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Église Saint-Michel in Chamonix, France / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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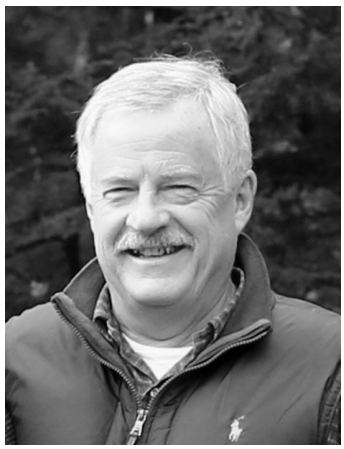

This is the fifteenth annual printed edition of Ordained Servant as we enter our thirtieth year of publication in 2021.

As I reviewed the various articles and reviews in this 2020 annual print edition I was impressed again by the quality of the thinking and writing of each author. The limits of our financial resources are amply made up for by the talents and commitment of our writers. Each are committed to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and his glory in it all. The cover picture is of a beautiful church, Église Saint-Michel de Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, Chamonix, France. Last February, as Robin and I were enjoying a snack in that delightful town, suddenly the bells of the church, which was next to the café, began to ring, calling worshippers to church. As we ran outside to hear and take pictures we were sadly struck by the paucity of worshippers. In this remarkable picture I had the privilege of getting both a steeple and a mountain peak together. Mountains are God's steeples.

Once again I would like to thank the Committee on Christian Education general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange (Chairman of the Subcommittee on Resources for the Churches), and the Subcommittee on Serial Publications, Darryl Hart (chairman), Glen Clary, Stephen Tracey, and David Winslow for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Ayrian Yasar, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, 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 Judith Dinsmore for her excellent final proofing and formatting of this printed volume.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
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Servant Thoughts

Editorials

Repentance in the Time of Coronavirus

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* May 2020[1]

by Gregory E. Reynolds

> There were some present at that very time who told him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1–5)

Accidents, disease, and crime take lives every day, but when a mass disaster like the World Trade Center attack of 2001 happens it raises questions. Why did the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, spread and attack some nations and some cities more than others?[2] Was it because some nations or populations are more sinful than others? Some Christians believe that the answer is, "Yes." Believers in biblical times made the same mistake. In Luke 13 Galileans among Jesus's audience brought news of Pilate's injustice towards some of their own, perhaps because they were perceived to be revolutionaries.

These were killed at Passover by Pilate (v.1). And Jesus has his own disaster story. The tower of Siloam, connected with a reservoir supplying Jerusalem with water from Gihon, collapsed and killed eighteen.

So, the question is: Is every disaster or evil, great or small, God's special judgement on individuals or groups? Many people today, including believers, think so. According to the Bible there is only one nation in history with whom God has established a covenant: Israel. In the new covenant the visible church is the covenant community distributed among the nations. In the Mosaic covenant, God established blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience, so there is a correlation between the spiritual and the moral state of the nation and God's relationship to them. The theocratic situation is the only time in history when covenantal religion and civil government were coextensive. The prophets were called to bring covenant lawsuits against the disobedient nation of Israel. We also see that the Lord judged certain pagan nations, like Egypt, the Amorites, and the nations of Palestine during the exodus when their sin reached a fullness. "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). But we only know this because God's assessment is given to us in his Word. It is a mistake, therefore, to apply these sanctions to America, any other nation, or any group of people. Jesus's words are instructive, then, in this regard.

On the personal level, Job's "friends" made the same mistake. Counselor Eliphaz was functioning in light of a covenant of works when he says, "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?" (Job 4:7). Blessings and curses were an exact payment for obedience and disobedience: "Do not make

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=818.

2 This article is based on a sermon that I preached shortly after 9/11 at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church in Manchester, New Hampshire, on September 23, 2001.

yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (Lev. 18:24–25).

So, was Pilate's attack on the worshipping Galileans or the victims of the falling of the tower of Siloam more sinful than others? Jesus answers with an emphatic "No!" But note how he phrases his answer: "do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others?" All accidents, tragedies, deaths, and disasters are a stark reminder that all people are presently and continually under God's wrath and curse, as Romans 1:18 clearly teaches: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Jesus assumes that all people are sinners! Again Paul is clear in this universal indictment: "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, . . . so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:9, 19, 23). However, this is not to say that every disaster is not a form of God's judgment. The mistake is in saying that a particular disaster is necessarily a punishment for the particular sins of particular individuals or nations.

Good and bad things happen to all people. There are common curses and common blessings on all people. Rabbi Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*[3] begs the biblical question: Why do good things happen to bad people? The answer is God's common grace, or undeserved favor, as Jesus said in the Sermon of the Mount: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:44–45).

What should our response be to a worldwide disaster like the present pandemic, affecting 184 nations as of this writing? Jesus answer could not be plainer: "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (vv. 3, 5). The coronavirus, first of all, should work deep repentance in us Christians as we remember that we deserve God's judgment and that it is only God's utterly remarkable grace that makes us righteous in his sight, and will spare us from the final judgment, because Jesus has been judged for us. The present tense of the verb "repent" (*metanoēte*, μετανοῆτε) reminds us that the Christian life is to be one of continual repentance, a constant turning from the practice of sin to the way of righteousness.

> Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:4–6)

As the Westminster Larger Catechism answers the question: "What is repentance unto life?"

> WLC Q. 76. A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.

These Scriptures are among the proof texts for this answer:

> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matt. 3:8)

> For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor. 7:10)

The consequence of not repenting is that "you will all likewise perish" (vv. 3, 5). The comparison "likewise" does not mean one of the same in kind,

3 Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Random House, 1981).

but that judgment will come with unexpected suddenness and finality. All evils and disasters are a foretaste of final judgment. Great disasters, like COVID-19, are meant to be stark reminders of this extremely serious reality. On that great and awful day the wicked "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46).

Instead of looking at the wicked with disdain, which we are often tempted to do, compassion is the order of the day. If we remember what we are by nature, we will learn the lesson Paul was teaching the Corinthian church about their attitude toward the wicked, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Seek to be a comfort to those who are suffering in this pandemic. All the heroism and help that people and nations are offering is a revelation of God's goodness and mercy, a blessing of his providence.

Along with being part of the help we should be seeking opportunities to compassionately warn our neighbors and families to flee the wrath to come by turning and trusting Christ, freely offered to them in the gospel. Religion presently is thought to be a general comfort for the suffering and the fearful, a kind of mere placebo. This gives us a wonderful opportunity to distinguish Christianity by the undeserved favor of God shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:18–21)

Along with the uniqueness of God's grace in Christ, we need to communicate the power of the historical nature of that gospel. It is only truly good news because the eternal Son of God came into this world as a man to redeem us from sin and death.

The idea of transcendence has lost its footing in the assumptions of modernity. All is material and physical health; life in this present world is all many people have. We can often be caught up in this mentality and the way of life it demands. The gospel view is radically and, thus, wonderfully different:

> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

The hope of another world and the historical resurrection of the dead is central to the exclusivity of our message: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:19–20).

A day of ultimate reckoning is coming! We need to remind ourselves of this and call sinners to turn to the Lord of the present world and the one to come.

> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. (Luke 21:33–35)

The "greater sin" is an unrepentant and thus unfruitful life. Of all our blessings how much is used for the glory of God? Every disaster is a reminder that we all need to repent and believe

the gospel. Ⓢ

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Reflections on Virtual Church Meeings in the Time of Coronavirus

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2020[1]

by Gregory E. Reynolds

> Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. (2 John 12)[2]

There is nothing like my black raspberries in early July. The ones I get from the grocery store are good, but the first-hand experience of picking and eating my own is much more satisfying. So, the mediated connection with other people, especially people we love, whether by phone or teleconferencing, is good in certain circumstances, but nothing can replace their actual presence. The apostle John felt this keenly as we all do each Lord's Day during this time of coronavirus. I will use the word "actual" to refer to our physical presence in gathering for worship. I do so because worship is an act, an act of bowing and adoring our Lord body and soul: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!" (Ps. 95:6). Worship is an act of the whole person which cannot be done mediated by a screen. The present necessity is like John's paper and ink—better than nothing—but making us long for a better day. As we shall see teleconferencing platforms are unsuitable for worship and preaching.

Permanent self-isolation would be a denial of the incarnation. This has been an increasing problem in the church ever since the internet became a household reality in the 1990s. The First Church of Cyberspace was a pioneer in this sad folly. We live in the midst of many who believe we can lead disembodied lives. This present crisis will only tend to fuel the fire of radical individualism and enable cybergnosticism—living in cyberspace as if without a body. The writer of Hebrews warned of this tendency long before the electronic environment: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24–25). My pastor and another nearby, whose Lord's Day presentation I have viewed, have done their very best, given the weaknesses of the various electronic means of communicating, to feed their congregations. I believe this is true throughout our communion. For this I am grateful.

Having studied the phenomena of electronically mediated church since 1990, when TV ministry was all the rage, I have been critical of many of the ways the church unreflectively has used electronic media. Yet, now not only is this version of the coronavirus novel, but so also is my experience of live streaming church meetings each Lord's Day. Experiencing almost two months of tuning in to virtual church presentations made me think that it might be helpful to share some of my reflections on the benefits and liabilities of such presentations both to immunize church officers to the temptation to have such meetings regularly and to help them appreciate why it is so good to gather for corporate worship each Lord's Day.

On the spectrum of responses to the sudden

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=826..

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, "Face to Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life," *Ordained Servant* (December 2012).

need to have something available each Lord's Day to the church during the COVID shutdown are two poles of approach: those who have a devotional via audio or video prepared beforehand and those who live stream something close to a full liturgy, and in a few cases in the church building, and even with a few people (in line with local and state requirements). My experience is with a live streamed liturgy reduced essentially to confession, assurance of pardon, preaching, and prayer. The fact that we as a presbytery and local church do not do this very well speaks highly of our commitment to corporate gathering for public worship because it means that we have no experience with live streaming any church meetings. And because we know one another as a small congregation, the live streaming is probably more meaningful than if we had never met or were a large group.

However, using backgrounds, having proper lighting, using the full screen to block out distractions, and practicing a host of other more technical aspects of livestreaming in particular, require experience and the proper knowledge required of the speaker and the audience on how to use the Zoom application. Paying better attention to these things helps to mitigate the negatives of a medium that is, in itself, essentially unsuitable for worship. I recommend Zoom over other livestream applications because it is free for the limited use we will make of it. And, unlike Facebook or other social platforms, you do not have to join the platform to join the meeting. With Go-To-Meeting one must subscribe for a fee in order to use the system settings, so those who join the meeting are not able to have backgrounds to filter out what's happening in the viewer's home. There may be other platforms that are being used that are better than Zoom, but this is one I am experiencing in my local church, presbytery, and its committees.

The efficiency of such platforms as Zoom in terms of cost and convenience will tempt many, even in Reformed churches, to make this a standard practice at some level. In our general culture we already see the temporary being made permanent. Twitter is letting its employees work from home permanently. Consider these statements by evangelical pastors recently interviewed by Sarah Zylstra for the Gospel Coalition:

> "I think the Lord is showing us a new strategy, if we'd just pay attention," he said. He's seen unexpected fruit from the online worship he never wanted to have—members watching services at home with unbelieving family members, more people in more small groups, a higher number in the discipleship class for new people. "There hasn't been a [ministry] retreat at all," Mabry said. "I think this is a strategy God wants us to hang on to."[3]

Even though I believe that OPC officers and congregants will be less tempted, we should never take that for granted in rapidly changing times. The Lord's Day worship hill is the one I am prepared to die on; but I would also argue strongly that a lack of personal presence in all sorts of meeting and teaching venues is an impoverishment.

There are two fundamental errors that I wish to address at the outset. First, the idea that the introduction of electronic media is the same as the introduction of other technologies in history, such as the printing press. Recently a prominent evangelical leader wrote that

> For centuries faith has flourished when technology could meet spiritual need. The Gutenberg Bible transformed Christianity, combining a hunger for faith and disdain for hierarchy with the printing press. . . . Necessity has sparked innovation during the coronavirus outbreak as well. Recently a church in Nashville, Tenn., offered drive-through communion, distributing consecrated bread to congregants in their cars. . . . Ministries also have shifted from physical spaces to digital platforms. Online viewers at First Baptist Church in Dallas, for example, surged from 50,000 before the coronavirus outbreak

3 Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, "How 6 Pastors Are Thinking About Reopening," The Gospel Coalition (May 2, 2020), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-6-pastors-thinking-reopening/.

to over 200,000.[4]

There is a vast difference between the cultural effect of the printing press and the electronic environment, even though both media inventions radically changed culture. Canadian scholar Arthur Boers observes that modern technological change is unique in five ways:[5]1) Change is occurring at an unprecedented rate, leaving little time to adapt discerningly, and thus technology is overpowering culture. By contrast the change from handwritten manuscripts to the printed word took several centuries. 2) Change is artificial, separating us from nature and the real world. Matthew Crawford demonstrates the importance of the integration of manual and mental competence for living in the actual world.[6] Wendell Berry contends that the Bible is an "outdoor book."[7] 3) Change is pervasive, dominating everything from communication to irons, restaurants to family. It tends to intrude on vacations and the Sabbath. 4) Change is not related to personal skills; rather, change is marked by such things as self-driving cars and automated airplanes. In contrast, on January 15, 2009, Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger landed an Airbus A320 in New York's freezing Hudson River by human skill that no automated system, at least at the time, could replicate. 5) Change demands universal conformity, tending to eradicate the unique, local, and diverse. The title of James Howard Kunstler's book emphasizes this point relative to our built environment: *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*.[8]

That leads me to the second error, the idea that all technologies are simply tools.

Because various technologies are designed with certain functions and consequences in mind, each has a genius of its own, a suitability to a particular purpose or purposes. There are, of course, also unintended consequences. The automobile was intended to make travel more efficient and far reaching, but it also disintegrated the social structures of family and community. In analyzing the new electronic environment and its devices, a good steward of technology will become familiar with both the intended and unintended influences and consequences of human inventions.

