addresses by the late Dutch theologian S. G. de Graaf (introduced and translated by Kloosterman) and then essays on various topics by Timothy Scheuers, John Halsey Wood Jr., and Branson Parler. The book concludes with Part 3, "Kingdom Living," consisting of chapters by Scott Swanson,

Jason Lief, and McIlhenny. I believe it will be most helpful to consider first the chapters that are primarily historical in focus and then those that are primarily theoretical or constructive.

## The Historical Essays

The first two history-focused chapters in *Kingdoms Apart* concern John Calvin, though they differ in tone and substance. Venema's piece, unlike Haas's, is very polemical and tendentious. Venema's chief purpose is to argue that my interpretation of natural law and the two kingdoms in Calvin does not provide a satisfactory account of Calvin's "public theology." Meanwhile, Haas's interpretation of Calvin on these same subjects agrees with my own interpretation about 98 percent, I estimate, though Haas himself does not say this and offers a few points of criticism of my work.

After providing an initial "sketch" of my interpretation of Calvin, Venema devotes the rest of his essay to critiquing it at three main points. First, he argues that "Calvin's Two Kingdoms conception focuses primarily on the legitimacy of the Christian believer's continued subjection to the civil magistrate" and concludes that I have erred by interpreting it "as a means to divide all of human life and conduct into two hermetically separated domains or realms" and by identifying "the spiritual kingdom of Christ *simpliciter* with the institutional church" and consigning "the remainder of human conduct and culture to the natural kingdom" (17). Second, Venema faults me for assigning Calvin too optimistic a view of natural law, for not recognizing the indispensable role for special revelation in all areas of human life for Calvin, and for making a distinction between the roles of natural law and biblical revelation that is inconsistent with Calvin's doctrine of sanctification. Finally, Venema asserts that my interpretation of Calvin on the relationship of creation and redemption is "explicitly *dualistic*."

It would take another essay to respond to all of Venema's charges, but I offer a few remarks here. For one thing, Venema misdescribes my views on a number of issues, and oddly imputes a number

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=369&issue\\_id=86](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=369&issue_id=86).



of things to my interpretation of Calvin that simply aren't there.<sup>2</sup> With respect to his first point, I am open to hearing criticism that on specific occasions I have overdrawn the line of distinction between the two kingdoms in Calvin (though in the next chapter Haas himself says that Calvin drew a "sharp distinction between the jurisdictions of the Two Kingdoms" (58). But Venema's claim that, in my interpretation, all of human life and conduct are divided into "two hermetically separated domains or realms" (17), resulting in a "neat bifurcation" (18), is certainly not how I put it and hardly seems consistent with my explicit statement, for example, that for Calvin "no area of life can be completely slotted as civil and not at all as spiritual."<sup>3</sup> Venema is also concerned here that I identify Calvin's spiritual kingdom "*simpliciter*" with the institutional church. I do not make this claim,<sup>4</sup> but I do stand by my conclusions about how closely Calvin ties the two kingdoms to the institutional work of church and state, over against Venema's minimizing of this connection. Haas (see 53, 58, 60) appreciates this point and seems to agree with my interpretation rather than Venema's.

In his second point of critique, Venema makes a vague accusation that I assign to Calvin too optimistic a view of natural law, but he never offers a single citation from my work to provide concrete evidence. I agree with most of what Venema

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2 To mention several things from just the first few pages (see 4–6) of his chapter that do not correspond to my treatment of Calvin in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, Venema says that I grant special importance to Calvin in the development of Reformed public theology (in fact, I discuss Calvin in less than one full chapter out of ten in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* and warn against an overemphasis on Calvin's importance), he repeatedly speaks of my handling of Calvin's "public theology" (a term I never use), states that I see the two kingdoms and natural law as "two comprehensive ... principles in Calvin's theology" (I am quite sure I never made such a sweepingly odd claim), describes me as speaking of the "natural kingdom" and "ecclesiastical kingdom" in Calvin's thought (I do not use either of these adjectives to modify "kingdom"), and claims that I describe Calvin as advocating a "secular" approach to life in the "natural kingdom" (I never use the term *secular* to describe Calvin's view of anything).

3 David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 87; see also p. 82 and elsewhere.

4 See e.g., *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 77–78.

says about the relationship of natural and special revelation in Calvin. With his third point, Venema discusses some issues related to the relationship between creation and redemption that indeed I do not consider in my book. It is helpful to note these themes, though Venema's labeling my interpretation as "dualistic" is again vague and serves more like an epithet than a specified charge of error.

Haas's chapter provides a clear, straightforward, and helpful summary of Calvin's views on natural law, the state, and the two kingdoms. Haas's interpretation of Calvin is practically identical to mine, though he never indicates this. Instead, he offers mild critique of my work at several points, but this seems to be a hunt for differences that really don't exist.

Kloosterman's chapter on Bavinck republishes a journal article that was originally a response to a conference lecture of mine.<sup>5</sup> Kloosterman states his desire to reflect on the life and labors of Bavinck and to respond "in particular, to the Two Kingdoms claim that there exists a fundamental inconsistency in Bavinck's thought when it comes to natural law and the kingdom of God" (65). Most of the essay consists of Kloosterman's interpretation of Bavinck on natural law and the two kingdoms, and he concludes with two brief appendices polemicizing against me. Though this essay is purportedly a response to me, it has almost nothing to do with my article on Bavinck. Readers gain no information about my article's claims, and Kloosterman never indicates where my substantive arguments are correct or incorrect. Besides a general citation providing bibliographical information, Kloosterman ends up citing my article only twice, once to a single sentence and a footnote, the other time to another footnote. His "response" to my article seems to rest on his strong disagreement

with respect to the thesis that forms a thread, if not the backbone, of VanDrunen's understanding of Bavinck. He is suggesting that the

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5 David VanDrunen, "The Kingship of Christ is Twofold: Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (April 2010): 147–64.

alleged existence of ‘two Bavincks’ has left us with a theology that is inconsistent and incoherent. (66)

This is bizarre. My article’s thesis has nothing to do with the existence of “two Bavincks” or his (their?) inconsistency or incoherence. In fact, part of my thesis is that natural law and the two kingdoms are integral aspects of Bavinck’s broader theology. The only time I mention the “two Bavincks” thesis discussed by many prominent Bavinck scholars is in a footnote. I did state my judgment that Bavinck has not left us “with an entirely coherent portrait of Christians’ basic relationship to this world,”<sup>6</sup> but that is much different from saying that it is simply “incoherent.” And Kloosterman himself admits that “one can identify various ‘tensions’ in the thought of Herman Bavinck” (80).

Kloosterman also introduces the two addresses by S. G. de Graaf—with more sharp polemics against me. At one point he quotes me, labels my words “destructive,” and remarks:

Separating ‘x’ as a moral issue from ‘x’ as a concrete political policy issue constitutes precisely the kind of surreal religious secularizing dualism that permitted numerous German and Dutch citizens to cooperate with German National Socialism [i.e., the Nazis].” (93)

Presumably this was not what the editor had in mind when he spoke of *Kingdoms Apart*’s “cordial” engagement with the “two kingdoms perspective.”<sup>7</sup>

The final historically focused essay is Wood’s discussion of church and state in Abraham Kuyper’s thought. Wood presents Kuyper explicitly as a two kingdoms theologian with respect to the distinction between common and particular grace, the light of nature, and twofold kingship of the Son. Wood’s interpretation of Kuyper on these

6 Ibid., 162.

7 Someday Kloosterman might consider writing an essay on the many Dutch neo-Calvinists who winked at Hitler and the many South African neo-Calvinists who provided the intellectual foundations for apartheid. My cautions about the church embracing specific political agendas might not seem so “destructive” in comparison.

issues is nearly indistinguishable from my own, though Wood never indicates this. Wood helpfully describes the opposition to Kuyper’s views on church and state by his compatriot Philip Hoedemaker, who “wanted to preserve the Dutch as a unified nation under a single Reformed church” (169). Perhaps Wood is correct, but I am not sure that Kuyper saw social structures as religiously neutral, as Wood claims (171); in any case, Wood rightly denies that such structures can be neutral (168, 171). A significant part of Wood’s claim concerns the innovative character of Kuyper on church-state relations. In his Dutch context this is probably true, though Kuyper’s basic ideas on the two kingdoms and the twofold kingship of Christ were standard doctrinal fare in earlier Reformed orthodoxy. Furthermore, American Presbyterians had embraced the idea of non-state churches for over a century before Kuyper advocated them.