Suitability is a useful lens for the wise assessment of various technologies. A hymn would not be suitable music with which to begin a baseball game; just as a Sousa march would be unsuitable as an opening hymn in worship. Television is suitable for drama because it captivates us with faces and visual stories. This is why Neil Postman argues, I think convincingly, that television is not suitable for preaching or worship.[9] It diminishes the transcendence of God while amplifying the importance of the preacher.

So, we come to the question of the suitability of a livestreaming application like Zoom, which is the platform I have experienced regularly for church meetings since the stay-at-home orders. Some of us have a problem with calling them worship services.

While livestreaming is, I believe, unsuitable for many things, its place in education, business, and elsewhere should be discussed in term of suitableness and also with an eye to what is lost in the absence of actual human presence. This will vary at various times and in different situations. Being able to see a loved one in a nursing home or the hospital when it is not possible for a physical visit is a great blessing. Not being part of an actual community in learning or business may not be.

4 Ralph Reed, "A Coronavirus Easter," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 10, 2020): A13.

5 Arthur Boers, "Open the Wells of Grace and Salvation: Creative and Redemptive Potential of Technology in Today's Church" (lecture at the conference From the Garden to the Sanctuary: The Promise and Challenge of Technology, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, June 6, 2013).

6 Matthew B. Crawford, *The World beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

7 Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Random House, 1993); reprinted in *Cross Currents* 43, no. 2 (Summer 93): 149, https://www.crosscurrents.org/berry.htm.

8 James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

9 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1985), 114–24.

One caution: we must be careful in this fluid, and hopefully temporary, situation to be generous in assessing the practices of various churches in response to this pandemic. This is why my remarks in this article are called "reflections." While I hope to articulate principles rooted in God's Word, which we can all affirm, I do not expect everyone to agree with every detail of my analysis—especially of the liabilities of virtual church meetings. I am also limited by the kind of virtual platform I have become familiar with, as well as the particular form and content of the presentation at the church of which I am part.

Benefits

In such a time as this we simply would be unable to meet without virtual conferencing platforms or some form of electronic communication. And if churches actually met as usual during a pandemic, many more deaths would likely occur. It is also my opinion that with people we know well face to face, seeing them mediated via a screen is helpful, perhaps similar to the way that carrying a picture of one's family is meaningful while traveling.

Modern electronic technologies have made possible the analysis of a virus like COVID-19, the rapid manufacture of medical materials, the gathering and analysis of data, and communication of information and guidelines that have saved many lives.

In my recent experience with Zoom, sermon discussion often took place unplanned after the meeting. This was unusual because everyone heard the discussion and benefited from it. Ordinarily, after worship, discussion takes place one-on-one or in small groups. Of course, this may be implemented, and often has been, in the corporate setting by holding an actual meeting for just this purpose after worship. But this unintended consequence reminded me of the value of such discussions, not that we should continue using livestreaming for Lord's Day meetings.

Also, some of us have been able to attend, actually to see and hear, the evening meeting, which we, for various reasons such as distance, health, and little children, are not normally able to attend.

Liabilities

The Nature of Lord's Day Public Worship

It often has been thought that I do not like electronic media because I engage in critical analysis. This is not true. Because we as Americans are generally positive and even enthusiastic about every new invention, I have found it important to be alert to ways in which the electronic environment diminishes and alters embodied existence and personal presence. In a fallen world, our inventions always have liabilities as well as benefits. Consider atomic power.

If we examine words that we often take for granted, like congregation, corporate, or public we will be reminded that our physical presence in Lord's Day worship is essential to the nature of worship and the visible church. The congregation *congregates* on the Lord's Day. Congregate is derived from the Latin verb *congregare*, meaning flock together. Corporate is from the Latin *corporare*, to form into a body or social group. The accent on bodily or actual presence is pronounced. When we refer to the *visible* church and public worship, we are also accenting the personal presence of a group of believers.

Since Lord's Day public worship is a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in history, the physical presence of gathered worshippers is an essential expression of that reality. The visible and tactile nature of the sacraments accents the embodied character of corporate worship. The Directory for the Public Worship of God of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (DW) says this eloquently, "Because God's people worship, not as an aggregation of individuals, but as a congregation of those who are members of one another in Christ, public worship is to be conducted as a *corporate* activity in which all the members participate as the *body* of Christ" (emphasis added, DW I.B.4.d). Some may be tempted to think that the spiritual nature of public worship

obviates the necessity of bodily presence. But, since Paul refers to Christ's, and our, resurrected bodies as "heavenly" or "spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:40, 44–45), and Christ ate fish with the disciples after the resurrection, it seems clear that whole persons, body and soul, are called to gather for worship in space and time.

The Unsuitableness of Virtual Lord's Day Meetings

The Importance of Space

The "gallery view" in Zoom reminds me of the sixties game show Hollywood Squares, except that those participants were social distancing whereas we are not actually present. Individuals in little boxes are the focus rather than the corporate reality of a gathered people. With the pervasiveness of visual media, we do not need one more venue in which to focus on ourselves. In "speaker view" the preacher is the visual focus, rather than God and his gathered people, as I have said above. These are the limits of screens, which can never replicate space. We *view* others, clustered on a screen but not actually present together. Instead of focusing on the pastor leading worship, the "gallery view" has us looking at ourselves; even in "speaker view" some viewers can see themselves, although that can be turned off. I chose to turn off the video so that a still picture of me shows up. But this is still distracting.

One of the great joys of actual gathering on the Lord's Day is the informal, serendipitous fellowship we enjoy after worship. The screen does not allow the one-on- one of small group conversations after worship. Those who are more reserved tend to say nothing.

Livestreaming is also a threat to the reality of the local church. It may tempt us to go elsewhere electronically on the Lord's Day because the preacher is better at another site.

This is a denial of the vital importance of the local assembly of God's people with the preacher whom God has called to that place. Paul emphasizes the importance of locality when he addresses the various churches in his letters, such as "To the church of God *that is in* Corinth (emphasis added, 1 Cor. 1:2)."

The Danger of Informality and Distraction

The home environment is by its nature informal. Mediated through a screen, social and cognitive space are altered radically. The formalities of our culture have been under attack for a long time. What I call the "Cult of Informality" is the extreme implementation of egalitarianism, and certainly one of the weak tendencies of a democratic society. I love loose-fitting sports clothing and have not strapped a tie around my neck in nearly two months; but the way we dress should be appropriate to the various occasions of our lives. I have never worn my three-piece suit for gardening. A home is a place of refuge where informality is appropriate. Also, when we dress for church it gives us a sense of the difference and the importance of what we are doing. We are essentially paying attention to coming into the presence of the living and true God in his resplendent majesty and marvelous mercy.

In actual worship, worshippers face the minister; in Zoom we are looking at each other as I have mentioned. If the preacher fails to mute everyone, even a sneeze or a screaming child will take center stage momentarily. Also, even when muted, if viewers do not use backgrounds, everyone sees the many ordinary things that go on in a home: children and pets walking through rooms, people reaching for coffee across the kitchen table, the chiming of clocks; all of these draw our attention away from what is supposed to be holding our attention. Also, we can turn ourselves off at will and walk away. With this medium we tend to lose our focus and the seriousness of worship is diminished. We are naturally distracted; worshipping in a single space with one another minimizes distraction and enhances our sense of mutual accountability. Fortunately, the sensibilities we have formed over many years of actual worship will, I believe, enable us to endure this temporary challenge with its temptations.

The Impossibility of the Sacraments, Singing, Confession, and Many Other Things

Nothing reveals the unsuitableness of streaming church meetings more than the physical impossibility of the elements of worship. Some elements like preaching, the assurance of pardon, and fellowship are seriously impaired and awkward; other elements such as singing, corporate confession of sin and faith, the offering, and especially the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are impossible. Not being in the same space, especially with varying qualities of microphones and internet connections, conjoin to undermine true worship and preaching.

Our Directory for the Public Worship of God reminds us of what Scripture teaches concerning the administration of the sacraments:

> Because the sacraments are ordinances of Christ for the benefit of the visible church, they are to be administered only under the oversight of the government of the church. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances they are properly administered only in a gathering of the congregation for the public worship of God . . ." (DW II.A.4.b)

Many have asked about having the Lord's Supper administered virtually. Because the sacraments include physical elements and the physical actions of the minister of the Word, they require our presence body and soul. The sacraments are part of the worship of the gathered congregation and "under the oversight of the government of the church." This is not possible virtually.

Evangelism is made more difficult with platforms that require a meeting identification number and password. While unbelievers may be invited, they cannot simply attend. Churches with livestreaming coming directly from their website have the advantage of being publicly accessible. May our Lord keep us from the digital temptation to live disembodied lives. May he bless us as we return to actual worship with a renewed enthusiasm and commitment. There is a longing in John's statement quoted above (2 John 12), a deep desire for personal presence, which is one of the great unintended blessings of social distancing: it makes us yearn for the presence that the psalmist longed for, "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God" (Ps. 84:2). ☺

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Servant
Worship

Image of God and Images of God: The Second Commandment and Semi-realized Eschatology

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by Glen J. Clary

In the iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries, the chief argument of the iconophiles in favor of iconography was the incarnation of Christ.[2] According to the seventh ecumenical council of the church (AD 787), the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God, necessitates the production of sacred icons and their use in divine worship. That doctrine is based, in part, on the assumption that the incarnation of Christ has rendered the prohibition of images in the second commandment obsolete.[3] A proper understanding of the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images, however, will demonstrate that the incarnation of Christ does not sanction iconic worship. Lawful worship in the new covenant, just as in the old covenant, is aniconic, or without images.

The Second Commandment

> You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exod. 20:3–6)

In Exodus 20:3–6, there are two distinct but related commandments.[4] Both commandments belong to the same genus, but they are different species. Both prohibit idolatry, but they deal with two different species of idolatry.[5] The first teaches us "whom we are to worship;" the second, "how we are to worship."[6] Even though the second commandment only explicitly prohibits the use of icons or images in worship, the scope of the commandment is much broader.[7] God not only proscribes images as means of worship; he prescribes other means of worship including prayer, the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and the singing of psalms and hymns. God regulates worship prescriptively not merely proscriptively. The second commandment has a broad scope; it deals with the overall governance of wor-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=792; https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=799.

2 See Daniel Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 178–79. Cf. Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Seventh Ecumenical Council* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 107–13; and Andrew Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images: St. John of Damascus* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2003).

3 Cf. Giakalis, 108–10; and Marjorie Boyle, "Christ the EIKΩN in the Apologies for Holy Images of John of Damascus," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1970): 175–86.

4 Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 137.

5 Cf. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 518.

6 G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 138; cf. Joachim Douma, *The Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 35; and John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, volume 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 106; hereafter, *Harmony of the Law*.

7 Calvin, *Harmony of the Law*, 107.

ship. This article, however, focuses on the narrow question of cultic images.

That the Ten Commandments begin by addressing the sin of idolatry points up the fact that "idolatry is the ultimate sin" and, in some sense, "the root of all other sins."[8] Idolatry was the chief sin of Israel and, indeed, the chief sin of humanity. As Tertullian said, "The principal crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment—is idolatry."[9] In Romans 1:21–25, Paul indicts all people for rebellion against God, his chief accusation being the sin of idolatry.

Cornelius Van Til observed, "Paul knows only two classes of people, those who worship and serve the Creator and those who worship and serve the creature."[10] All people fall into one of these two categories: true worshipers or idolaters. Every unregenerate person is an idolater. Idolatry is not merely an external cultic act, it is "a matter of the heart and its ultimate attachments."[11] Idolatry was both the root of Adam's sin and the result of it. All who descend from him by ordinary generation are idolaters by nature. "Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."[12] Idolatry pervades the life of all who are in a state of sin. To put it in Pauline terms, all who are "in Adam" are idolaters; true worshipers are those who are "in Christ." Conversion, therefore, may be described as turning away from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9; cf. Acts 14:15; Rev. 9:20).

The second commandment contains a twofold prohibition: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image" (v. 4), and "You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (v. 5). The grounds of the prohibition are as follows, "for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers," etc. (vv. 5–6). The prohibition deals with the production of any representations of God and the use of such images in the worship of God. You shall not make them, nor shall you bow down to them. Both idol-making (iconography) and idol-worshiping (iconolatry) are forbidden. A breach of the first would necessarily lead to a breach of the second.

The second part of the prohibition makes it clear that the first part has in view cultic images. It is not a prohibition of the visual arts in general, but of cultic images in particular. Turretin explains, "The making of images is not absolutely interdicted, but with a twofold limitation—that images should not be made representing God (Deut. 4:16), nor be employed in his worship."[13] It is helpful to make a distinction here between cult and culture. Images are forbidden with regard to the former not the latter. The second commandment does not forbid the cultural use of visual arts or images, only their cultic use.[14]

What is especially in view in the second commandment is the iconic worship of Yahweh. Israel must not worship Yahweh like the pagan nations worship their gods. Iconic worship was a prominent feature of the nations that surrounded Israel, but the worship of Yahweh was to be aniconic. Even before leaving Mount Sinai, however, Israel broke the second commandment. Aaron made a golden calf as a symbolic representation of Yahweh (Exod. 32:5; cf. 1 Kings 12:28).[15] Aaron made an image of a bull not because he thought Yahweh possessed the form of a bull, but to symbolize Yahweh's power. His image was "never intended to portray a photographic likeness, but only to control Yah-

8 G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993), 95.

9 Cited in David Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 350.

10 Cornelius Van Til, *Paul at Athens* (unidentified publisher, 1956), 1; cited in Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 17.

11 Reynolds, *The Word*, 15.

12 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles*, ed. by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 108.

13 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, volume 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994) 65.

14 Cf. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 54–56.

15 After making the calf, Aaron proclaimed, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD [Yahweh]" (Exod. 32:5). Hence, the golden calf was an image of Yahweh. In Acts 7:41, the calf is called an idol even though it was intended as a representation of Yahweh. God treated the calf as a rival and substitute for himself; he made no distinction between Israel's worship of him through the golden calf and the pagan worship of false gods (1 Cor. 10:7–14).

weh's power."[16] He "saw a passing representation of precisely that power in the strong bull with its fertility."[17] Thus, the golden calf was an attempt to secure Yahweh's presence among his people and to harness and channel his power. That is, it was an attempt to walk God around on a leash.[18]

After their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, the Israelites entered the Promised Land with orders to destroy all cultic images of the Canaanites. The conquest of Canaan was meant to be a war against the idols of Canaan. In place of the false worship of the Canaanites, Israel was to establish the true worship of Yahweh "in the midst of his sanctuary-kingdom."[19] However, Israel failed to do that, and as a result, the idols of the nations proved to be a snare to them (Ps. 106:36). They soon fell into idolatry just as God had forewarned (Deut. 7:16).

Throughout Israel's history, there were many periods of repentance and reformation accompanied by the destruction of images and recovery of true worship. The forbidden means of worship were destroyed, and the divinely prescribed means were restored.[20] Indeed, the whole history of Israel's dynastic period can be told and evaluated in terms of her faithfulness to or disregard of the first and second commandments. Gregory Reynolds explains:

> While First and Second Kings focus on the prophetic dimension and First and Second Chronicles focus on the priestly dimension of Israel's dynastic history; the history of Israel's kings in both places is viewed uniformly from the perspective of idolatry. The Former Prophets [Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings] form a court brief, used by the prophets in prosecuting God's Covenant lawsuit against idolatrous Israel. Asa, Jehoshaphat, and especially Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah stand out as heroes by destroying idolatry in varying degrees.[21]

Despite the occasional periods of reformation in Israel's history and the repeated prophetic warnings and calls to repentance, Israel continued to descend into deeper depths of depravity, which ultimately led to the departure of God's glory from his temple, the temple's destruction, and the exile of his people—all because of their idolatry. In his mercy, however, God graciously preserved a remnant of his people and promised to make a new covenant with them, which included, among other things, a promise to cleanse and cure them of their idolatry (e.g. Ezek. 36:24–27).

Verbal Revelation at Mount Sinai

Another version of the second commandment is found in Deuteronomy 4, where Moses reminds the Israelites that when they came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, the Lord spoke to them "out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (4:12). The word translated "form" here is the same term used in the second commandment. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness" (Exod. 20:4). The Hebrew word *temunah* (תְּמוּנָה) meaning "form" or "likeness," occurs only ten times in the Old Testament, including Numbers 12:8, which I will examine below.[22] As the basis of the prohibition of images, Moses appeals to the fact that Israel did not see Yahweh's form (*temunah*). "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form (*temunah*) on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image" (Deut. 4:15–16).

"Carved image" (*pesel*, פֶּסֶל) is the other term used in the second commandment. "You shall not make for yourself a carved image" (Exod. 20:4). In the Old Testament, *pesel* refers to any image made from wood, stone, or metal that represents

16 Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 39.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 40.

19 Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, second edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 50.

20 Reynolds, *The Word*, 8.

21 Ibid., 9; cf. Kline, *Structure of Biblical Authority*, 58–59.

22 See Exod. 20:4; Num. 12:8; Deut. 4:12, 15, 16, 23, 25; 5:8; Job. 4:16; and Psalm 17:15. Cf. Francis Brown, et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 568; hereafter BDB.

God (whether the true God or a false god).[23] Moses writes,

> Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form [*temunah*] on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image [*pesel*] for yourselves, in the form [*temunah*] of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. (Deut. 4:15–18)

This is another version of the second commandment, but notice that the rationale for the prohibition is different than the rationale given in Exodus 20. In Exodus 20, the grounds are, "for I the LORD your God am a jealous God," referring to God's conjugal jealousy.[24] But in Deuteronomy 4:15–18, we find a different rationale for the prohibition, namely, the fact that Israel saw no form when God spoke to them at the mountain. Since you saw no form or likeness (*temunah*), do not make an image (*pesel*). The common interpretation of this rationale appeals to the spiritual (nonphysical) nature of God. Since God is an invisible spirit, he cannot be imaged. It is an ontological impossibility.[25]

There are two problems with that interpretation. First, on several occasions, God visibly appeared to certain people like Abraham, who saw him in human form (Gen. 18:1–21), and Jacob, who declared that he had seen God face to face (Gen. 32:22–32). Likewise, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended Mt. Sinai, beheld God, and ate and drank in his presence (Exod. 24:11). The second problem with that interpretation is that Deuteronomy 4:15–18 is making a historical argument not an ontological one about the immaterial and invisible nature of the divine essence.[26] It is true that God is a pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions (WCF 2.1), but that is not the point of the rationale in Deuteronomy 4:15–18. Rather, the rationale is based on God's chosen mode of revelation at Mount Sinai. God chose to reveal himself to Israel by means of words not images. His chosen mode of revelation was verbal not visual. Therefore, since you heard a voice but saw no form, do not make an image (Deut. 4:15–16). There is an inseparable link, therefore, between the prohibition of images in the second commandment and God's choice of verbal revelation.

Direct and Indirect Revelation

Bearing in mind the link between the prohibition of images and divine revelation, let us examine Numbers 12:6–8. Out of jealousy over Moses's unique role as prophet-mediator of the covenant, Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses. Consequently, the Lord rebuked them:

> Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.[27] Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form [*temunah*] of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Num. 12:6–8)

This rebuke of Miriam and Aaron highlights the priority and uniqueness of Moses in compari-

23 See BDB, 820; cf. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew*, electronic edition (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

24 Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 136. Idolatry is spiritual adultery, which arouses jealousy in Yahweh much like jealousy is aroused in a husband if his wife leaves him for another man (cf. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 43).

25 E.g., Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 60. For a critique of this interpretation, see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 136; Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 45; and David VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology: Toward a Catholic Understanding of the Reformed Doctrine of the 'Second' Commandment," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (April 2004): 130–47.

26 VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 134–35.

27 Visions and dreams are prophetic modes of revelation (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17–18).

son to all other prophets of Israel, particularly with respect to the various modes of revelation by which God made himself known to them.[28] God distinguishes Moses from all other prophets and places him in an entirely different category in terms of how he receives divine revelation. God spoke to the other prophets in dreams and visions—not clearly but in riddles, not directly but indirectly. To Moses, however, God spoke mouth to mouth or face to face as it is stated elsewhere in the Pentateuch. "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exod. 33:11).[29] "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). Again, the priority and uniqueness of Moses is stressed in terms of his face-to-face communion with God.

God spoke to the other prophets of Israel in dreams and visions, but that is not how he spoke to Moses. "With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles" (Numb. 12:8). The term translated "riddles" here means through obscure or enigmatic words.[30]

Furthermore, Moses "beholds the form [*temunah*, תְּמוּנָה] of the LORD" (Num. 12:8). *Temunah* here is the same word used in the grounds of the prohibition of the second commandment. Since you saw no form (*temunah*, תְּמוּנָה), make no image (Deut. 4:15–16).[31] Robertson explains the significance of Moses seeing the form of the LORD:

> Scripture says elsewhere that no man can see God and live (Exod. 33:18–19). Yet Moses as prophet shall see the form of God. These statements are not contradictory. Moses will not see the essential nature of God. Yet he will see a form that shall manifest the nature of the invisible God to the understanding of mortal man. This experience by Moses places him in a category distinct from all the other prophets. He is unique in the history of prophetism in Israel, and by God's appointment he holds a position of priority that will belong to no one else.[32]

The contrast in Numbers 12:6–8 is between two modes of revelation that we can label face-to-face communication versus non-face-to-face communication, or, if one prefers, direct versus indirect communication. "Face to face" is an idiom that denotes direct, intimate communication in contrast to indirect communication by means of an intermediary or medium.[33] In the ancient world both in Jewish literature (particularly with reference to Numb. 12:6–8) and in Greco-Roman literature, the metaphor used to describe an indirect mode of communication was a mirror.[34] When one looks at something in a mirror, one does not see the thing itself but only a reflection of it. If we apply the mirror metaphor to Numbers 12:6–8, we can paraphrase the idea as follows: Unlike Moses with whom God spoke face to face, the other prophets of Israel only beheld God indirectly as if they were looking at his reflection in a mirror. Similarly, if we apply the same metaphor to the rationale of the prohibition of images in Deuteronomy 4:15–18, we can paraphrase the prohibition as follows: Since you did not behold my form but only saw my reflection in the mirror of my Word, do not make an image of me.

It should be noted that the direct, intimate, face-to-face encounter with God that Moses experienced pointed forward to and was a foretaste of the consummative revelation of God's glory in the age to come, the eschatological hope of every believer. When Moses prayed "Please show me your glory,"

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28 Cf. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), 31–39.

29 The idiom "face to face" denotes intimacy of relationship and access. See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1070.

30 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1068.

31 It is significant that the Septuagint uses the word *doxa* (δόξα) in Numbers 12:8; Moses "beholds the glory of the Lord"; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

32 Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 38.

33 Cf. David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 624.

34 See Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 658–60; cf. Garland, 623–25; and Thiselton, 1067–70.

the LORD said to him, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:22–23). Moses's face-to-face communication with God in which he beheld the form of God (Num. 12:8) does not refer to the consummative revelation of God's glory at the end of the age, though it was certainly a foretaste of it.

Like Moses, many other saints of old longed to see God. The psalmist states, "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness [*temunah*, תְּמוּנָה]" (Ps. 17:15). Again, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (27:4; cf. Job 19:25–26). The desire to see God is good. It is, in fact, the pinnacle of Christian eschatological hope.[35] This desire is partly fulfilled in the incarnation of the eternal Son of God who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). When Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us," the Lord responded, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:8– 9).

The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ

Our thesis is that the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images in the Law still applies to the church on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation, therefore, does not sanction iconic worship.

In the prologue of his Gospel, the Apostle John heralds the eternal Word who was with God in the beginning, who is of the same substance as the Father yet personally distinct from the Father, and who, with the Father, created all things (John 1:1–3). The prologue reaches a climax when John writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the disciples beheld the glory of God. Moses longed to see the consummative revelation of God's glory that will be manifested at the end of the age. The disciples experienced a foretaste of that consummation-glory. Even though God spoke to Moses face to face and allowed him to behold the form of the Lord and catch a glimpse of the glory of the Lord, the revelation of God that Moses had, as glorious as it was, was inferior to the revelation of God in the incarnate Word.[36] John's prologue concludes by contrasting the revelation of God through Moses and the revelation of God in Christ. "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:17–18).

This teaching stands behind the words of Jesus to Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). When the disciples saw Jesus, they saw the image or icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), and they worshiped God in and through that image—not a dead image created by human hands, but the true and living image, indeed, the eternal and uncreated image of God visibly and tangibly present with them in the incarnate Christ. Christ is the living icon of God that we are not only permitted to worship, we are commanded to worship. And in worshiping Christ, the image of the invisible God, we become like him; we are transformed from glory into glory, into the image of Christ himself, the eschatological Adam in whom the creaturely image of God has reached its state of consummate perfection.

There is an inseparable connection between the second commandment and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. "The fulfillment of the second commandment is the birth of Jesus Christ," says Edmund Clowney.[37] Clowney adds, "The Father has offered us a true image to worship, and his jealousy is aroused if we choose anything but the incarnate Lord Jesus as the focus of our worship. Jesus is the true and only object of worship" (Clowney, 34).

35 VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 143.

36 Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 68–87.

37 Edmund Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 28.

Greg Reynolds echoes this thought:

> The image of God in Christ is the ultimate challenge to the worship of created images. All idols are counterfeit mediators. But now the true Mediator has invaded history. The Creator-Son has made Himself visible in history to draw sinners from among all nations away from idols.[38]

For the disciples, the ultimate revelation of God's glory was when they saw the risen and glorified Christ. After his resurrection, Christ did not appear to everyone but only to a select few whom he had chosen to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection. That brings into view the unique role of the apostles in the foundational era of the church because one of the prerequisites for apostleship was seeing the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor. 9:1; Eph. 2:20). Seeing the risen Christ was not a privilege given to everyone in the New Testament church. In fact, there is a clear distinction in the New Testament between those who saw him and those who did not see him.

In the context of the revelation of Christ at the end of the age, Peter says to his readers "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). The Apostle John, who more than any other New Testament author emphasizes the visible manifestation of God in the incarnate Son, frequently makes a distinction between those who saw Christ and those who did not see him and who *will not* see him until his return. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Jesus was looking forward to the time when he would no longer be bodily present with his disciples, which is the present state of affairs, one that will continue until his return. Only then will we see the face of Christ (Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2). According to David VanDrunen:

> This present age is an age of not seeing Jesus; the eschatological age to come is the age in which the Christian will see Jesus. For now, the believer possesses only the eschatological hope of the "beatific vision"—seeing the glorified Jesus in the age to come. This present age is an age of Christ's invisible presence in the Spirit, to be followed by an age of his visible presence which will commence when he reappears in glory (John 16:16). Furthermore, this present age is an age of walking by faith and not by sight (Rom. 8:24–25; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:8). . . . We do not attempt to make Christ seen in the present because the present is not the time for seeing Christ.[39]

Indeed, the time is coming when we will see the face of Christ. That is the blessed hope of every believer (Heb. 9:28). The believer should long to see Christ and expect to see him at the consummation, but until that day, "we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). The desire to see Christ with our eyes is appropriate. In fact, Christ prayed that we would see his glory (John 17:24). We refer to this vision of the glory of Christ as the beatific vision. The beatific vision is the consummate revelation of God's glory in the person of the ascended Christ, the image of the invisible God, who is presently unseen.