I conclude this section with two broader reflections on the historical essays. First, these essays’ scope is very narrow. Two essays deal with Calvin and the others deal with early twentieth-century Dutch theologians. There is nothing wrong with the figures selected, though the fact that *Kingdoms Apart* considers such a narrow slice of Reformed history obscures the extent to which the two kingdoms doctrine was a crucial aspect of Presbyterian faith and life,<sup>8</sup> not to mention so much of the continental Reformed tradition of earlier years.<sup>9</sup>

Second, *Kingdoms Apart* does not resolve a question that would seem to be absolutely crucial

8 See, e.g., George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming* (London, 1646; reprinted Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1985), 90–96; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 599–609; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 550–51; and Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel* (reprinted Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009), 65–66 (Part III, Section 5).

9 See, e.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–97), 2.486–90; 3.3.278–81; and Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, vol. 1, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (originally published in Dutch in 1700; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1999), 561–66.

to its purposes: is the two kingdoms doctrine part of our Reformed heritage? Since *Kingdoms Apart* aims to engage the “two kingdoms perspective” critically, one might think that the book would answer no. One of the endorsers (Charles Dunahoo) indeed states that *Kingdoms Apart* “compares and contrasts the one-kingdom view and the Two Kingdoms view.” But who actually holds a “one-kingdom view?” Venema and Haas clearly affirm that Calvin taught a two kingdoms doctrine, Wood explicitly presents Kuyper as a two kingdoms theologian (confirmed by Parler in a later chapter), and even Kloosterman admits that Bavinck “recognized the twofold kingship of Christ” and “the so-called two kingdoms” (72). For all of the negative comments against me in these chapters (Wood’s excluded), it seems as though all of these contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* agree with my basic thesis that the earlier Reformed tradition—including Kuyper and Bavinck—affirmed the two kingdoms.<sup>10</sup> But what then of neo-Calvinism? My historical claim is that contemporary neo-Calvinism (post Kuyper and Bavinck) is different from the earlier Reformed tradition in ignoring and even denying the two kingdoms doctrine in favor of a one-kingdom perspective. If the contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* believe this is wrong (yet agree that Calvin, Kuyper, and Bavinck affirmed two kingdoms categories), then presumably they believe that neo-Calvinism itself adheres to a two kingdoms doctrine. This would be quite a remarkable claim. But even McIlhenny’s introduction (which seeks to define neo-Calvinism) doesn’t make this claim or clarify the issue.

## The Theoretical Essays

I now describe and evaluate several of the remaining essays in *Kingdoms Apart*. They are quite diverse and no clear common theme holds them together.

Parler’s chapter is perhaps the most interesting essay in the book to me, for it gets at some really

important issues that I believe any future “engagement” among interested parties should take seriously. Like Wood, Parler interprets Kuyper as a two kingdoms theologian, and he often associates “Kuyper and VanDrunen” together, over against Augustine and twentieth-century Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder—an intriguing tag team match-up. Parler portrays Kuyper and me as understanding the civil kingdom (or common kingdom, or arena of common grace) as having certain independent and penultimate ends that can be attained to some degree among believers and unbelievers together, in distinction from the ultimate ends of the redemptive kingdom. On the other hand, relying especially on English theologian John Milbank’s interpretation of Augustine, Parler portrays Augustine’s Two Cities idea as incompatible with the Kuyper-VanDrunen two kingdoms idea: the character of all human societies is determined by their allegiance to ultimate ends, and thus cannot be assessed simply on the basis of penultimate ends.

There are a number of points at which Parler’s description of my view is not quite accurate. The most important is the most general. My claim is that Augustine’s Two Cities and the Reformed Two Kingdoms ideas are compatible, not that they are identical. They are harmonious, but get at different aspects of the truth: Augustine’s Two Cities describe two eschatological peoples, one marked by love of the Creator above all and one marked by love of the creation above all; in this world the Two Cities mingle, but they can’t be identified with any particular earthly society or institution; there is stark antithesis between these Two Cities, and each person is a member of one city and one city only. The Reformed Two Kingdoms, on the other hand, pertain to the twofold way in which God rules this present world, primarily (for early Reformed theologians) through church and state. This means that Christians are actually citizens of both kingdoms. Christians, in other words, are citizens of two kingdoms, but of one city. As citizens of the city of God they stand in eschatological conflict with unbelievers; as participants in the common kingdom, they are called to coexist in peace with unbelievers as far as possible.

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<sup>10</sup> I explain and defend this thesis in detail in *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*.

To return to Parler: much of his critique of me (185–88) wrongly assumes that I claim that the Two Cities and Two Kingdoms are the same category. Now, Parler’s dependence upon Milbank’s interpretation of Augustine does make it more difficult to appreciate the claim I do make. But Milbank’s appropriation of Augustine is hardly uncontroversial, and I doubt that most of the other contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* would want to embrace that appropriation, in light of Milbank’s Radical Orthodox theological program that underlies it.<sup>11</sup> In any case, I am glad to be placed on Kuyper’s team on this issue, for I think his defense of the independent purposes of common grace was helpful and necessary. Of course all human societies can and should be evaluated from an ultimate perspective, and found drastically wanting. But since God has ordained through his common grace to preserve human societies for the purpose of allowing a number of important penultimate ends to be fulfilled *to some degree*, it is crucial that we be able to evaluate these societies not *only* on the basis of their failure to achieve what is ultimately important, but also on their *relative* success in achieving what is penultimately important. That was my earlier claim,<sup>12</sup> and I hope to develop these ideas at some length in the future. May Kuyper smile over my shoulder.

Lief expresses theological difficulties with both the “two kingdoms perspective” and neo-Calvinism, proposing something of a third way. He seeks to rescue neo-Calvinism by reading certain neo-Calvinist figures (such as Herman Dooyeweerd) in a way shaped by contemporary theologians Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Ted Peters, as well as contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor. Lief is especially concerned to

promote a dynamic “eschatological interpretation of creation” in which creation’s original destiny was the resurrection of Christ; this is over against the ideas, present even in much of neo-Calvinism, that the created order is a “given” and human identity is “static.” In brief, I do not think that the likes of Pannenberg and Moltmann offer a helpful way forward in our present Reformed debates, and most other contributors to *Kingdoms Apart* would probably agree. I do, however, agree with Lief that how we interpret the opening chapters of Genesis is extremely important for our approach to issues such as the two kingdoms (228). I have actually provided an eschatological interpretation of creation in a recent work,<sup>13</sup> but I approach this through the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works (an idea Lief never mentions, nor would it seem to fit well into his proposal).

*Kingdoms Apart* closes with an essay by editor McIlhenny. In the first part he seeks to define the slippery term “culture,” in interaction with contemporary cultural studies. Then he makes a case, not for Christians “redeeming culture” (a common neo-Calvinist way of putting things of which McIlhenny is skeptical), but for “redeemed culture”: everything Christians do communicates a redeemed identity to the world, and hence, in the words that end the book, “Christians *are* redeemed culture” (275). This chapter is something of a mystery to me. It is a revision of an earlier article in which he purported to set out a “Third-Way” alongside neo-Calvinism and the two kingdoms, but he claims now to “have further entrenched” himself in “the neo-Calvinist position” (251 n.1). It’s not clear what this entails, especially since he expresses the desire to “bridge the aisle” (253) shortly thereafter. Although he refers to his definition of “culture” as favorable to neo-Calvinism (253), I find his discussion here helpful, especially in its emphasis upon culture not simply as a thing that humans create

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11 See especially John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

12 See “The Importance of the Penultimate: Reformed Social Thought and the Contemporary Critiques of the Liberal Society,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9 (Fall 2006): 219–49. It would have been helpful, incidentally, if Parler had defined the sense in which I speak favorably of “liberalism” on page 178 of his essay, since I am not remotely a theological or political liberal in the ways “liberal” is typically used today.

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13 *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), chap. 2. I expand this discussion considerably in a forthcoming book, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*, chap. 1.

but as at root language, which involves community practices and interpretations. And though he makes some critical comments directed toward advocates of the two kingdoms in the second part of the chapter, it is still not clear whether his broad proposal is really so at odds with the two kingdoms idea, at least how I understand it.

One of McIlhenny's burdens in this part of the chapter seems to be defending the distinctive "Christian" character of Christian schools and scholarly work. A key point is that he as a historian has common ground with unbelievers when interacting with the raw material of history, but because of his "own conceptual framework . . . cannot fully accept the idea that history is nothing more than the jumbled processes of the mode of production," as held by materialist historians (269–70). At this point he states: "Interestingly, VanDrunen seems to agree with this" (270). Indeed, but why does he find this surprising? Does McIlhenny believe, deep down, that no two kingdoms proponent *really* thinks that no aspect of life is religiously/morally neutral or that the antithesis rears its head in all human activity, no matter how often some of us affirm such things? At the end of the day, McIlhenny's interest in a redeemed cultural ethos seems to approach the subject at a different angle from me, but I hold out hope that our approaches may not be ultimately incompatible.

I offer two final thoughts on these theoretical essays. First, these chapters have very little biblical exegesis. With the exception of Swanson's contribution (which is largely removed from direct discussions of neo-Calvinism and the "two kingdoms perspective"), there is practically no detailed exegesis at all. In itself this is no reason to fault the book, but it leads to a second observation. *Kingdoms Apart* purports to be a defense of neo-Calvinism through engagement with the "two kingdoms perspective" of which I am apparently the chief representative, and I have offered four chapters of a biblical-theological defense of a two kingdoms paradigm in *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (LGTK), noting specifically where I think differences exist with representative neo-Calvinist paradigms. Thus it would seem that a

defense of neo-Calvinism over against my own work would have considerable interest in addressing my biblical claims, since we all affirm Scripture as our ultimate standard. A key aspect of my biblical-theological case for the two kingdoms is my interpretation of the continuing applicability of the cultural mandate in light of Paul's Two Adams paradigm and the Noahic covenant. Though *Kingdoms Apart* frequently cites LGTK, I believe it mentions my claims about the cultural mandate and the Two Adams only twice (ii; 129 n.9)—both times incompletely and, thus, misleadingly—and notes once, in passing, my view of the Noahic covenant (178–79).

My basic case in chapters 2–5 of LGTK is this: God gave the original cultural mandate to Adam as representative of the human race in an unfallen world, demanding perfect obedience and promising the attainment of an eschatological new creation as a reward for obedience. Adam failed and plunged the human race into a state of curse rather than eschatological blessing. But God sent his Son as the Last Adam, to fulfill God's task for humanity perfectly and thereby to attain the new creation for himself and his people. Popular recent neo-Calvinist works speak of redeemed Christians being called to take up again Adam's original cultural task (not to go back to Eden, but to fulfill Adam's responsibility to fill the earth, have dominion, etc.). In response, I have argued that this cannot be the correct biblical paradigm for the Christian's present responsibilities in this world. If Christ is the *Last* Adam, then none of us are called to be new Adams. It is not as if Christians have no cultural mandate (as *Kingdoms Apart* suggests I claim), but that the cultural mandate comes to the human race only as refracted through the covenant with Noah after the flood. It comes thereby to the human race as a whole (not to Christians uniquely) and is geared for life in a fallen world and holds out no eschatological hope of reward. Thus, in order to understand our calling to participate in the life of politics or commerce, for example, we should understand these responsibilities as rooted in the Noahic covenant and as work to pursue in collaboration with unbelievers, as far as possible

(without forgetting the different attitude, motivation, goals, etc. with which Christians take up these tasks). I also suggested that all of us who share a commitment to the Reformed doctrine of justification should appreciate the attractiveness of my suggested paradigm, built as it is upon traditional understandings of the covenant of works, the Two Adams, and the sufficiency of the obedience of Christ. This is an invitation to soteriologically orthodox neo-Calvinists to embrace a view of Christianity-and-culture that is more consistent with doctrines at the core of the gospel they love.

## Conclusion

I have expressed a number of disappointments with the attempt of *Kingdoms Apart* to offer cordial engagement with the “two kingdoms perspective.” Yet for the well-being of our confessional Reformed churches, I hope there will be cordial engagement in the future among us who may disagree. And in many small ways I see evidence of this already, though not always evident in print or (especially) on the Internet. In light of the questions that two kingdoms proponents have raised in recent years, it would be interesting to see a robust response in defense of neo-Calvinism. To be productive, I think such a response would have to address specifically the questions I’ve raised above about history and Scripture.

It might also be interesting for a valiant defender of neo-Calvinism to address the following observation: most ordinary Reformed believers already live what might be called a two kingdoms way of life. When they follow the regulative principle of worship, uphold the church’s jurisdiction over its own discipline, and respect the Christian liberty of fellow believers in matters of faith and worship that are “beside” God’s Word (see Westminster Confession of Faith 20.2), they embrace aspects of Reformed practice historically inseparable from the two kingdoms doctrine. And when they live peaceably with their unbelieving neighbors—working, buying, selling, driving, flying, playing, and voting alongside them—are they not giving implicit witness to the reality of God’s

distinctive common grace government over the world through the covenant with Noah? And if this is the case, then I suggest that the two kingdoms idea serves a clarifying function: it helps Reformed Christians understand in a more theologically clear way the Christian faith and life they are in so many respects already practicing. ⑤

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## Understanding Flannery O’Conner

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by **Danny E. Olinger**

*Flannery*, by Brad Gooch. New York: Little, Brown, 2009, 448 pages, \$16.99, paper.

*The Terrible Speed of Mercy*, by Jonathan Rogers. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012, xviii + 189 pages, \$15.99, paper.

In June 1952, the month following the publication of her debut novel *Wise Blood*, twenty-seven year-old Flannery O’Connor learned that she was suffering from lupus erythematosus, the autoimmune disease that had killed her father in his

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=374&issue\\_id=87](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=374&issue_id=87).

mid-forties. Physically limited by both the disease and its side effects, she lived with her mother on the family farm, Andalusia, in Milledgeville, Georgia, the remaining twelve years of her life. Undeterred by her diminishing health she made it her practice to write two hours every day producing one more novel (*The Violent Bear It Away*) and two volumes of short stories (*A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge*). When she died in 1964, her literary reputation was firmly established, but nowhere near its current status. O'Connor is now widely praised as one of the great writers of the twentieth century; some even consider her the most important Christian writer that the United States has ever produced. Nearly two hundred doctoral dissertations and over seventy books have been written about O'Connor; since 1972, her alma mater, the now Georgia College, has operated the *Flannery O'Connor Review*, which annually publishes critical pieces regarding her writings. Two new biographies, Brad Gooch's *Flannery* and Jonathan Rogers's *The Terrible Speed of Mercy*, reflect the growing interest in O'Connor and add to the understanding of her and her work.

At 448 pages, Gooch's *Flannery* is professional, impeccably researched, and well-written. It will undoubtedly serve as the standard for straight biographical information on O'Connor, her life, influences, and relationships. However, it is also not terribly exciting. Gooch seems to acknowledge this in the epigraph where he places O'Connor's declaration, "As for biographies, there won't be any biographies of me because, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make exciting copy."

Gooch recognizes that the dominant influence in O'Connor's writing—as well as in her life—was the Roman Catholic Church. After rising daily at 6 a.m. to pray, O'Connor rarely, if ever, missed morning mass, and her practice at bedtime was to read twenty minutes of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. When confronted with the claims of modernism at the then Georgia State College for Women, O'Connor claimed that it was her Christian faith that preserved her, "I always said: wait, don't bite on this, get a wider picture,

continue to read" (114).

In graduate school at the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa, O'Connor marked up heavily French Catholic Jacques Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, particularly his statement, "Do not make the absurd attempt to sever in yourself the artist and the Christian" (156). O'Connor took as her creed Maritain's contention that the job of the Christian writer was pure devotion to craft, to telling strong stories, even if the stories involved the undesirables of culture.

O'Connor was also, in the words of a friend, a "demon rewriter" (145). O'Connor remarked, "When I sit down to write, a monstrous reader looms up who sits down beside me and continually mutters, 'I don't get it, I don't see it, I don't want it.' Some writers can ignore this presence, but I have never learned how" (86). Her eventual publisher, Robert Giroux, took a chance and signed O'Connor as an author because he thought "this woman is so committed, as a writer, she'll do whatever she's made up her mind to do" (172).

Surprisingly, Gooch stays away for the most part from interpreting O'Connor's fiction other than giving a summary statement or relating how a real life experience affected a story. Gooch relates, for example, that, while staying at the home of Robert and Sally Fitzgerald, O'Connor had reached an impasse in the development of the character of Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*. Her solution in moving forward came from reading a copy of Robert Fitzgerald's translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Just as Oedipus had blinded himself in recognition of his sins, she had Motes remove the mote in his own eye by blinding himself with quicklime. Gooch observes this pattern would often be repeated in O'Connor's fiction, the use of the grotesque to convey a shocking Christian vision of original sin.