The apostle John tells us that we shall see Christ "as he is" in his state of perfected glory, and that vision of Christ will transform us into his image (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:49). That transformation will happen at the end of the age when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:52–53). Perhaps, no one has expressed this teaching better than Jonathan Edwards:

> It is the glorious sighting of Christ . . . radiating from his glorified body that effects a remarkable transformation of both the living

38 Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25.

39 David VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology: Toward a Catholic Understanding of the Reformed Doctrine of the 'Second' Commandment," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (April 2004): 144–45.

and the dead saints. The living shall be immediately transformed, both body and soul, when they first see Christ as he is (1 John 3:2). All remnants of sin shall be eradicated in their souls and their natural bodies shall be transformed into spiritual bodies. Jesus Christ as the "light of life" shines on the dead, raising them to life in resurrection bodies by the means of his visible glory.[40]

The beatific vision is when we behold God in the person of the glorified Christ in the eschaton. With our physical eyes, we will behold the glory of God in the glorified human nature of Christ, and we ourselves will become mirror reflections of that glory. We will not only behold the image of God but bear the image of God, not merely in the protological sense like Adam prior to the fall but in the eschatological sense like Christ after his resurrection. As perfected, eschatological image-bearers, we will experience for all eternity unceasing, consummative communion and fellowship with the Triune God.

That is what we have to look forward to in the age to come. But what about now? Are we currently cut off from communion and fellowship with Christ because he is no longer bodily present with us? Is the glory of the incarnate Word completely hidden from us?

Must we await Christ's return before we can behold his glory? Thankfully, although Christ is presently hidden from our eyes, God has not left us without a means of beholding his glory on this side of the eschaton. He has not left us without a means of communion with him. Even now, we behold the glory of Christ by faith when we look at the mirror of the gospel.

Beholding God in a Mirror

In 1 Corinthians 13:8–12, the apostle Paul employs the mirror metaphor to describe the present way the believer sees God.

> Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. . . . For now we see in a mirror dimly,[41] but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul refers to various modes of revelation: prophecy, tongues and knowledge (i.e., the spiritual gift of "the utterance of knowledge" listed in 1 Cor. 12:8). Paul contrasts the partial, incomplete knowledge of God that we currently have by means of these temporary modes of revelation with the future knowledge of God that we will have in the age to come.

The phrase, "when the perfect comes" (v. 10), refers to the perfect state of affairs ushered in at the consummation with the return of Christ.42 At the consummation, our partial, fragmentary knowledge of God will be replaced by a complete knowledge of God.[43] Paul says, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (v. 12). The contrast is between our knowledge of God in the present age and our knowledge of him in the age to come. But the contrast is also between two different ways of seeing God. Alluding to Numbers 12:8, Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Paul uses the same rare term *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα) that is used in Numbers 12:8 (LXX), where it is translated "riddles" and refers to the nature of the modes of revelation by which God spoke to the prophets of Israel in contrast to the

40 *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Miscellanies, 833–1152*, ed. by Amy Pauw (Yale University Press, 2002), 461–62.

41 "Dimly" translates *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα), which occurs only here in the New Testament and echoes Numbers 12:8 (LXX), "not in riddles." *Ainigma* means "indirectly" or "in a riddle," or perhaps both ideas are intended. See Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 658–60; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 623–25; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1067–71.

42 See Richard Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 109–12.

43 This should not be interpreted as a comprehensive knowledge because even in a state of glory, we remain finite while God is infinite.

manner in which he spoke to Moses (i.e., clearly, face to face, directly). The contrast in Numbers 12 is between two groups of people (Moses and the prophets), but in 1 Corinthians 13, it is between two ages, this age and the age to come.

According to Paul, a direct, face-to-face vision of God will not occur until the consummation "when the perfect comes" (1 Cor. 13:10). Until that day, we cannot behold God directly, face to face, but only indirectly as if we were looking at his reflection in a mirror. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (12). The face-to-face vision of God in view here is the direct, unmediated sight of God's glory that shines in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ in the beatific vision. That direct vision of God's glory awaits the return of Christ, but even now, we see the reflection of that glory in a mirror.

In 1 Corinthians 13 (just as in Numbers 12), the mirror refers to modes of revelation: visions, dreams, tongues, and prophecy. These were modes of revelation given by the Holy Spirit to the apostolic church on the Day of Pentecost when the ascended Christ poured out his Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17–18). In the absence of a direct, face-to-face, revelation of God in the incarnate Christ (which the church no longer has because Christ has ascended), Christ gave these prophetic modes of revelation to the church to function like a mirror in which the saints beheld his reflection.

In order to draw a conclusion from this teaching regarding images of Christ, we need to look once again at the grounds of the prohibition of images stated in Deuteronomy.

Since you heard my voice but saw no form, do not make an image, said the Lord (Deut. 4:15–16). Using the mirror metaphor, we can state the grounds of the prohibition as follows: Since you did not see me face to face but only saw my reflection in the mirror of my Word (voice), do not make an image of me. After the ascension of Jesus and until his return, the church is like Israel at Mount Sinai. We cannot see Christ directly, face to face, but only indirectly beholding his reflection as in a mirror, namely, the mirror of his Word. And therefore, the rationale of the prohibition of images still applies today on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation of Christ does not render the grounds of the prohibition obsolete because, like the Israelites at Sinai, we do not see Christ. We only hear his voice. We only see him indirectly as if beholding his reflection in a mirror. In the age of the apostles, that mirror included various prophetic modes of revelation such as dreams, visions, tongues and prophecy. And although special revelation has come to an end—visions, tongues, and prophecy have ceased—there, nevertheless, remains a mirror in which we have an *indirect* vision of God, namely, the mirror of the gospel. Believers behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the mirror of the gospel preached.

The Mirror of the Gospel

In 2 Corinthians 3:17–4:6, the apostle Paul explains that believers see the glory of God when they hear the gospel proclaimed. The key term is in 3:18, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord."[44] The point in using the mirror metaphor is that we do not have a direct, face-to-face, vision of the glory of God but only an indirect vision as if we were seeing it in a mirror. The mirror that Paul has in mind is the preaching of the gospel.

> If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. (2 Cor. 4:3–5a)

Unbelievers, whose minds are blinded, do not see the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God when they hear the gospel proclaimed. Believers do. By faith, we see it when we hear his

44 "Beholding as in a mirror" translates the word *katoptrizo* (κατοπτρίζω), which only occurs here in the New Testament. The term means to see indirectly or by reflection as in a mirror. This is another allusion to Numbers 12:8 (LXX); Moses "beheld the glory of the LORD." See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. by Frederick Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 535.

Word. The gospel is the mirror that reflects his glory.

Notice also that Paul says when we behold the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image (icon) from glory into glory (3:18).[45] Remarkably, our future glorification by means of seeing Christ in the beatific vision is something that has already begun.

When we behold Christ's glory in the gospel, we are transformed into his image. We are transformed into what we behold. We become like what we worship. Even now, prior to the beatific vision, we are being transformed in the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16) from glory into glory when we behold the image of Christ in the mirror of the gospel. Although Christ is not bodily present with the saints on earth, we are not cut off from communion and fellowship with him. Through the preaching of the gospel, we already experience by the power of his Spirit a foretaste of what we will experience at the consummation. By faith, we behold Christ in his Word. As John Calvin says, Christ, "the living image of God, is evidently set before our eyes in the mirror of the gospel!"[46] Calvin adds,

> The ministry of the word, I say, is like a looking-glass. For the angels have no need of preaching, or other inferior helps, nor of sacraments, for they enjoy a vision of God of another kind; and God does not give them a view of his face merely in a mirror, but openly manifests himself as present with them. We, who have not as yet reached that great height, behold the image of God as it is presented before us in the word, in the sacraments, and . . . in the whole of the service of the Church . . . we walk by faith, not by sight. Our faith, therefore, at present beholds God as absent. How so? Because it sees not his face, but rests satisfied with the image in the mirror.[47]

That is the present state of affairs, which will continue until the return of Christ. Until then, we walk by faith not by sight, and our faith at present beholds him as absent because we see his true image in the mirror of his gospel.

We conclude, then, that the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images in the Law still applies in the church on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation of Christ does not sanction iconic worship. If Israel was forbidden from making images of Yahweh because they heard his voice but saw no form, then why would that prohibition not equally apply to us given that God's chosen mode of revealing himself to the church has not changed? It is through the administration of the Word of God written that we behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). It is through the preaching of his gospel that we have true, spiritual communion and fellowship with the triune God. That is true worship, which cannot be obtained by means of cultic images. ⓢ

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45 The terms "glory" and "image" are used interchangeably. We see the same thing in 2 Cor. 4:4, "the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. by John De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.

46 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 202. Calvin is commenting on Genesis 32:30, Jacob's vision of God.

47 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 429–30. Calvin is commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:12.

The ESV and Homosexual Identity

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by Andy Wilson

In recent years, a controversy has emerged in evangelical and Reformed circles over the manner in which some of those who belong to these traditions are dealing with the issue of homosexuality. These Christians contend that a homosexual orientation is something that is fixed, innate, and given by God, and that same-sex attraction (SSA) is not sinful in and of itself but is a result of the fall akin to a physical disability. In their view, those who experience SSA are not morally culpable for being sexually attracted to members of their own sex but are simply responding to beauty as they were created to respond to it. This position has come to be known by the designations "Spiritual Friendship" and "Side B." It is distinguished from the much more liberal stance advocated by what is known as "Side A," which says that homosexual practice is morally acceptable for professing Christians. Proponents of Side B are not willing to go that far, as they maintain that homosexual behavior is prohibited by God. Nevertheless, they insist upon seeing homosexual orientation as a legitimate category of identity, and they encourage those who experience SSA to express their orientation without engaging in homosexual intercourse. As Wesley Hill, an advocate for Side B, explains,

> In my experience, at least, being gay colors everything about me, even though I am celibate. It's less a separable piece of my experience, like a shelf in my office, which is indistinguishable from the other shelves, and more like a proverbial drop of ink in a glass of water.[2]

Hill adds, "My question, at root, is how I can steward and sanctify my homosexual orientation in such a way that it can be a doorway to blessing and grace."[3] It certainly resonates with the prevailing thinking in our culture to embrace homosexual orientation as a classification of personhood. In this way, proponents of Side B display one of the key traits of contemporary evangelicalism: the tendency to look for ways to affirm things that are culturally popular while downplaying aspects of Christian teaching that are culturally offensive.

It is not surprising that the Bible translation of choice for many evangelicals, the English Standard Version (ESV), shows signs of being influenced by the idea that homosexual orientation is a legitimate category of identity.[4] This is evident in the ESV's handling of two New Testament passages that deal with the subject of homosexuality: 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of their calling to live holy lives, saying,

> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=804.

2 Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 80.

3 Hill, 78.

4 I am not suggesting that the ESV is a full-blown endorser of Side B thinking. The point under consideration is that the ESV's rendering of certain passages suggests that it affirms the validity of the notion of homosexual orientation, which is at the root of Side B thinking. Homosexual orientation was being discussed in biblical scholarship long before the ESV was first published in 2001. For example, in BDAG's entry for ἀρσενοκοίτης, the journal article that is cited in support of the decision to separate orientation from practice in the definition of this term was written by William L. Petersen in 1986.

such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

In verse 9, the ESV translates two Greek terms μαλακοί (*malakoi*) and ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) with the single phrase "men who practice homosexuality," explaining in a footnote that "The two Greek terms translated by this phrase refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts." Other major English versions translate these two terms as: "effeminate" and "abusers of themselves with mankind" (KJV); "sexual perverts" (RSV); "effeminate" and "homosexuals" (NASB); and "men who have sex with men" (NIV).[5] The first term, μαλακοί (*malakoi*), occurs with some frequency in ancient Greek literature and has a broad range of meaning. In his comprehensive volume on the Bible's teaching on homosexuality, Robert Gagnon argues convincingly that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 μαλακοί (*malakoi*) "should be understood as the passive partners in homosexual intercourse, the most egregious case of which are those who also intentionally engage in a process of feminization to erase further their masculine appearance and manner."[6]

As for ἀρσενοκοίταις (*arsenokoitais*), this term appears again in 1 Timothy 1:10 in a list in which Paul is summarizing the sins that are condemned by the Decalogue. As in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the ESV translates ἀρσενοκοίταις (*arsenokoitais*) in 1 Timothy 1:10 as "men who practice homosexuality." Other major English versions translate it as: "them that defile themselves with mankind" (KJV); "sodomites" (RSV); "homosexuals" (NASB); "those practicing homosexuality" (NIV).[7] There are no known occurrences of ἀρσενοκοίταις (*arsenokoitais*) prior to Paul, so it is likely that he coined this word himself. It is a compound of ἄρσην (*arsēn*; "man") and κοίτη (*koitē*; "bed"), which are used in conjunction with each other in the condemnations of homosexuality in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 (LXX). The background, etymology, and immediate context for Paul's uses of ἀρσενοκοίταις (arsenokoitais) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 indicate that he uses it broadly to refer to men who have sexual intercourse with other men.

The particular issue under consideration is the ESV's decision to give further specificity in its translation of these terms by employing the verb "practice."[8] Is this warranted? In the Greek text, neither passage contains a verb that could be translated as "practice." Both passages consist of lists of nouns (or adjectives used as substantives). It is true that most of the terms in these lists describe people who engage in certain sinful practices or behaviors, but the ESV does not render the other words in the lists with phrases like "those who practice idolatry," "those who practice sexual immorality," "those who practice thievery," etc. Why then does it do so with homosexuality? Why not simply say "homosexuals"? After all, this is the term that is used in our culture to describe people who practice homosexuality. More importantly, Paul explicitly condemns homosexual desire alongside homosexual activity in Romans 1, and Scripture consistently teaches that all inclinations towards sin are themselves sinful and are to be dealt with as such. (See Matt. 15:18–20; 18:8–9; Rom. 13:13–14; Gal. 5:16–17; Col. 3:5; James 1:14–15). These are the key factors that should be considered when translating biblical terms (one of which Paul probably coined) that describe homosexuality. But the ESV translates these terms in a manner that leaves room for the notion that the Bible does not condemn embracing a homosexual identity but only condemns committing homosexual acts.