Regarding O'Connor's acclaimed short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Gooch notes Giroux's reaction upon first reading it: "I thought, this is one of the greatest short stories ever written in the United States. It's equal to Hemingway, or Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener.' And it absolutely put her on the map" (227). Gooch, however,

never goes into detail on what made “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” so exceptional. He simply says that the Misfit is a prophet of existential nihilism far more harrowing than Hazel Motes, and quotes a friend of O’Connor’s who believed that the grandmother was a version of O’Connor’s mother, Regina. This is the pattern that Gooch uses throughout the book. He provides interesting background material, but at the same time maintains a critical distance.

Jonathan Rogers acknowledges openly that his biography covers much of the same ground as Gooch’s biography. The difference, according to Rogers, is that his interest is in exploring the spiritual themes in O’Connor’s writings, which Gooch does not emphasize. The question is whether Rogers has included enough new material to distance himself from Gooch’s volume. In reading the biographies back to back, the amount of overlap was painfully obvious for the first third of Rogers’s volume. Thankfully, once Rogers gets to *Wise Blood*, the book starts to pick up speed, although it never really takes off as it should.

Rogers argues that what occurs in every O’Connor story is that a person must face the truth that he or she is accountable before the living God. In *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes seeks to deny this truth, but Jesus proves to be a wild, ragged figure moving from tree to tree in the back of Motes’s mind. Motes cannot escape the conviction that Jesus had redeemed him, and, in the end, Jesus wins.<sup>2</sup> Deformed as he was by original sin, it was

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2 Although Rogers communicates this theme from *Wise Blood* clearly, the line “in the end, Jesus wins” is not found in his biography. Reportedly, this is what producer Michael Fitzgerald, son of Robert and Sally Fitzgerald, told director John Huston that the book was about in the 1979 filming of *Wise Blood* as a movie. Francine Prose recalls the episode:

In the preface to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, O’Connor made her novel’s stance toward the life-and-death nature of Christianity unmistakably clear, even for those readers who saw the story’s grotesqueness without quite catching its gravity. Huston himself seems to have been one such reader, persuaded throughout the filming of the unmediated comedy of Hazel’s obsession, until [Brad] Dourif questioned him about the meaning of the last scenes. Without giving anything away, it seems safe to say that the dark plot turns considerably darker as Hazel, the prophet of the Church Without Christ—“where the blind

not something that Motes did that brought him to Jesus. It was only the grace of God, but the way that grace appeared was scandalous. That to Rogers is the essence of O’Connor’s writing. She will offend conventional morality because the gospel itself is an offence to conventional morality.

In analyzing *The Violent Bear It Away*, Rogers makes the case that this book represents O’Connor distilled and fortified. In the long opening sentence, fourteen year old Francis Marion Tarwater is drunk, haunted by his dead uncle who remains seated at the breakfast table. A Negro passing by to get his jug filled—the boy and his uncle being moonshiners—has to finish digging the grave, drag the body from the table, and bury the body in a decent and Christian way, with the sight of its Savior at the head of the grave and enough dirt on top to keep the dogs from digging it up. The combination of the sign of the Savior juxtaposed with sniffing dogs looking to uncover an old man’s rotting flesh is a capsule of O’Connor’s fiction as a whole. It is a picture of this world at its ugliest, but overshadowed by the grace of God.

O’Connor herself commented that the story was about the boy’s struggle not to be a prophet, which he loses. In that sense, Rogers observes that Francis Marion Tarwater is yet another Protestant prophet tormented by “wise blood,” the visceral hunger for the holy (133). Much like Hazel Motes, Francis Tarwater’s tenuous grasp of reality does not change the fact that ultimate realities have a firm grasp on him and will not let him go.

Rogers finishes the volume by briefly commenting upon the stories that would comprise O’Connor’s posthumous volume, “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” and with a conclud-

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don’t see and the lame don’t walk and what’s dead stays that way”—takes an exceedingly sharp turn toward Jesus. The Fitzgeralds had believed all along that they were making a film about redemption and salvation, but Huston had been under the impression that he was shooting a picture about the semi-ridiculous religious manias prevalent throughout the South. According to Huston biographer Lawrence Grobel, a hasty script conference about Hazel’s faith persuaded Huston that at “the end of the film, Jesus wins.” See, Francine Prose, *Wise Blood: A Matter of Life and Death in the Criterion Collection*, May 11, 2009.



ing chapter on the rapid deterioration of her health and death in August 1964.

Rogers's style is not as smooth as Gooch's, and the editing is a little inconsistent. Still, Roger's biography is helpful in filling out the picture of O'Connor's spirituality in her life and writings. Rogers's fundamental insight about O'Connor's writings, that she saw a broken world that was beyond self-help or instant uplift, alone distinguishes his book from many of the critical theories regarding O'Connor and her literature that would undoubtedly horrify the author if she were still alive.<sup>3</sup>

However, for those who desire to supplement Rogers (and Gooch) with a fuller understanding and appreciation of O'Connor's fiction, a number of helpful books still remain in print or are available online through Amazon.com or other used book stores. The single best book on Flannery O'Connor's literature remains Ralph Wood's *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South*.<sup>4</sup> Not as well known by Wood, but also extremely helpful in understanding O'Connor's writing, is his *Comedy of Redemption*, in which he devotes two chapters to O'Connor as a satirist of the negative way and comedian of positive grace. The later chapter contains perhaps the best defense against charges of racism against O'Connor. Wood argues that O'Connor's

concern with divine mercy explains her refusal to give the standard moralistic account of black-white relations. Only because God's justice is not primarily wrath but forgiveness can human injustice also be made redemptive

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3 As one example of many, see *Flannery O'Connor: New Perspectives*, edited by S. Rath and M. Shaw (University of Georgia Press, 1986). The editors state that the book's aim is to offer new directions and insights into reading O'Connor's fiction in light of new critical insights from gender studies, rhetorical theory, dialogism, and psychoanalysis. The articles, at least to this reader, are dreadful and already outdated, as literary theories from the decade of the eighties have shifted to new paradigms.

4 Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). See Danny E. Olinger's review of this book in *Ordained Servant* 16 (2007): 124.

rather than destructive.<sup>5</sup>

Wood's "From Fashionable Tolerance to Unfashionable Redemption" in Harold Bloom's excellent anthology *Flannery O'Connor*, is also very valuable. There Wood argues that O'Connor's work must be understood as religious to the core. "The single religious concern woven through the tapestry of the entire O'Connor oeuvre," says Wood, "is that the heedless secularity of the modern world deserves a withering judgment."<sup>6</sup>

Bloom's volume also includes two chapters from O'Connor's close friend and literary executor, Robert Fitzgerald, which are must reads when it comes to O'Connor's writings. The first, "The Countryside and the True Country," analyzes O'Connor's short story "The Displaced Person" and it gives a seminal insight into O'Connor's writing.<sup>7</sup> According to Fitzgerald, O'Connor's stories are always pointing beyond the visual to the unseen, beyond even the pastoral to the yet realized. This, according to Fitzgerald, energizes O'Connor's writing with a Pauline quality that does not abide the religiously lukewarm. Almost all of her characters consequently are displaced, whether they realize it or not.

Fitzgerald's second article, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," shows that while O'Connor did parody certain philosophies like existentialism, the parodies were quite serious.<sup>8</sup> That is, she gave godlessness a force proportionate to what it actually has—Hazel Motes preaches with passion what the world believes—nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar. The pushing back of belief, then, must be as violent as the force pushing against it.<sup>9</sup> Fitzgerald maintains, then, that the humility of her style is deceptive, for "the true range of her stories

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5 Ralph C. Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 132.

6 Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Views: Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 55.

7 *Ibid.*, 19.

8 *Ibid.*, 31.

9 O'Connor's passion for this belief is seen in her adopting the Douay translation and its reading of Matthew 11:12 for the title of her second book, *The Violent Bear it Away*.

is vertical and Dantesque in what is taken in, in scale of implication.”<sup>10</sup>

One reason such commentators as Wood and Fitzgerald are so helpful is that they allow O'Connor to speak for herself in her literature, and also in her lectures, letters, and interviews that have been collected and preserved. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald selected and edited O'Connor's occasional prose for *Mystery and Manners*,<sup>11</sup> and Sally Fitzgerald did the same for O'Connor's letters, *Habit of Being*.<sup>12</sup> *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor* is also a wonderful collection of print interviews with O'Connor.<sup>13</sup> What O'Connor makes apparent throughout is that the character of her books and short stories is Christian. She wrote the way that she did because of her faith, not in spite of it, and that, combined with a gift for language and storytelling, has resulted in a literary corpus that is remarkable for its power and insight. ©

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# Mind and Cosmos

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by Douglas A. Felch

*Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, by Thomas Nagel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 144 pages, \$24.95.

In current discussions related to science and the Christian faith, many apparent conflicts between science and religion actually operate at the level of rival worldview or religious perspectives between theism and naturalism. Theism asserts that God has created the world and brought about life in all of its variety and complexity. Naturalism assumes there is no God and that complex life evolved through some process, not yet fully understood, of natural selection (hence NS).

This is sometimes framed as a creation/evolution controversy, but the issues are more complex. The Christian perspective does not forbid that God used some kind of process, at least in part, to bring about life, nor do Christian scientists reject Darwin's principle of NS. Darwin's theory states simply that certain variations in a living creature existing within a certain environment are selected out according to the likelihood of allowing that creature to survive or thrive. It is a simple and elegant principle. It is also true. Evidences of NS are clearly observable in variations within species, the development of antibiotic resistance in certain bacterial diseases, and the challenge to existing ecosystems by invasive species (such as the threat to the Great Lakes ecosystem by Asian carp).

So the question is not whether NS is a true scientific and explanatory principle. It most certainly is. The question is this: how *much* can it explain?

At this point the divide between theism and naturalism (not between theism and natural selec-

10 Bloom, *Modern Critical Views*, 35.

11 Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, eds., *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970).

12 Sally Fitzgerald, ed., *Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988).

13 Rosemary M. Magee, ed., *Conversations with Flannery O'Connor* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1987).

1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=381&issue\\_id=88](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=381&issue_id=88).

tion) becomes apparent. Naturalistic evolutionists appeal to NS as a “theory of everything.” For naturalists, NS must not only account for variations in species, disease adaptation, and ecological equilibrium, but also must explain how life arose from nonlife and how it developed in all of its variety and complexity. Since nature is all there is, and there is no God, all of life must be accounted for by the mindless, purposeless, and entirely random process of NS. But does NS have sufficient explanatory power to bear the weight of being a theory of everything?

Many Christian scientists and thinkers doubt this. The intelligent design (ID) movement, developed by Michael Behe and others, argues that many biological systems are irreducibly complex, making it difficult to account for the incremental evolution of such multifaceted biological systems (such as the eye) on the basis of NS alone.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga points out the difficulty for evolutionary naturalists to account for the trustworthiness of our mental faculties, because the evolutionary process that has allegedly led to the formation of our minds is itself unintelligent and random and does not select for truthfulness.<sup>3</sup>

Some naturalistic scientists, including the “new atheists” like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, have strongly resisted such arguments and have insisted that the materialistic perspective provides all that is necessary to account for the emergence of life, mind, intelligence, consciousness, and self-reflection.

It is in this context that the philosopher Thomas Nagel raises a significant challenge to the view that NS can be successfully used as a theory of everything in *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*. What make this refutation

of neo-Darwinism especially noteworthy is that Nagel is an avowed atheist who explicitly rejects the theistic worldview perspective. Nonetheless, he argues that the current materialistic Darwinian evolutionary model is insufficient to account for the emergence of life, and, among human beings, of consciousness, intelligence, and value. For his position he has been severely criticized by many of his colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

## The Critique of Materialism

In his first chapter, Nagel suggests that the attempt to use the physical processes of NS as a theory of everything is nothing more than “materialistic psychophysical reductionism.” It is materialist in that it insists that the fundamental stuff of the universe is simply matter in motion. It is reductionist in that it tries to explain the emergence of consciousness and cognition as simply another aspect of material in motion.

Nagel is skeptical of such materialistic explanations of the emergence of both life and cognition. Regarding the former, he observes:

It seems to me that, as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense.

I would like to defend the untutored reaction of incredulity to the reductionist neo-Darwinian account of the origin and evolution of life. It is prima facie highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection. We are expected to abandon this naïve response, not in favor of a fully worked out physical/chemical explanation but in favor of an alternative that is really a schema for explanation, supported by some

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2 Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 2006).

3 This essay is available in many forms as well as in online video presented by Plantinga himself. The most recent print form is found in “The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism.” Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 307–50.

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4 For an intriguing account of the controversy, see Andrew Ferguson, “The Heretic: Who is Thomas Nagel and why are so many of his fellow academics condemning him?” in *The Weekly Standard*, March 25, 2013, available online at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/heretic\\_707692.html?nopager=1](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/heretic_707692.html?nopager=1)

examples. What is lacking, to my knowledge, is a credible argument that the story has a non-negligible probability of being true. (5–6)

Accordingly, Richard Dawkins’s account of the evolution of complex structures like the eye can no longer be viewed as legitimate. Further, NS cannot be applied to the origin of life from nonlife, because NS can only function among organisms that are already existing (9–10).

In arriving at these conclusions, Nagel credits some of the discussions developed by Michael Behe and Stephen Meyers, two of the proponents of the ID movement:

Even if one is not drawn to the alternative of an explanation by the actions of a designer, the problems that these iconoclasts pose for the orthodox scientific consensus should be taken seriously. They do not deserve the scorn with which they are commonly met. It is manifestly unfair. (10)

However, while Nagel is open to some of the insights and criticisms of the ID movement, he is not the least bit sympathetic to their theistic leanings:

I confess to an ungrounded assumption of my own, in not finding it possible to regard the design alternative as a real option. I lack the *sensus divinitatis* that enables—indeed compels—so many people to see in the world the expression of divine purpose as naturally as they see in a smiling face the expression of human feeling.... Nevertheless, I believe that defenders of intelligent design deserve our gratitude for challenging a scientific worldview that owes some of the passion displayed by its adherents precisely to the fact that it is thought to liberate us from religion. (12)

In a footnote accompanying this declaration that he lacks the *sensus divinitatis*, he further admits that he is not simply unreceptive but also strongly adverse to the idea. Alvin Plantinga notes in his review article on *Mind and Cosmos* an earlier reference of Nagel to his attitude on religion:

I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers.... It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.<sup>5</sup>

Plantinga is saddened by Nagel’s rejection of theism, but also observes that Nagel’s discomfort seems more emotional than philosophical or rational (8–9).<sup>6</sup>

Although Nagel is appreciative of the scientific accomplishments of reductive materialism (which he believes will continue to be productive), he does hope his critique will lead to a new openness to find substitute solutions. If the materialist perspective is shown to fail to provide adequate explanation for the emergence of consciousness in the evolutionary story, this may provide an additional “reason for pessimism about purely chemical explanations of the origin of life as well” (12) and may eventually lead to a better, although still nontheistic, alternative. Nagel himself, however, is unable to provide a convincing alternative.

### Antireductionism

Having framed the issue in his introduction, Nagel pursues his project in four succeeding chapters. In chapter 2, “Antireductionism and the Natural Order,” he considers the explanations of the presence or emergence of human consciousness provided by theism and materialistic naturalism, weighs them in the balance, and finds them both wanting. Theism is deficient because (in his mind) it does not offer a sufficiently substantial explana-

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5 From Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Cited in Alvin Plantinga, “A Secular Heresy” in *The New Republic*, December 6, 2012, and found on p. 9 of the online version of the article entitled, “Why Darwinist Materialism Is Wrong” at <http://www.newrepublic.com/authors/alvin-plantinga>

6 Plantinga, “Why Darwinist Materialism is Wrong,” 8–9.

tion for our capacities within the natural world, but pushes the quest for intelligibility outside the natural world by appeal to divine intervention. For Nagel, “Such interventionist hypotheses amount to a denial that there is a comprehensive natural order” (26).

On the other hand, materialistic naturalism is deficient because it does not offer a sufficiently credible account of the emergence of human consciousness. “Evolutionary naturalism provides an account of our capacities that undermines their reliability, and in so doing undermines itself” (27). Nagel agrees with Alvin Plantinga that “mechanisms of belief formation that have selective advantage in the everyday struggle for existence do not warrant our confidence in the construction of theoretical accounts of the world as a whole” (27). This is because natural selection selects for survival not for truth or the trustworthiness of our minds, which are themselves the product of a random evolutionary process according to materialistic naturalism.