5 This is from the 2011 update of the NIV. The original NIV had "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders."

6 Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 312.

7 This is from the 2011 update of the NIV. The original NIV had "perverts."

8 Other recent translations, including the 2011 NIV update, the NLT, the NET, and the CSB, handle these passages in the same basic manner. Interestingly, the NET includes the following explanatory footnote for both passages: "Since there is a distinction in contemporary usage between sexual orientation and actual behavior, the qualification 'practicing' was supplied in the translation, following the emphasis in BDAG." While the NET cites BDAG for support, BDAG's entry for ἀρσενοκοίτης simply follows William L. Petersen in assuming the validity of the contemporary notion of sexual orientation.

Perhaps this is not what the translators intended to convey. At the very least, they appear to have been influenced by the fact that our culture conceives of homosexuality not only in terms of sexual activity but also in terms of sexual orientation. The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation as:

> An enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.[9]

The assumption that homosexual orientation is a legitimate category of identity is something that must be tested against the teaching of Scripture. When it is, it is found to conflict with the Bible's doctrine of sin, as is shown in the paragraphs below. The embrace of homosexual orientation as a classification of personhood stands as an example of how, in the words of David Wells, "We reject reality as [God] has defined it" and "redefine our world and ourselves in order to accommodate our rebellion."[10]

When a passage of Scripture uses terms that describe people who engage in sinful behaviors, these terms should not be translated or interpreted in a manner that appears to isolate the behaviors from the inward dispositions and thoughts that give birth to these sinful behaviors. This should be clear in light of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, where he says that a person can be guilty of murder or adultery without actually putting these sins into practice (see Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28). Any inclination towards sin is a violation of the law. This remains the case even when different variables intersect with each other and contribute to sinful predispositions. From the standpoint of Scripture, human sexuality is not merely a matter of biology and psychology but is first and foremost a matter of morality. The only sense in which there is such a thing as an adulterer, fornicator, or homosexual is in an ethical sense. Any inclination toward these sins is sinful, even if they are not put into practice. The fact that the Bible condemns both homosexual desire and homosexual activity means that it also condemns locating one's identity in a supposed homosexual orientation.

Some Side B proponents claim that support for the notion of a morally neutral homosexual orientation is found in Matthew 19:12, where Jesus says, "there are eunuchs who have been so from birth." The problem with this argument is that it equates a congenital defect, which is of a physical nature, with a disordered desire, which is of an ethical nature. Moreover, the claim that those who experience SSA are simply "born that way" is scientifically unfounded. A recent study of over 500,000 people found that it is impossible to predict same-sex behavior on the basis of genetic factors.[11] While there are a number of variables that can contribute to SSA, the bottom line for Christians is that the Scriptures consistently deal with homosexual desire and activity as a matter of ethical perversion.

It is true that salvation is offered to homosexuals every bit as much as it is offered to other sinners. But salvation is offered to homosexuals on the same terms that it is offered to other sinners: on the terms of faith and repentance. And as the Westminster Shorter Catechism explains, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience" (WSC 87). To locate one's identity in a specific sin is to fail to turn from it to God in true repentance.

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9 "Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality," *American Psychological Association*, https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.pdf, accessed October 7, 2019.

10 David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 70.

11 "Massive Study Finds No Single Genetic Cause of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," Sara Reardon, *Scientific American*, August 29, 2019, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/massive-study-finds-no-single-genetic-cause-of-same-sex-sexual-behavior/, accessed September 24, 2019.

When Christians discuss homosexuality, the focus is often upon whether a homosexual orientation can be changed. To frame the issue in this manner is to beg the question. It is to assume that sexual orientation is a biblical category when it is not. The real issue is whether a person will let go of unbiblical ways of thinking and submit to God's Word so that he or she can be transformed by the renewing of his or her mind. The specific ways in which this transformation takes place will vary from believer to believer, and will never be without struggle. As with other sins, sexual sin can become deeply ingrained through habits of thought and behavior. This is not only true with regard to homosexuality. Those who have engaged in pornography use, sexual fantasizing, and masturbation often find that those sins cling so closely that the struggle against them seems unceasing. Nevertheless, every Christian is called, in reliance upon the promises of the gospel and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to persevere in putting sinful patterns of thought and behavior to death and to live to God. Some of those who come to Christ out of a homosexual background will live to God in heterosexual marriages.

Others will live to God as singles. The common denominator is that both groups can testify that they are no longer what they once were. They were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Of course, like all Christians, they still have to struggle against temptation. But even when temptation arises from inside themselves, it does not define who they are.

Their identity is now in Christ. Temptation is evidence of the unwelcome presence of indwelling sin in "this body of death," in which we groan as we await the consummation of our redemption (see Rom. 7:15–8:25). The way to respond to this is not to try to excuse our sin, but to let God's law expose it so that we may be continually driven out of ourselves to Christ.[12]

The ESV's popularity is well-deserved. Its "essentially literal" translation philosophy has produced a Bible in contemporary English that is highly readable and largely reflective of the wording of the original text. That being said, no Bible translation is beyond criticism. As this article has shown, the ESV's rendering of the terms μαλακοί (*malakoi*) and ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) has the potential to reinforce an idea that conflicts with the teaching of Scripture. Given our culture's widespread acceptance of the unbiblical notion that homosexual orientation is a category of identity, it would be far better to render these words in a manner similar to the NASB, which translates μαλακοί (*malakoi*) as "effeminate" and ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*) as "homosexuals." This more clearly conveys that the Bible not only declares homosexual practice to be a violation of God's law, but also calls people to repent of homosexual desires and the false notion of homosexual identity. The church must not be ashamed of saying this. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."[13] Sin is not something that can be stewarded and turned into "a doorway to blessing." Sin is something that must be daily put to death. This is why homosexuals are not helped when Christians try to minister to them by telling them that it is good for them to identify as homosexuals. As R.C. Sproul once explained,

> The problem is that so many have bought the myth that they are intrinsically homosexuals. . . . What we must do in order to help them is begin with this fundamental thesis: Biologically, essentially, and intrinsically, there is no such thing as a homosexual. Let me say that again. Biologically, essentially, and intrinsically, there is no such thing as a homosexual.[14]

12 This theme is developed at length in *The Marrow of The Marrow of Modern Divinity: A Simplification of Edward Fisher's Seventeenth-Century Classic*, edited and revised by Andy Wilson (independently published, 2018).

13 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 107.

14 "Homosexuality," R.C. Sproul, Ligonier Ministries, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/homosexuality/homosexuality/.

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The Truth Is on Your Side: Systematic Theology and Pastoral Ministry

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by Andy Wilson

Near the end of the second part of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the pilgrims continue on the path towards the Celestial City, they come across a man with a bloodied face who is holding a drawn sword. When they ask the man his name, he replies, "I am one whose name is Valiant-for-truth." He then explains that he has just stood his ground against three wicked men who offered him three choices: become one of them; turn back; or lose his life. He chose "none of the above," and had to fight for his life. When one of the pilgrims notes that the odds were stacked against him in that encounter, Valiant-for-truth replies, "'Tis true; but little and more are nothing to him that has the Truth on his side."[2] What a stirring picture of how the truth that God has revealed in his Word emboldens the believer! When our feet remain firmly planted on God's truth, we are always on solid ground, even when faced with opposition, affliction, trial, temptation, change, or uncertainty.

The Open Statement of the Truth

The Apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth that faithful ministry is marked by a refusal to practice cunning or tamper with God's Word and by a commitment to the open statement of the truth (2 Cor. 4:2). Christ works through the open statement of the truth to gather, feed, comfort, and protect his sheep. This makes systematic theology an essential tool for all who would be faithful in their calling as stewards of the mysteries of God and shepherds of Christ's flock. If a pastor fails to give careful consideration to the organization of the various doctrines contained in God's Word, how can he know that he is being faithful in his exposition and application of the biblical message? Ministry that neglects systematic theology is ministry that is in grave danger of being untethered from the truth.

Of course, systematic theology is not the only item in the pastor's theological toolbox. As Geerhardus Vos noted in his classic *Biblical Theology*, there are four main departments in the study of Christian theology: exegetical theology (of which biblical theology is one branch), historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology.[3] Some Christians may think that the inductive nature of exegetical theology makes it purer and less subject to human influence than systematic theology. It is certainly true that exegesis holds precedence in the study of Christian doctrine and in pastoral ministry.

However, this does not mean that systematic theology is inherently less biblical than the exegetical branches of theology. The Apostle Paul clearly had an organizational framework in mind when he spoke of the importance of following "the pattern of the sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). How can that pattern be discerned without engaging in systematization? Moreover, a reluctance to systemize produces an atomistic hermeneutic that puts individual passages at variance with each other.

It is a good and necessary inference to say that the church is called to exercise its ministerial authority by formulating biblical doctrine in a system

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=834.

2 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 348–349.

3 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 4.

whose content is derived and regulated by Scripture as a whole. This is why, as Richard Muller points out, the Reformed have always thought that

> exegesis functioned not as a disciplinary end in itself but as the ground and foundation for a path—a *methodus*—leading to theological formulation on all matters of doctrine and practice. That formulation, moreover, could take the form of preaching, of catechesis, or of didactic, scholastic, or polemical theology.[4]

When the church fails to handle Scripture in this way, the Bible is typically made subordinate to a churchly magisterium (the error of Roman Catholicism), the Christian consciousness (the error of liberalism and mysticism), or an individualistic biblicism that reduces Scripture to its explicit teachings and ignores the historical development of doctrine (the error of rationalism and fundamentalism). In short, the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* cannot really be upheld without systematic theology. As Louis Berkhof explains,

> The Church does not find her dogmas in finished form on the pages of Holy Writ but obtains them by reflecting on the truths revealed in the Word of God. The Christian consciousness not only appropriates the truth but also feels an irrepressible urge to reproduce it and see it in its grand unity.[5]

Even though the pastor is often focused on expositing and applying particular texts of Scripture, he always needs to be immersing himself in the study of systematics to ensure that his handling of individual texts is consistent with the whole of Scripture and is not in isolation from the history of interpretation in the church.

Swerving from the Truth

It has become popular in our day to separate doctrine from practice and to look to methodology rather than theology to give shape to pastoral ministry. When this happens, the church begins to swerve from the truth. In the words of sociologist Peter Berger,

> When churches abandon or de-emphasize theology, they give up the intellectual tools by which the Christian message can be articulated and defended. In the resulting chaos of religious ideas, the principalcriterion left to the community as it seeks to find its way is, quite naturally, that of expediency.[6]

One does not need to look far to see evidence of this in the contemporary church. Recent decades have been marked by trendy ministry paradigms identified by various designations (seeker-sensitive, emergent, missional, etc.), all of which reflect a populistic impulse that typically involves a significant degree of cultural accommodation.

Theology is sometimes downplayed for the sake of ecumenical efforts at gaining greater influence in society. One of the ways this has taken place in recent decades is in the stance taken by some evangelical and Reformed Christians toward Roman Catholicism. The 1990s saw the publication of the documents of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, which pursued unity by setting aside points of doctrinal precision that were regarded as vital by the Reformers. In 2005, prominent evangelical historian Mark Noll teamed with journalist Carolyn Nystrom to co-author *Is the Reformation Over?*, in which they argued that contemporary Protestants and Roman Catholics have attained significant doctrinal rapprochement. And in 2017, Covenant Theological Seminary marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by asserting that the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions can give a better and more credible testimony to Christ by finding common ground and cooperating with each other rather than by merely rehashing the reasons why the Reformation took place.[7] The problem with these

4 Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 2: Holy Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 502.

5 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 23.

6 Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 124.

7 Melissa Morgan Kelley, "Protestant-Catholic Relations on the

and similar efforts is their failure to reckon with the fact that the fundamental issues that led to the sixteenth-century division between Protestants and Rome remain unresolved. That is, Rome continues to reject the biblical doctrines that are summarized by the Latin slogans *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*. In addition, the Second Vatican Council resulted in Rome's embrace of various aspects of liberal theology. In light of these things, while Reformed and evangelical Christians certainly can forge fruitful alliances with Roman Catholics on a number of political and social issues, we cannot say that we have a common cause in the gospel when we have major differences on doctrines that are at the heart of the gospel.

It is sometimes thought that placing too much emphasis on theology in the Christian life reduces Christianity to the intellect when the seat of our personhood is in the heart. The heart is indeed the core of our being, but the heart should not be defined in a manner that separates it from our rational functions. After all, Scripture speaks of the heart as inclusive not only of the will and the affections, but of the mind as well. As Craig Troxel explains,

> The heart is the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose).[8]

If desire is elevated over the mind, our religious practices and beliefs will be regulated by tradition, experience, or expediency rather than by sound doctrine. While it is wrong to reduce human nature to bare intellect, it is just as wrong to think that the will and the affections can be transformed apart from the renewing of the mind (see Rom. 12:2). Of course, we should not seek to acquire knowledge of God's truth merely to fill our heads with information. Rather, we should ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth and cause that truth to sink down into our innermost being so that it can shape our affections and our wills. In the words of Calvin, "We have given the first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us."[9] This means there is an interdependence between sound theology and faithful ministry. As John Murray once put it,

> He would be a poor theologian indeed who would be unaware of, or indifferent to, the practical application of God's revealed counsel. But likewise, and perhaps more tragically, he would be a poor exponent of practical theology who did not know the theology of which practice is the application.[10]

To use an analogy, while it would be wasteful to go through medical school without ever intending to practice medicine, it would be irresponsible and fraudulent to practice medicine without the proper training and credentials. In the same way, while failing to apply theology to life misses the point of the study of theology, conducting ministry with little interest in theology is religious quackery.

Maintaining a theological focus in ministry is critical as we live in a culture in which people increasingly locate truth in their inward emotions and experiences, and operate under the assumption that the supreme purpose of life is to be happy and feel good about themselves. This is not an atmosphere that is friendly to objective truth. One of the areas where this is especially evident is in our culture's handling of homosexuality and transgenderism. The fact that some people experience

500th Anniversary of the Reformation," *By Faith: The Online Magazine of the PCA* (September 21, 2017): http://byfaithonline.com/protestant-catholic-relations-on-the-500th-anniversary-of-the-reformation/, accessed February 13, 2020.

8 A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will toward Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 21.

9 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 3.6.4.

10 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 1: The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 108.

homosexual desire or gender dysphoria is taken to mean that these things define who they are and therefore need to be expressed, affirmed, and celebrated. When the church goes along with this line of reasoning, personal experience is elevated above Scripture. We need systematic theology because it combats the therapeutic mindset that makes the self sovereign, calling us instead to submit to the body of truth that God has revealed in his Word.

Contending for the Truth

When the church keeps theology primary, it understands that its ministry needs to be carried out in a manner that is always mindful of the church's spiritual antithesis with the world. While we certainly should strive, as far as it depends on us, to "live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18), we have to remember that "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4), and that we are called to expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). The church often loses sight of this by prioritizing mission over theology.

When this is done, the focus is upon having a positive engagement with the unbelieving world, and there is a corresponding reluctance to engage in cultural confrontation. The assumption is that if we are direct and uncompromising in setting forth the Bible's teaching, we are failing to show compassion and empathy towards those who are living in sin and error. But if this were really true, then Jesus and the inspired authors of Scripture would stand condemned as unloving.

Another unwarranted assumption is that the church will be more effective in ministry if it expresses support for culturally popular ideas and causes while downplaying the culturally offensive aspects of Christian teaching that speak to those matters. If this were true, then the way to advance the gospel would be to follow the lead of the culture, a notion that is in conflict with the biblical admonition not to be conformed to the pattern of the world (see Rom. 12:2).

While we should not be inhospitable to those who are outside the church, we do need to be careful about how we define what it means to be hospitable. A biblically hospitable church is one that faithfully sets forth God's terms for how sinners are welcomed into his kingdom, as well as how he expects those who belong to his kingdom to live. The church does not exist to adapt itself to the desires of man. On the contrary, the church is the place where redeemed man is brought into conformity with what God has expressed in his Word.

While engaging in theological controversy is an important aspect of pastoral ministry, there is such a thing as an unhealthy craving for controversy. The Apostle Paul addresses this problem when he writes,

> If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words. (1 Tim. 6:3–4)

In saying this, Paul does not mean that we should never engage in controversies over words. After all, he criticizes those who deviate from the sound words of Christ. Paul obviously thought that there are times when it is necessary to enter into controversy in order to contend for the truth. Having "an unhealthy craving for controversy" means seeking out controversy for personal benefit. This is what the false teachers in Ephesus were doing. They were engaging in arguments that were profitless and unedifying. They were using controversy as a way of gathering people around themselves. In short, they were not interested in the truth.

Theological controversy is sometimes avoided in our day by calling for dialogue in so-called "safe spaces." While this may sound enlightened, it is often a tactical move that is used to disseminate and give credibility to unorthodox views. Dialogues of this nature reflect a dialectical perspective that assumes that opposing views can be reconciled by showing how each side gives expression to a portion of the truth. James Buchanan shows the futility of this kind of dialogue in his discussion of the failed attempt to reconcile the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of justification at the

Colloquy of Ratisbon (1541):

> At Ratisbon, the difference between the Popish and Protestant doctrines of justification seemed to resolve itself into one point, and even on that point both parties held some views in common. It might seem, then, that there was no radical or irreconcilable difference between the two; and yet, when they came to explain their respective views, it was found that they were contending for two opposite methods of justification—the one by an inherent, the other by an imputed, righteousness; the one by the personal obedience of the believer, the other by the vicarious obedience of Christ; the one by the inchoate and imperfect work of the Spirit in men, the other by the finished work of Christ for them, when he "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This fact shows the utter folly of every attempt to reconcile two systems, which are radically opposed, by means of compromise between them; and the great danger of engaging in private conferences with a view to that end. In the open field of controversy, truth, so far from being endangered, is ventilated, cleared, and defined; in the secret conclaves of divines and the cabinets of princes, it is often smothered or silenced. It has far less to fear from discussion than from diplomacy.[11]

If the focus of a dialogue is upon managing and reconciling different viewpoints rather than understanding and measuring them against God's Word, then truth is not the goal. The church needs to maintain that the clear teaching of Scripture is non-negotiable. If we enter into dialogue with views that are patently false, we are failing to contend for the truth. Moreover, as Rod Dreher warns, there have been far too many instances where

> the liberals within various church circles have called for dialogue, but after they gained power within the church, declared that dialogue with the orthodox must end, because it would be wrong to have a dialogue with people who believe such immoral things.[12]

Conclusion

Pastoral ministry that is committed to the truth will provoke opposition. Valiant-for- truths are at times the object of people's vexation, disdain, and false accusations. They are often marginalized and disparaged for eschewing what is culturally fashionable for the sake of theological faithfulness and consistency. And when they have to confront the abandoning or downplaying of sound theology in their own circles, they may find that some try to silence them by portraying their criticisms as inaccurate, intemperate, unloving, and divisive. While none of this is pleasant, we will only grow discouraged by it if we forget that the truth of God will stand forever. When the truth is on our side, we can be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan. 3:16– 18). On the one hand, we know that our God is able to deliver us from any threat breathed out by man. On the other hand, we know that faithfulness is always worth it, even if the Lord chooses not to deliver us in this life. As Martin Luther put it in his great hymn,

> The body they may kill:
> God's truth abideth still;
> His kingdom is forever. Ⓢ

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11 James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 127–128 (italics original).

12 Rod Dreher, "The Dangers of 'Dialogue,'" *The American Conservative* (September 13, 2017): https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-dangers-of-dialogue/, accessed February 18, 2020.

Ecology and Environmentalism: A Christian Perspective

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by Jan F. Dudt

During these days of COVID-19 there remain concerns, that are near and dear to the Christian heart, that have been put on the back burner of the issues stove.

One concern is associated with the present state of the earth's environment and ecology. Many people, perhaps most, in common usage, treat these terms as synonymous. Those who work professionally in the field see them as related, but truly distinct. Ecology is a raw scientific discipline that seeks to understand the interaction of biotic influences (plant, animals, fungi, microbes) and abiotic influences (soil minerals, water, climate, sunshine) that unfold in our natural world. It is conceivable that one can have extensive understanding of those biotic and abiotic interactions, on either the local or global scale, and have no real commitment to ethical human use of and responsibility for the natural world.

The terms environment and environmentalism are typically associated with concerns for ecological health and the ethics associated with proper management and sustainability of the natural world. However, those who work closely with the biological world and the abiotic factors often have a heightened sense of responsibility and paternity for the environment and ecology. Under the present situation many have noticed that things are not all right in this domain. However, Christians and the broader secular community, though interfacing with each other, often have different assessments of the situation. It is apparent that neither subculture has a perfect handle on the truth. Also, in each subpopulation there is a spectrum of sensitivities and understandings that make it impossible to paint each with simple brush strokes. Since all truth is God's truth, regardless of where it comes from, we can learn from each other. That said, syncretism remains an ever-present possibility for Christians in any cultural setting. We are not immune to such a tendency today. On the environmental issues front it is easy to syncretize unbiblical thinking with Christian and biblical understanding. Or, we can make the other mistake of not embracing the truth that we can learn from the secular mainstream.

Although we can receive knowledge and wisdom from unbelievers, Christians need to assess such information within the context of clear biblical definitions. Our approach to ecology and the environment is no exception. Our spiritual and physical health and the health of the God's ecological creation depend on it. As Christians we are often so focused on the human implications of the biblical history of redemption that we may overlook the fact that definitions regarding the created order are clearly articulated for us from the context of an unfallen paradise of moral innocence. And those definitions hold sway in the post-fallen economy. In Genesis 1 we are told that God created the heavens and the earth, and that there is nothing that came into being that he, Christ the Word, did not make (John 1:3). This includes things visible, invisible, rulers, and authorities. All things being created for him and by him (Col. 1:16). Into this, as a crowning act of creation, humans were created as male and female, in God's image, to be fruitful, to multiply, to have dominion, and to subdue the earth as cultivators and keepers (Gen. 1 and 2). After the fall and the flood, this charge is reiterated to Noah when he left the ark (Gen. 9:1). Human status as rulers over the works of God's hands is reaffirmed in Psalm 8:6. Yet, Psalms 24:1 and 50:10 remind us that these works remain in God's possession. The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains. Even the human-owned cattle on a thousand hills are his. Although God rests from his creation until now (Heb. 4:3), he continues to create through his providential care

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=849.

and oversight as outlined in Psalms 104 and 147. He sends forth his Spirit and things are created (Ps. 104:30). He brings forth wine to gladden the heart of man (Ps. 104:15) and satisfies us with the finest wheat (Ps. 147:14). Hence, we are not deists, believing that God is distant from his creation. We recognize God's continual care for and valuing of his creation, even when the products are through human effort.

As we think through these definitions there are some implications. First, it is evident from Genesis 2 and 3 that pre-fallen humans were enlisted into God's service to subdue the earth, filling it with offspring and tending it, while Satan was perpetrating his rebellion against God. Given this context, what was to be the role of humans? It is evident that Satan was already working against God when Adam and Eve were in the Garden (Gen 3). It makes sense that if humans had not fallen, they would have engaged Satanic forces as they expanded out of the Garden. This engagement would likely have preempted Satanic expansion. Or, possibly, humans were to redeem those gains Satan had already achieved, wrestling them from him. In any event, Satan succeeded in derailing the Creator's assignment for humanity through the First Adam. But, by God's grace, the derailment was not complete. However, humanity is divided in its allegiance between God and Satan. This division separates human populations for the Creator or against him (Matt. 12:30). It even cuts to the core of the individual. Even those who are redeemed remain in conflict with indwelling sin (Rom. 7:24–25). And, according to God's common grace, even the reprobate can do some things well.

As we know from Romans 8:19–22, the creation eagerly awaits in anxious longing for the revealing of the sons of God. In some respect this truth can be seen in the frustration that the creation experiences as a result of the unrealized potential that it suffers under the derailment of the assignment given to the first Adam. However, consider the pre-fallen mission. Unfallen humans would have extended the Garden's realized ecological values of diversity, productivity, peace, and fecundity to the whole globe. God's good creation of expansive primal wilderness would have been improved, made better under the efforts of unfallen humanity and its expansion of subduing and taking dominion. This is often called the Creational or Cultural Mandate.

It is impossible to know the extent to which God's good creation had been influenced by Satanic expansion before humanity's fall in the Garden. Yet, the notion of taking dominion and subduing the earth suggests that a struggle of some sort was in view for pre-fallen humanity. This struggle between good and evil would have involved human effort. Human expansion would have confronted Satanic expansion. The first Adam would have been on the front lines of the conflict in service of the King of the Universe. Instead, the conflict is extended to human identity itself. Satan seems to scuttle the divine project by convincing Adam that the created order, as outlined in the Creational Mandate, was not in the best interests of humanity's future. Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to break free of the assignment, as defined by God himself. Except for the grace of God, their moral collapse would have been complete and the divine assignment utterly abandoned.

The created order was assaulted but it remains. Fallen humans retain the image of God. Consequently, they retain the ability to subdue and to have dominion. However, the values of the Garden, under fallen human dominion, are expanded imperfectly to the entire globe. At times, due to human greed and selfishness, there is even environmental destruction. Yet, we see glimmers of the original created order and its ideals. Well managed farms are places where productivity, diversity, fecundity, and peace can be seen even if it is to an imperfect extent. The lives of livestock and pets are stamped with Garden values. Human dominion brings a measure of peace and flourishing not found in the wild. In the wild, those creatures would be vicious competitors of food items. The wilderness groans in a way that these well-managed places do not.

Fallen humans have been known to have moments of epiphany when they catch glimpses of the original created order. They may not recog-

nize it as such. An article from the October 2009 *National Geographic* on redwood forest management is an example, in a publication not known for its sympathy to Christian thinking. The author testifies that,

> along the (redwood) forest transect I met foresters who talked as if they've *discovered the holy grail of redwood management*. What they're learning and how they're applying the knowledge can serve as a blueprint for the entire redwood range. Their ability to supply large amounts of lumber for humanity and improve ecological function is an approach that should be adopted around the world (emphasis added).[2]

This is an amazing comment on the ideal of human dominion, stewardship, and management in an age when humans are often seen as the main blight on the earth. Proper human management supplies goods and products for humanity and improves ecological function.

We can take note of another unexpected example of people coming to appreciate the created order. However, I doubt that they realize it. The example is found in a 2018 article in *Science*, one of the world's most prestigious science publications. The article is not Christian in the least. However, the authors do propose that humans can control the earth's systems, those envisioned in J. E. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. The claim is that humans can enhance the inherent self-regulating systems of earth to new levels of long- term sustainability, even to the point of intentionally influencing global climate. They call it Gaia 2.0.[3]

These examples imply that even fallen human management, when properly undertaken, can make God's good creation better. When humans are a blessing, Satan frowns. His project is eroded. When humans fail to realize the ideal, the creation groans in anticipation of the redemption of the sons of God that would bring restoration to the created order, releasing it from futility and slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:20–23). The ultimate restoration will come in the form of the new heavens and new earth. But humans, acting as salt and light, can bring something of that to pass in this age.

Over the past fifty years or more, Christians have expressed a heightened concern about the degradation that the environment has suffered in the wake of fallen human dominion. Humans often have subdued the earth with practices that have yielded the cost of unsustainability. In other words, the good creation, though fallen, is left in worse shape than it was found. Farming, mining, forestry, manufacturing, and waste disposal industries can all point to manmade environmental disasters precipitated by mismanagement or greed.