Further, what is true of the mental realm also applies to the moral sphere with equally detrimental consequences:

The evolutionary story leaves the authority of reason in a much weaker position. This is even more clearly true of our moral and other normative capacities—on which we often rely to correct our instincts.... Evolutionary naturalism implies that we shouldn’t take any of our convictions seriously, including the scientific world picture on which evolutionary naturalism itself depends. (28)

If that is true, why is it that naturalistic evolutionary theory has dominated the intellectual landscape? Nagel comments:

The priority given to evolutionary naturalism in the face of its implausible conclusions about other subjects is due, I think, to the secular consensus that this is the only form of external understanding of ourselves that provides an alternative to theism—which is to be rejected as a mere projection of our internal

self-conception onto the universe, without evidence. (29)

If both theism and naturalism are inadequate, what is the alternative? Nagel suggests that it opens the way to a third approach which takes into full consideration our nature as intelligent, conscious, and moral beings. While he is not able to provide an explicit alternative, he does sketch out its parameters:

The essential character of such an understanding would be to explain the appearance of life, consciousness, reason, and knowledge neither as the accidental side effects of the physical laws of nature nor as the result of intentional intervention in nature from without but as an unsurprising if not inevitable consequence of the order that governs the natural world from within. That order would have to include physical law, but if life is not just a physical phenomenon, the origin and evolution of life and mind will not be explainable by physics and chemistry alone. (32–33)

In the following three chapters, Nagel continues his negative critique of the materialistic reductionist account of the emergence of “Consciousness” (chapter 3), “Cognition” (chapter 4), and “Value” (chapter 5).

## Consciousness

In his discussion of consciousness and cognition, Nagel finds it doubtful that either one could emerge if materialistic evolutionary naturalism is true.

Consciousness is an obvious obstacle to physical naturalism because of its irreducibly subjective nature, a subjectivity that provoked the mind/body dualism of Descartes. While current evolutionary thought rejects such dualism in favor of a materialistic monism, its attempts to find an alternative “begins a series of failures” (37) because it tries to reduce mind and its experiences to physical processes or observable behaviors. However, the experience of mind cannot ultimately be suppressed, because “conscious subjects and their mental lives

are inescapable components of reality not describable by the physical sciences” (41).

This failure carries over to attempts to account for the emergence of consciousness by materialistic evolutionary process. While physical science can explain a good many facts about our world, it is unable to provide any explanation of the emergence of consciousness (46). Nagel finds trying to explain simply the development of the purely physical characteristics of organisms by evolutionary theory difficult enough (48) and “the confidence among the scientific establishment that the whole scenario will yield to a purely chemical explanation hard to understand” (49). However, if the emergence of consciousness is added to the mix, the problems become intractable. If evolutionary materialism cannot account for the rise of consciousness, there is little hope that it can provide an intelligent account of the world in which we find ourselves:

The existence of consciousness is both one of the most familiar and one of the most astounding things about the world. No conception of the natural order that does not reveal it as something to be expected can aspire even to the outline of completeness. And if physical science, whatever it may have to say about the origin of life, leaves us necessarily in the dark about consciousness, that shows that it cannot provide the basic form of intelligibility for this world. (53)

Any solution must be either reductive or emergent (as in the case of chaos or complexity theory). However, both of these result in an end product, consciousness, that bears no resemblance to its cause and is qualitatively different from its physical origins (54–56).

In sum, we are left with three alternative explanations: causal, teleological, or intentional. A causal explanation would argue that consciousness arises out of the “properties of the elementary constituents of the universe” (59). A teleological explanation would point to principles of self-organization or complexity that go beyond the physical laws of causality. An intentional explanation would point to the intervention of an intel-

ligent being (such as God) in order to combine the constituent elements and self-organizing elements to bring about consciousness. Nagel finds the first two inadequate and obscure, and the last an option for theists, but personally unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, Nagel remains optimistic about some form of naturalistic explanation: “I believe that it makes sense.... The more a theory has to explain, the more powerful it has to be” (69).

## Cognition

The problem is even more pronounced with the development of belief and cognition, because “it is not merely the subjectivity of thought but its capacity to transcend subjectivity and to discover what is objectively the case that presents a problem” (72). These include such activities as thought, reasoning, evaluation and belief formation, and the use of language. The presence of such cognitive abilities generates two intractable difficulties for Darwinian evolutionary theory:

The first concerns the likelihood that the process of natural selection should have generated creatures with the capacity to discover by reason the truth about a reality that extends vastly beyond initial appearances—as we take ourselves to have done and to continue to do collectively in science, logic, and ethics....

The second problem is the difficulty of understanding naturalistically the faculty of reason that is the essence of these activities. (74)

The first problem is intractable because it requires that the process of mutation and natural selection be able to account not only for physical characteristics, but also the human experience of desire and aversion, the ability to discern the presence of other minds, the ability to think logically, and the ability to formulate logical abstract structures through language (77). The second problem arises because

any evolutionary account of the place of reason presupposes reason’s validity and cannot confirm it without circularity. Eventually the attempt to understand oneself in evolutionary,

naturalistic terms must bottom out in something that is grasped as valid in itself—something without which the evolutionary understanding would not be possible. Thought moves us beyond appearance to something that we cannot regard merely as a biologically based disposition, whose reliability we can determine on other grounds. It is not enough to be able to think that *if* there are logical truths, natural selection might very well have given me the capacity to recognize them. That cannot be the ground for my trusting my reason, because even that thought implicitly relies on reason in a prior way. (81)

Despite these strong arguments against materialistic naturalism, Nagel continues to reject the theistic alternative as “unscientific” (89) and opts instead for what he calls a “natural teleology” in which organizational and developmental principles are “an irreducible part of the natural order and not the result of intentional or purposeful influence by anyone” (93). Although he admits that this view is not fully developed, he believes it is a coherent possibility and is more congruent with his atheism (95).

## Value

As Nagel’s discussion progresses from consciousness, to cognition, to value, the obstacles they pose for materialistic naturalism loom larger and larger. The existence of a moral sense poses serious problems for evolutionary naturalism. Human beings are for the most part confident that moral judgments have objective validity. While we may disagree on the precise meaning of what constitutes something being right and wrong, the reason why they are right or wrong is not viewed as simply fantasy or opinion, but real. Therefore:

An adequate conception of the cosmos must contain the resources to account for how it could have given rise to beings capable of thinking successfully about what is good and bad, right and wrong, and discovering moral and evaluative truths that do not depend on

their own beliefs. (106)

According to the reductionist narrative, morality evolved as part of the strategy for survival. Certain behaviors, like being nice to others, proved to be beneficial to the community. These were labeled as “good.” Risky behaviors such as being continuously angry or pugnacious were quickly identified as “bad.” However, neither behavior was *really* good or bad, they were only branded as such in order to perpetuate or eliminate them.

This account, argues Nagel, flies in the face of the way our moral senses actually do function. Moral sense and nuance go far beyond anything that might be required for adaptive survivability.

The human world, or any individual human life, is potentially, and often actually, the scene of incredible riches—beauty, love, pleasure, knowledge, and the sheer joy of existing and living in the world. It is also potentially, and often actually, the scene of horrible misery, but on both sides the value, however specific it may be to our form of life, seems inescapably real.... Therefore the historical explanation of life must include an explanation of value, just as it must include an explanation of consciousness. (120)

However, it is precisely this kind of explanation that materialistic Darwinianism is unable to provide because NS can only demonstrate what is, not that what is has objective value.

Nagel admits that the intentional or theistic explanation does provide a coherent explanation of value, but he again chooses to set that aside in favor of his preference for a natural teleology in which “the natural world would have a propensity to give rise to beings of the kind that have a good—beings for which things can be good or bad” (221). He admits that his movements in this direction are offered “merely as possibilities, without positive conviction” (124). What he is positively convinced of is the inadequacy of materialistic Darwinianism to account for our moral nature (125).

## Nagel's Conclusion

In his two-page concluding chapter, Nagel is apologetic that his own attempts to explore alternatives to materialistic reductionism are “far too unimaginative” (127), but he is unwavering in critique of materialistic evolutionary orthodoxy:

I find this view antecedently unbelievable—a heroic triumph of ideological theory over common sense. The empirical evidence can be interpreted to accommodate different comprehensive theories, but in this case the cost in conceptual and probabilistic contortions is prohibitive. I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid. The human will to believe is inexhaustible. (128)

## Assessment

What should we do with Nagel's critique of materialistic naturalism? His atheistic perspective is at one and the same time happily insightful but also disappointingly limiting. His critique reinforces what various Christian theists have been saying about naturalistic evolution for some time, but his personal rejection of Christian theism is lamentable and his vague quest for some pan-psychic alternative, simply lame.

The Orthodox Presbyterian theologian and apologist Cornelius Van Til famously argued that all non-Christian thought hangs itself on the horns of the dilemma between rationalism and irrationalism. That is, unbelievers want what the Christian worldview has to offer in terms of intellectual stability and moral authority (the rational pole), but ground their own views in something that is ultimately arbitrary, meaningless, purposeless, or valueless (the irrational pole).

Nagel's critique of materialistic evolutionary naturalism is useful in vividly illustrating Van Til's point, but sadly he himself does not escape the dilemma Van Til outlines. Nagel also wants what the Christian worldview has to offer but grounds that

hope in a physical or metaphysical reality that he admits he cannot articulate and only vainly hopes can be discovered. ☹

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# The Apotheosis of Adolescence

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

*The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, by Thomas E. Bergler. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, 281 pages, \$25.00.

An evangelical church without a youth group is unthinkable. Few realize that this, along with Sunday school, are rather recent innovations in the Western church. Bergler provides us with a detailed history of the development of youth groups in American Christianity, focusing on fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal, and black Protestantism. What these all have in common is their concern for cultural decline. What Bergler fails to mention is their lack of confessional ecclesiology. Hence, the pragmatism that lies at the root of the development of youth groups ends in serious cultural compromise, which Bergler insightfully notes

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1 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=389&issue\\_id=89](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=389&issue_id=89).



along the way.

Bergler is himself experienced in youth ministry. He is senior associate editor for *The Journal of Youth Ministry* and is associate professor of ministry and missions at Huntington University, Indiana. Because he is a strong advocate of youth ministry, his criticisms have extra weight.

It is critical for church officers to be aware of this history in order to understand some of the perils of evangelical youth group culture, especially the temptation to imitate secular youth culture. In our tradition, we make promises to be involved in the discipling of our young people, as reflected in the parental and congregational vows taken at infant baptism.<sup>2</sup>

Although “juvenilization” is an awkward term, there seems to be no better single word to describe the phenomenon that Bergler is identifying. Generally, juvenilization is the result of embracing adolescence as an ideal, which is the defining force of American youth culture. In the church, it is immature versions of the faith that resemble American youth culture. Bergler observes:

They [adolescent Christians] are drawn to religious practices that produce emotional highs and sometimes assume that experiencing strong feelings is the same thing as spiritual authenticity. They may be tempted to believe that God’s main role in their lives is to help them feel better or to heal their emotional pain. Juvenilized adults agree that the main purpose of Christianity is to help them feel better about their problems. (12)

Bergler traces the origin of Christian youth groups and the development of juvenilization to the Great Depression. He demonstrates that the initial motivation for this development was a response to the perceived “Crisis of Civilization,” especially presented by Communism as an ultimate threat to “Christian Civilization.” The revival of Christian youth was conceived as the best way to combat this foe. Save the world by saving youth.

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2 *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for the Public Worship of God II.B.1.b. (5, 8).

Entertainment was considered the only way to appeal to youth. Hence the creation of groups like Youth for Christ and Young Life and the popularity of revivalist youth ministers like Jack Wertzen and Word of Life Ministries (19–40).

The leaders of this new movement underestimated the long-term effects of accommodating American youth culture. Many young people became Christian “stars.” Old gospel music took on contemporary styles “subtly altering the gospel message” (51). Leaders embraced marketing and business methods (52).

The late 1940s witnessed the invention of the teenager. A new subculture of “passive consumers with poor critical thinking skills” was born (65). Mass entertainment promoted cultural conformity, which in turn dramatically reshaped American Christianity (80). But it was in the 1950s that American youth group culture was fully formed. Bergler’s title for chapter 6 nicely sums up the result: “How to Have Fun, Be Popular, and Save the World at the Same Time” (147). But, as Bergler observes, by adapting to American youth culture, “the faith could become just another product to consume; a relationship with Jesus might become just another source of emotional fulfillment.... [This] set the stage for the widespread juvenilization of American Christianity” (148). “The evangelical youth culture had taken on a life of its own” (157).

Although some of their innovations may seem quaint today, the evangelical teenagers and youth leaders of the 1950s were engaged in a radical transformation of their religious tradition.... By defining the Christian life as less countercultural and more fun and fulfilling, YFC leaders harnessed the appeal of youth culture to the cart of revivalism. (157)

The new evangelical youth culture taught teenagers to see emotional states like ‘happiness and thrill’ as central to Christianity and its appeal.... Evangelical teenagers demanded that Christian music reflect the emotionally intense, romantic spirituality they were creating in their youth groups. (162)

With the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, “evangelical youth environments increasingly glorified entertainment and self-fulfillment and downplayed calls to spiritual maturity” (199). Youth groups more aggressively catered to teen styles, especially in dress and music. Informality ruled and general countercultural ideals prevailed, as evidenced in slogans such as “Get high on Jesus.” One of the leaders of the movement, Ralph Carmichael, accurately predicted “that teenagers of the sixties would bring their Christian rock music with them into the ‘adult’ worship services of the future” (201). Bergler chillingly observes that today the “Youth for Christ Model” has become the church. Bill Hybels at Willow Creek and Rick Warren at Saddleback self-consciously modeled their churches on this (208).

Aping the culture has come fully home to roost. An intensified focus on individual lifestyle places Christianity in the service of “lifestyle enhancement” (220). Formed by the juvenile mentality created by the menu of choices available in every area of popular culture, Christian youth are trained to “pick and choose what to believe and to be suspicious of religious orthodoxies and authorities” (221). The democratization of ideas and beliefs undermines the teaching authority of the church among its youth, and seeks to make the church like the youth group.

[T]he teaching methods used often reinforce the cultural imperative toward individualized belief systems. Youth ministries pioneered group discussions and simplified, entertaining teaching styles. Many leaders idealized youth and hoped to make the church in the image of youth. Some youth leaders actively criticized the adult church and taught young people to feel religiously superior to adults. In short, youth ministry activities communicated to young people that they and their opinions were all-important. (223)

Bergler acknowledges the value of sociologist Christian Smith’s analysis of the American teenager (219–20). Smith’s book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American*

*Teenagers* is a unique exploration of the religious and spiritual dimensions of the lives of American teenagers. Most disturbing is Smith’s discovery of an emerging, culturally pervasive religious outlook in America that he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith perceptively relates this emerging outlook to digital communication, mass consumer capitalism, and therapeutic individualism.

While Bergler does not mention the absence of confessional consciousness, he does observe the lack of theological thinking behind the conception of evangelical youth ministries. Speaking of the evangelical youth leaders in the 1950s he says:

Rather than developing sophisticated theological criteria for evaluating popular culture and entertainment... They saw most pop culture forms as morally neutral and showed little awareness of the way that a change of medium can change the message it communicates. (158)

The failure to understand the relationship between cultural forms and their messages has been endemic among evangelicals. The irony of fundamentalists using the tube was not lost on liberal Harvard Divinity School professor Harvey Cox, who wrote:

This is a tension between content and form, between message and medium, that occurs when the Old Time Gospel Hour goes out on network television.... The move from the revivalist tent to the vacuum tube has vastly amplified the voices of defenders of tradition. At the same time it has made them more dependent on the styles and assumptions inherent in the medium itself ... a set of attitudes and values that are inimical to traditional morality.... If the devil is a modernist, the TV evangelist may have struck a deal with Lucifer himself, who always appears—so the Bible teaches—as an angel of light.<sup>3</sup>

This is one of the major themes to take away

3 Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 68–70.

from Bergler's research: the forms of culture communicate meaning. All embodiments of culture bear a message. When the church fails to understand this, it unwittingly adjusts itself to the plausibility structures of the culture.