Subsequent generations too often have found an environment worse off instead of improved. In the 1960s, works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*[4] and Lynn White's famous essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" heightened society's awareness of widespread ecological trauma. Specifically, White's essay railed against the Christian concept of human dominion, blaming Christians for much of the environmental degradation in the west.[5] Soon after, Francis Schaeffer wrote *Pollution and the Death of Man*, calling Christians to take a more responsible and loving biblical approach to beauty and environmental concerns. He gave the 1960s counter-culture high marks for pointing out the problem. Schaeffer maintained that the church should have been beating the drum of warning, calling for environmental action because of nature's inherent value as God's creation.[6]

Here lies the challenge for Christians in any age, the Augustinian Charter for believers: take

2 J. Michael Fay, "The Redwoods Point the Way," *National Geographic* (October 2009): 60–63.

3 Timothy M. Lenton and Bruno Latour, "Gaia 2.0: Could humans add some level of self-awareness to Earth's self-regulation?" *Science* 361 (2018): 1066–1068.

4 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

5 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207.

6 Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970).

truth from the pagans, worthy ideas of God's truth, and incorporate them in a mature biblical context, while leaving behind what Augustine termed their "miserable" ones.[7] Such a process has long been recognized as one that can enrich Christian thinking, enabling it to become mature and nuanced in ways that Christianity may miss without the external stimulation. Yet, the dangers of over borrowing without proper biblically informed discernment, insight, and perception are ever present. Since the closing of the American frontier in the late nineteenth century, voices in American society have called us to care for the inherent beauty and value of the environment. The establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872 was not specifically a movement initiated by people in the church. The great environmental debate of the early 1900s between John Muir's preservationists (influencing the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior, and the Sierra Club) and Gifford Pinchot's conservationists (influencing the United States Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture) certainly had Christians in each camp. Neither the preservationist nor conservationist movements are recognized as originating among distinctly Christian thinkers. John Muir exhorted us to see humanity as one small part of the great unit of creation. Conversely, Pinchot seemed to see value in nature in light of its enduring use by humans.[8]

Both views are biblically inadequate as seen by the biblical definitions above. Yet, it is likely that we know Christians who would fall in either camp. Either case would be on the cusp of dangerous error. If one overreacts to the abuses of overwrought human dominion, one may move toward devaluing humanity, seeing it as an insensitive blight on creation. In so doing, the corrective of defining dominion as a biblical concept would be missed. On the other hand, if we see God's creation only in terms of its usefulness to humanity, we are likely to lose sight of its inherent value as something beautiful and valued by God.

So, what *is* our relationship to the environment and the other life forms? Are we simply one of them, gifted with a bit more intelligence and hence some responsibility? Or are we, as humans, a little lower than the angels, endued with rank and privilege to have freedom to do with creation as we will? It is clear from the biblical definitions that the bear and the whale are not our brothers. But as God's possessions, they are our charge. Proper dominion and care will keep them from eating us while preventing their extinction.

Christians have tried to balance these tensions. *The Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*[9] attempted to reemphasize stewardship in the face of long-term sinful dominion excesses. It called for repentance for environmental abuse and reorientation to a biblical faith and expression. The long list of original signatories included several Christian college presidents and such notables as Timothy George, Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Ron Sider, and J. I. Packer. However, in response to perceived inadequacies of this declaration, another statement was drafted under the leadership of E. Calvin Beisner, *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship*.[10] This statement has a stronger positive emphasis on human dominion and population while acknowledging the need for biblical stewardship. The signatories are a more ecumenical group that includes some notable Roman Catholic and Jewish signers as well as Protestants such as Charles Colson, James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, Marvin Olasky, and R. C. Sproul.

There certainly is no unanimity among Christians on how to approach the responsibility of addressing human needs and caring for creation. However, biblical definitions should guide us with basic principles. The relational definitions are clear. God loves his creation, and the creation

7 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html.

8 Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9 "On the Care of Creation: Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," (New Freedom, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994), https://creationcare.org/what-we-do/an-evangelical- declaration-on-the-care-of-creation.html.

10 "Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship" (Ringgold, GA: Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2000), https://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/the-cornwall-declaration- on-environmental-stewardship/.

proclaims his glory. Humans are to love God and to love and respect his works. The creation yields to humanity and provides for its needs. The spiritual struggle, which is going on behind the environmental scene, is both Satanic in origin and the result of human failure. Yet, humans are not merely consumers like deer or crayfish. We are also creators, able to extend the values of the Garden to the rest of creation, even to the point of making God's good primal wilderness better. However, as fallen image bearers, we have the power to degrade and destroy like no other creature on earth.

How do we move ahead? Prudence would dictate that we realize our power to create or to destroy. We must consider that humanity can be either a blessing or a blight, living in accordance with the created order and its definitions or in ignorance and opposition to them. One is life-giving. One is life-destroying. Also, God can and will bless us when we make the appropriate choices. The choices that the modern voices are asking us to make are confusing. For example, population control, as proposed by much of mainstream environmentalism, including some Christians, is without biblical warrant. The reproductive culture of the globe's most environmentally conscious societies must account for their self-destructive extinction trajectories. Birth rates of all the countries of the West and East Asia are significantly below replacement levels.[11] Yet many of these same societies are places where humans have never lived better. The water is cleaner, the air is better, and general health is at a historic high. Christians in these places can, and should, participate in efforts to maintain healthy environments. However, arresting development, industry, and population growth denies the created order and the human assignment. The outcome will not be a positive one.

Yet wise development, industry, and population growth require that we know the natural operations of the ecological systems that we impact so that we can preserve their health and enhance their function. In so doing everything benefits, including humans, and God is glorified. Technologically sophisticated and environmentally safe waste management, recycling, and energy production are necessary to provide for the needs of humanity and to increase ecological function. Humans can accomplish this. We often do it unknowingly. For example, Thomas Malthus's famous 1790s essay on human population had worldwide population capped at about three billion, given the conditions of the early Industrial Revolution.[12] Under present economies and technologies earth's carrying capacity is probably closer to triple that. As more new technologies and economic strategies are realized and applied, that number will most likely be revised upward. Humans are creators.

But we are also sinners. Consequently, should it surprise us to think that humans could impact global climate? It would make sense that if we were technologically capable enough and numerous enough, such an impact would be possible. Many are alarmed by this and are certain of the disastrous consequences. After all, the atmospheric concentration of CO2, a known greenhouse gas, has increased from 380 ppm to 410 ppm in the last few decades. This is higher than at any known time through the last four ice age cycles.[13] So, have humans contributed anything to the global warming cycle of the last three decades? Perhaps, for God has put all things under our feet (Ps. 8). If we can influence climate, at least in part, would it not be wise to figure out how to do it to increase global fertility, productivity, fecundity, and peace. If we can control climate, these should be governing values.

As we move ahead, it is good to remember that many doomsday scenarios predicted by certain demographers and environmentalists have simply failed to materialize. Classic among these is Paul and Anne Ehrlich's 1968 overpopulation predic-

11 "Fertility rate, total births (per woman)," The World Bank (2019), https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN.

12 Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*, (London: St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1798), Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project (1998), http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf.

13 "Carbon dioxide: Latest measurement," August 2020. https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon- dioxide/.

tion of starvation and plague by the 1980s.[14] Yet, to ignore trends of degradation would be irresponsible. By God's grace, humans can expect to have a profound positive influence on God's good creation. Information about how to do that can come from many voices. The issue will always be whether we can discern which voices affirm the created order and which ones do not. The success of the project depends on whether Christians can think biblically, even when innovation is called for, and thus avoid the pernicious influences that may accompany wisdom. There are times when Christians are indebted to unbelieving members of society for pointing out issues that need to be addressed. However, the solutions they propose often reflect a lack of understanding of or an outright denial of the created order. Such solutions are counterproductive. The salt and light Christians offer include redirecting proposals to align with Scripture. Ⓢ

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14 Paul Ehlrich and Anne Ehlrich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine, 1968).

Servant Work

Suicide Watch: Ministering to Christians Who Despair of Life

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant April 2019[1]

by Douglas A. Felch

Introduction

Suicide is a major and increasingly pervasive problem in our country and ought to be on the ministry radar of ministers, elders, and deacons. In 2019, 12 million Americans considered taking their lives. 3.5 million actively planned to do so. 1.4 million made the attempt. The total suicide rate increased a shocking 35 percent from 1999 to 2018. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death for all ages, the number two cause of death for people ages 10–34 (after unintentional injury) and an increasing problem for adolescents and people over sixty-five. Women are more likely to *try* to end their life. But the suicide rate among males was 3.7 times higher than among females.[2]

Our flocks are not immune from this problem. Nor are ministers, officers, or their families. During my forty years of ministry, I know of three OPC ministers and four OPC ministers' wives who have ended their lives. There may be others of whom I am unaware or which occurred earlier in our history. I am also aware of two ministers from other Reformed denominations who have recently committed suicide.

Almost everyone knows of someone who has committed suicide or whose family has been affected by one. Two people in the congregation we attend have experienced suicide in their extended families. As I was drafting this article, my wife received notice that a student at her university took his life while on an excursion with two of her colleagues and several classmates. The experience has been traumatic—as it uniformly is. The sorrow is palpable. As I was completing this essay, I was grieved to learn of another suicide in the OPC community (the second in the last six months). This makes the topic both current and exquisitely tender. It requires both a compassionate but forthright conversation that comforts those who mourn and hopefully avoids further anguish.[3]

Personal Background

I am an OPC minister and have served two congregations as pastor for nine years each as well as eighteen years as a college theology professor. I have had seminary and post-seminary training in pastoral counseling and have engaged in an extensive counseling ministry. I do not consider myself an expert in this area, but I have had some experience, both vocationally and personally.

I have struggled with melancholy all my life and am no stranger to depression. Surprisingly, this has proved a gift in pastoral ministry. I can often quickly identify individuals who are troubled or in need. This enables me to come alongside them, gently probe them, and be of encouragement.

However, since strength and weaknesses are often coupled, this intuition has proved a two-edged sword. The same sensitivities which assist me in shepherding can also weigh me down emotionally. The temptation to depression and despair of life always lies at the door. Those unfamiliar with depression may be perplexed as to why someone might be tempted to take their life. I am

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=811.

2 "Suicide," National Institute for Mental Health, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml, accessed April 29, 2021.

3 For an excellent discussion of ministering to survivors see Gordon H. Cook, Jr., "Suicide: A Complicated Grief," *Ordained Servant* 22 (2013): 49–54. While my discussion will overlap with his, my focus is on ministering to those who are tempted to end their lives.

not one of them.

My sophomore year at college was exceedingly difficult. I went through a humiliating and humbling experience that left me disoriented, perplexed, and deeply depressed. I struggled with suicidal despair the second half of that year, through the summer, and into my junior year. This provoked a spiritual crisis and caused me to question what I thought was a developing call to the ministry.

I remain forever grateful for a college roommate who encouraged me during my despair, provided helpful counsel and prayer, and enlisted me to become active in ministry. His kindness inaugurated a slow but steady recovery. While I was understandably cautious about my call to the ministry, I completed seminary training, became licensed, served as stated supply for several years in a church plant, and eventually became ordained.

Of course, pastoral ministry is a difficult stewardship for a person vulnerable to depression. Through the years, I have experienced many anguished moments and a number of dark nights of the soul. However, I have tried to use my temperament for a positive pastoral purpose while at the same time taking steps to restrain it from becoming destructive. I have also been privileged to minister to others who were troubled or despaired of life.

Most rewarding was a middle-aged parishioner who urgently asked to meet with me and confided that she was seriously contemplating ending her life. She was experiencing real and genuine sorrow and hurt, most of it imposed upon her. We had a wonderfully free and frank discussion which relieved the immediate crisis and inaugurated an excellent pastoral relationship between us. Only later did I discover how really close she was to taking her life that evening and how our conversation was a major turning point for her.

In addition, as pastor and professor, I have been privileged to counsel scores of parishioners and students who have struggled with periods of deep depression or despair.

It has been one of the joys of my life to be able to comfort others with the comfort with which I have been comforted.

The Bible and Suicide

Given the prevalence of suicide in modern life, it is surprising that Scripture says remarkably little about it. It describes about a half-dozen occurrences, all with very little comment.

Biblical Examples

King Saul, defeated in battle and fearful of dishonor and torture by his enemies, fell on the point of his own sword. His armorbearer followed suit (1Sam. 31:4–6). A young man who reported this to David either tried to take credit for Saul's death or participated in finishing the job at Saul's request. David executed him on the spot (2 Sam. 1:3–16).

Athiophel, David's wisest counselor, who had abandoned David for Absalom, took his own life when his counsel was rejected by Absalom in favor of the counsel of Hushai, David's mole. Once his counsel was rejected, Athiophel recognized there was no hope for himself or Absalom's reign. He went home, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself (2 Sam. 17:23).

In 1 Kings 16:15–20, Zimri reigned only seven days as king of Israel. He had killed the previous king, Elah, and exterminated the house of Baasha, Elah's father. When the Israelites heard of the murders, they proclaimed Omri king and besieged Tirzah where Zimri was living. Once he knew that all was lost, Zimri burned down the palace on top of himself and died.

Judas Iscariot, full of remorse (but apparently not repentance), hanged himself after realizing the enormity of what he had done in betraying Jesus (Matt. 27:3–5).

The Philippian jailer was about to take his own life to avoid almost certain execution because he believed that the prisoners for whom he was responsible had escaped. Paul prevented this action by calling out to him not to harm himself for they were all there.

That same evening the jailer and his household were converted and baptized (Acts 16:25–33).