In his final chapter, Bergler declares the juvenilization of American Christianity to be triumphant. He spends only the last three-and-a-half pages suggesting how to tame this dominant trend. Bergler's book is mostly descriptive with a taste of prescription. Here are some of his suggested themes that need extensive amplification, some of which I offer here as guidelines to those who minister to youth—hence its didactic form:

### **Teach Youth to Think Biblically and Live Mature Christian Lives**

“Pastors and youth leaders need to teach what the Bible says about spiritual maturity, with a special emphasis on those elements that are neglected by juvenilized Christians” (226). Youth ministry must locate teaching on maturity within the larger context of the Bible's rich doctrine, teaching our young people to own the language of the Bible and the Catechism. One of the pervasive problems with the teens Smith interviewed was a lack of ability to articulate their beliefs. Rote memory is the beginning, not the end. Emphasize the particularity and exclusivity of the claims of Jesus Christ and the gospel, “its doctrine of salvation ... the perfect and only doctrine of salvation” (first membership vow in the OPC).<sup>4</sup> Talk to them about the attributes of the Trinity, Christ's person and work, the meaning of the gospel, sin, repentance, self-denial, etc. Smith heard almost nothing of these things expressed by “conservative Protestants.”

Such environments [youth ministries] taught young people that Christianity was centered on them, and that their opinions mattered. The point of Christianity was not to get indoctrinated in a complicated set of theological beliefs, but to engage in open-ended discus-

sions with peers that culminated in a simple gospel message. (204)

### **Youth Ministry Is a Ministry of the Visible Church**

Youth ministry educators need to teach future youth ministers about juvenilization and equip them to serve as responsible cultural gatekeepers in the church.... Youth ministry educators also need to challenge youth ministers to love *both* young people *and* the church. (227)

Youth ministry must be understood and practiced as an extension of the covenantal training of the young people in the visible church, especially biblical and catechetical instruction. Youth leaders must be mature adults who submit to sessional authority. “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Pet. 5:5). The goal of the youth ministry is the formation of mature, adult thinking and character through the loving and wise nurture of mature leaders, not acting like teens.

### **Respect the Young at Their Stage of Growth**

“Our vision for youth ministry should neither stigmatize adolescents nor let adults off the hook” (228). Cultivate intergenerational ministry growing out of worship, not creating separate worlds of teenage and adult life. Do not promote “alienating stereotypes” that treat teens as aliens or rebels, impossible to understand. Nor should we idealize youth as a goal, but rather demonstrate the desirability of growing up into mature adults. We should engage them as young adults in the making. To promote intergenerational participation in the life of the church, include adults in all activities.

### **Avoid Creating an Adolescent Ghetto**

“Adults should not try to be teenagers, but instead need to set adult examples” (229). Avoid

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<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for the Public Worship of God IV.B.2.

the dangers of becoming an adolescent ghetto. Youth groups tend to exaggerate and cultivate peer culture, developing their own dress, language, behavior, and self-orientation. Forming an identity distinct from the visible church is a problem.

Adolescent Christians expect their faith to be fun and entertaining. They want the church to make use of the latest music, technology, and cultural trends.... Adolescent Christians construct their religious identities through consumption of products and experiences. (14)

I recently received an email that perfectly depicts this major flaw in the long history Bergler narrates.

Want to create community in your church and excite the younger generation?

My name is Arthur. I am with a company called Local Hero, where we help churches grow by exciting the young generation and keeping the church up to date with today. Have you been thinking of a way to get the younger kids at church involved? Today it's all about social media and tech, just two of the many things that an app offers.

There are currently more than 500 million Apple mobile devices and over 500 million Android mobile devices in use today and that number will only increase in the future. Your congregation has gone mobile. Have you been left behind?

What can a mobile app do for your church?<sup>5</sup>

### **Sing Music Commensurate with the Worship Song of the Church**

They need to ask hard questions about the music they sing, the curriculum materials they use, and the ways they structure the activities

of the church. Is what we are doing together reinforcing mature or immature versions of the faith. (227)

Youth leaders should be trained to be disciplers, not entertainers. Evangelical philosophies of youth ministry often unwittingly promote some of the worst aspects of American youth culture by adopting the forms of that culture. It is a matter of pedagogy—when young people are taught good worship songs, they will know what is appropriate in worship. This should be encouraged, taught, and practiced in youth ministry. More informal songs, which are appropriate in more informal settings, should be identified as such. The music used in the church's worship should be appreciated and enjoyed in youth ministry.

### **Youth Leaders Should Be Trained by the Session**

A training program of the session should inculcate:

1. An understanding of the Church, its doctrine, and its ministry, especially through its confessional documents. Youth leaders should love the church and its worship, and desire to pass this love on to the youth. They should also promote service in the church finding ways for the youth to help out in various activities.
2. The nature and dangers of American youth culture. Youth leaders should be alert to the ways our culture seeks to undermine a Reformed concept of the church and human life, and seek to build awareness in our teens. For example, they should discuss TV programs that portray adults as stupid, unwise, or immoral. They should avoid segregating teens into various groups; teaching teens that they are by nature rebels, not welcome in the adult world, etc. Culture forms people.
3. Youth leaders should teach critical skills so that our young people will discern the subtler themes of rebellion against all authority, and the worldliness in our culture and

<sup>5</sup> Email received on June 12, 2013.

how to deal with them.

4. Good stewardship of electronic media. Youth leaders should challenge youth to discover the ways that mass media and culture allure them to conform in ways that are contrary to godliness. They should be encouraged to become servants of God and others, not selfish consumers (Smith's "instrumentalist view" of religion—it works for me). They should teach responsible uses of electronic media, especially social and mobile media—develop media wisdom and navigation skills.
5. The distinction between biblical tolerance, which is loving communication of the truth, and secular tolerance, which is silence about one's religious convictions.

### **Some Practical Ways to Prevent Juvenilization in Youth Ministry**

1. Policies
  - Have youth leaders report to the session at least annually to explain the youth group's activities and future plans, and to seek advice where needed.
  - Ask youth leaders to seek approval of: all teaching topics and material; major special events, such as mission trips; proposed changes in policies or promotional material; expenses over a determined amount; a roster of the names of youth who regularly attend and their churches when some attend from other churches.
  - Have youth leaders share leadership so that the group's focus will not be on one individual. One of the goals of evangelical youth leaders is to be "an 'attention getter' or 'extrovert' that 'constantly has other kids following him'" (202).
  - Have a session liaison to help supervise and encourage the group and its leaders.
  - Develop a training program for all new youth leaders and insure that they are

committed to the doctrinal standards and *The Book of Church Order* of the OPC and committed to the church's philosophy of youth ministry.

2. Questions to help assess the success of youth ministry:
  - Are the young people growing in love for and commitment to their local church, its worship, Christian education, and service? Do they consider worship and Sunday school "boring"? Ask what they mean. Does youth group replace church? Is it more interesting or important? If so, why?
  - Do the young people exhibit growing maturity in imitation of their Lord and Savior? Ask them to define Christian maturity.
  - Are the young people growing in their knowledge of God's Word and Reformed theology and piety?
  - Are the young people establishing relationships with all generations in the congregation?
  - Do the young people exhibit discernment of the dangers of youth culture?

### **Conclusion**

Will we let the world call the shots, or will we take our pedagogical responsibility seriously and train the next generation in Reformed Christianity? Considering the negatives documented by Bergler, some officers may conclude that it is wisest not to have a youth group at all. Having a youth group is certainly not the only way to address the question of how the church, its families, and officers can minister to youth at the critical juncture in growing up. It should be remembered that Bergler has been working with youth ministry and the training of youth leadership for his entire career. So his critique is meant to be constructive—leading to more biblical youth ministry. Here are several reasons why youth ministry is important in our day.

1. The existence of the “teenager,” though a recent historical phenomenon, is here to stay in American culture. Adolescence, is, of course, an important stage in human development. The problem arises when it becomes the ideal—then we have arrested development, which perpetuates immaturity and dependency. Youth culture is pervasive. Teenagers are on the threshold of adulthood. The church needs to help them make this transition.
2. The pressure to conform to youth culture needs to be specifically addressed in the church with a countercultural approach. We must pay attention to God’s curse on Israel’s idolatry: “And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them” (Isa. 3:4).
3. Scripture does address the young specifically. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word” (Ps. 119:9). “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding ...” (Prov. 2:1–2). So, youth ministry doesn’t have to work against a biblical whole-church, intergenerational philosophy of ministry. Properly done, it should promote and enhance it.

I highly recommend this book. Every session that oversees or plans to design a youth group should read this book and use it to train potential youth leaders. ☺

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## **EDITORIAL POLICIES**

1. *Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.
2. *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.
3. *Ordained Servant* occasionally publishes articles on issues on which differing positions are taken by officers in good standing in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Ordained Servant* does not intend to take a partisan stance, but welcomes articles from various viewpoints in harmony with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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