An uncertain example is Samson, who died when he brought about the collapse of the temple

where the Philistines were feasting. He killed three thousand as well as himself— more than all the enemies of God that he had killed in his life (Judg. 16:28–30). While this may have been an act of suicide, it appears more likely that Samson sacrificed himself to defeat the enemies of God. Since the LORD grants his request to restore his strength for this one last act, it would appear that the LORD permitted him to die in fulfillment of his mission as a judge of Israel.

Examples of Despairing of Life

Scripture also records the experience of various individuals who experienced dark nights of the soul and longed for death. Moses, the "man of God," overwhelmed by the burdens of ministry and despairing of life, prays the prayer of the discouraged pastor: "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin." (Num. 11:15, NIV). The LORD does not grant Moses's request for death. Instead, he provides elders to share the burdens of ministry with him.

Elijah, the prophet of the LORD, exhausted after his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and under threat from Jezebel, echoes Moses's petition of the discouraged pastor and asks the Lord to end his life (1 Kings 19:4). Again, the LORD declines. Rather, he feeds him food and drink, gives him rest, gently but firmly counsels and encourages him, and returns him to ministry. But the Lord also provides for him an assistant, Elisha, who will later become his successor when the Lord finally does relieve him of his stewardship.

Job, who endures a difficult stewardship of sorrow and bereavement, initially responds with strong trust in the LORD. Despite huge losses of family, friends, and wealth, he submits to these hard providences (Job 1:20–22). But as the suffering persisted and increased to unrelenting physical suffering, he began to fray at the edges. He challenges the LORD, despairs of life, and wishes he had never been born (Job 10:1–2, 18–19).

David, throughout the Psalms, frequently laments in words which reflect despair of life. Psalms 22, 69, and 43–44 find David apparently overwhelmed by his circumstances. The first two instances are recognized as anticipating the experience of suffering of the Lord Jesus himself. Psalms 42–43 finds David's soul cast down for reasons he cannot discern. But he speaks to himself and to his readers to hope in God. He does not view his downcast state as permanent, but rather trusts that he will yet again praise the LORD. However, sometimes David knows precisely the roots of his despair. In Psalms 32, 38, and 51 he admits that his unrepentant sin has led to despondency and he pursues relief (and finds it) by seeking God's grace and forgiveness.

Jonah, bitterly angry because God had not destroyed the Ninevites as promised, and frustrated over the loss of a temporary shade bush, pleads for the Lord to end his life.

Even though Jonah is frustrated by the LORD'S compassion, the LORD does not slay his grumbling prophet. Instead, he extends that same compassion to Jonah. God reasons with him and points him to the need to have compassion and to value life both human and animal (Jon. 4:5–11).

A Biblical Perspective on Suicide

These examples reveal that the Bible recognizes suicide, and the despair of life that may tempt a person to it, but says little else. Surprisingly, the subject of suicide is not found in the case law of the Old Testament. Does this mean the Bible is neutral about suicide?

The answer is no. In the several examples of suicide surveyed above, none of them are commended (with the possible exception of Samson). Likewise, requests for death from Moses, Elijah, David, Job, and Jonah come in the context of despair. These men are portrayed realistically and compassionately, but not positively. The LORD ministers to their sorrow but does not grant their petitions.

Despite the lack of elaboration and reinforcement given in the case law, taking one's life clearly violates the principles of the Sixth Commandment. The Bible teaches that the LORD is the one who gives life. He also preserves and protects it. In

the Noahic covenant God preserves life by declaring the one who takes another person's life potentially forfeits his own. The reason provided is that such an act defaces the divine image of God with which he has created humankind (Gen. 9:6–7).

Not all taking of life is forbidden. When a soldier kills in the context of battle, this is not murder. When a person kills to protect himself or others, this is not murder. When a murderer who has been found guilty (according to a clearly defined process and very restrictive rules of evidence) in the Old Testament is put to death, this is not "state- sanctioned murder," it is God-sanctioned justice.

However, there can be no unauthorized taking of human life and suicide is not authorized. Nowhere in Scripture is it permissible to take one's own life unless it is done to lay down one's life for another in battle or out of love (John 15:13). Suicide is a form of murder. The difference is those who commit it make themselves both the perpetrator and the victim. To deface the image of God in this way is really a sign of rebellion. It is a rejection of the life that God has given. Suicide is a sin.

Suicide and Salvation

Does this mean that a professing Christian who takes his or her own life is not saved? This is not a simple question, but the short answer is no. None of us have access to another person's heart or motives. That is why we receive people into the membership of the visible church on the basis of a credible profession of faith. It is all we can do. It may be a person who makes a profession of faith is not a Christian in their heart. And, if they subsequently commit suicide, that could be evidence of their unbelief.

Nonetheless, if a person takes their own life it should not be viewed as proof that he or she was not a believer. As we have seen, many godly individuals at certain points in their life and ministries have despaired of life. Two of them, Moses and Elijah, respectively inaugurated and restored the prophetic office in the Old Testament and later appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration! Is it possible for a Christian in a low moment of despair to end their life? Absolutely. Just as it is possible that a person like David, a man after God's own heart, might succumb to adultery and a murderous cover up. Or a man like Peter, who really loved Jesus, might, in a moment of crisis, swear with an oath that he never knew him.

To be sure, taking one's life is sin. It involves rejecting the gift of life that God has given. It doubts that God is able to sustain us in difficult circumstances. It denies that God will not tempt us beyond what we are able to bear. It is contrary to God's will. *We ought neither to contemplate it, nor do it.* But this does not mean that a person who commits it does not belong to the Lord. Scripture speaks of only one unforgiveable sin. Suicide is not it.

All of us will die with unconfessed sin without jeopardizing our salvation. No one is justified by their obedience. Our only hope on the day of judgment is what Christ has done on our behalf. Salvation has always been dependent upon the Lord and his ability to sustain us. It has never rested upon our ability to sustain ourselves spiritually or physically.

This is true of all of us who know the Lord and who, sadly, sin every day. It is also true of all who know the Lord and who, sadly, take their lives. We have every reason to believe that a Christian who commits suicide remains a Christian despite this sin, and, being joined to Christ, experiences the forgiveness of Christ's atoning work regarding it. I also believe we can comfort those who have been left behind with those words, and ought to do so.

However, here as elsewhere, we are not to presume upon the grace of God. We are not to sin that grace may abound. While "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21), and to "be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), we are never encouraged to accelerate this outcome. Those who are despairing of life should seek help, not death.

The Aftermath of Suicide

While taking one's life does not rob the person of their salvation, it can produce other tragic consequences. Sadly, despite what we have just discussed, suicide can carry with it a linger-

ing doubt for those who are left behind about the spiritual state of the one who died. Further, the trauma of suicide greatly amplifies and complicates the grief of survivors. Many loved ones spend the balance of their lives trying to cope with its aftermath. Finally, ending one's life carries with it the potential of causing others to stumble: Those who have been contemplating suicide may be emboldened by the example of others to proceed with their own plan to end their life. These are all powerful additional reasons for not committing suicide.

Ministering to Those Who Despair of Life

Suicide is an uncomfortable topic, and its discomfort might tempt us to shy away from ministering to those who are contemplating it. We should not do so. Even if you do not have formal training, you know more than you think, and can be more helpful than you might expect.

Many people are ambivalent or conflicted about taking their life. This is in our (and their) favor. A kind word, or the sharing of hope, can make a huge difference. I mentioned how my college roommate helped me work through my own period of despair. I also reported on how my parishioner was relieved of the temptation to end her life by a serious, but encouraging, conversation. Remember the LORD himself engaged with Moses, Elijah, Jonah, David, and Job. He did not shy away from their despair. He ministered to it; so should we.

Myths and Misunderstandings

Several urban myths that surround suicide need correction. For example, it is often stated that if a person talks about suicide they will not do it. This is patently false.

Seventy percent of successful suicides have made at least one comment about taking their life before they do it.[4] The reason is that almost all suicides are purposeful. Those contemplating it are agonizing over what they perceive to be real problems in their life, and they are viewing suicide as a solution. Usually, they have been thinking about suicide for some time. However, they are also conflicted. Many do not really want to take their life, but feel they have no other choice to end their personal or physical pain. If a person should share their secret plan, this should be taken seriously and followed up on. It should never be dismissed or ignored.

A second myth is if a person tries and fails, they will not try again. This is incorrect. Most successful suicides have had at least two prior attempts. They are four times more likely to succeed the second time.

A third myth is that you can insert the idea of suicide in someone's head by talking to them about it, thus increasing the risk of its occurrence through the power of suggestion. Untrue. Never hesitate to ask someone if they are contemplating ending their life. Suicide is rarely a rash or spontaneous act. If someone is suicidal, it is likely that they have been thinking about it for some time. If they are not suicidal, and you ask them the question, they will likely simply deny being so. If they are, it may be a tremendous relief to be asked and to be able to share their secret burden. Indeed, they may be exceedingly grateful that someone has taken them seriously enough to raise the issue.

A fourth misunderstanding is that suicide is hereditary. Not true. Suicide is a highly individualistic act. However, depression, which can predispose a person to contemplate suicide, can be a family trait. Further, if a person has experienced the sorrow of a friend or family member escaping their struggles by taking their life, that person may be tempted to follow suit. Such an experience can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with dealing with life's problems this way. However, having been close to someone who has committed suicide does not inevitably lead to a parallel destiny.

Some Reasons Why People Take Their Own Lives

Suicide is a very personal and highly individualistic matter. While there may be some common elements among those who commit it, there is no

4 Karen Mason, *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains, and Pastoral Counselors* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 52–53.

cookie-cutter pattern. The reasons are as unique and numerous as the individuals themselves.

Nonetheless, certain patterns of thinking may be discernible, many of which should elicit empathy. Many suffer personal pain that has persisted over a long period of time (as in the example of Job). Personal emotional pain is very difficult. It feels like bereavement. Persistent physical or emotional pain can be a recipe for despair, and those who suffer from it may believe that suicide will release them from it. They have lost any sense of volition. They feel they have no other option or choice. The biblical examples of despair of life mostly reflect this view.

Some people believe they are a burden to others or that they have behaved so badly that ending their life will relieve friends or family of some of their pain. They justify it by convincing themselves, "They would be better off without me."

A few years ago, a childhood friend took his life. He had been laid off as an older, professional with dated skills and had difficulty finding new employment. He struggled to provide for his family and to retain a vocational identity. Crushed with a sense of failure, he convinced himself that by taking his life he would once again be able to provide for his family, looking to insurance to reduce financial pressures. Unfortunately, he did not share his misguided plan and did not reach out to anyone who might have dissuaded him. His death took his wife and extended family completely by surprise. He did not understand the loss of his presence was far greater than the monetary gain of an insurance policy. The sorrow was immense and his "solution" caused much anguish.

Suicide does not end personal pain, it simply passes it on to the survivors.

Some individuals contemplate suicide because of anger, frustration, or a desire to get back at someone. Taking their life is designed to make another suffer for what they have done, as in, "I'll show them! They'll be sorry when I'm gone!" This reasoning can be a special temptation for teens who are shunned or bullied. Some may leverage the threat of suicide to control their situation and manipulate others to do what they want. Jonah's death wish may contain some of this motivation.

Others are tempted to end their lives when they feel they have committed some great sin. A person may be traumatically afraid of being shamed if they are guilty of sexual sin or are exposed after committing a crime. Others may feel they need to be punished or make atonement for their failure. Ironically, people who are spiritually sensitive can be especially vulnerable at this point. We need to be better at embracing and restoring those who have been shamed. As churches and as Christians we should always lead with grace.

One major contributing cause of suicide is depression. This is a huge and complex subject, which would require a separate article to do it justice, but a few words are in order. Depression exists on a spectrum ranging from mild, to moderate, to severe.

Depression is a real and serious state, especially in its severe form. It can be provoked by experiential factors such as trauma, severe loss or bereavement, or chemical changes stemming from medical conditions, medications, or sudden hormonal changes. The last category includes postpartum depression which can be genuinely risky for women and should be carefully monitored.

Severe depression robs people of joy, hope, motivation, and pleasure and can lead to overwhelming feelings of guilt, sadness, weariness, and a despair of life that can tempt people to end their lives. Medical intervention may be necessary and should be actively pursued if required. The use of certain modern medications, coupled with counseling and personal support, often leads to substantial recovery. However, there is no magic bullet and relapses can occur.

Ministering to a Suicidal Person

There is no "one size fits all" approach for talking with someone who may be despairing of life. What follows is not a procedure. It is simply one of a number of things to keep in mind, especially if you never have experienced such an

encounter. Recognize that in a single conversation you will not cover all of them, let alone go into depth, and you should not try. You also need not proceed in the order they are discussed below.

Things to Avoid

First, there are some obvious approaches to avoid. Do not ridicule, be skeptical or harsh, or overly preachy. Try not to be uptight or anxious. If you have never encountered this situation before, be kind, empathetic, and concerned, while trying to remain calm.

Agree that the situation is serious, but encourage the person that there are many alternatives to ending one's life. Do not focus on how sinful suicide is unless a person directly asks you if suicide is a sin. Emphasizing the sin of suicide may only add to the pain which you are trying to alleviate.

Second, when you encounter someone despairing of life, do not be quick to provide advice. Most likely you do not know what is going on in their minds. The most obvious problem may not be the issue that is tempting them to flee this life. The path to despair can be a long road, and many have traveled it some distance prior to their sharing with you.

Encourage Them to Share

Try to get them to talk, while you listen. Do not pressure them, but encourage them to share the things that are troubling them. Take the time to gain a better sense of why they are contemplating ending their life and why they understand it to be a solution to their problems. Try to discover what they are hoping to accomplish. What they share may sound strange, but take it seriously. Gently suggest that whatever they hope to accomplish will not be achieved by ending their life. Remember, they are viewing suicide as a solution to some problem. Point out calmly, that what they hope to achieve will not be realized and that there are much better solutions.

Remember, people tend to be conflicted about suicide. Use that to advantage by encouraging them to talk about their pain and to move them away from the edge. Let their ambivalence rise. Let them know you care and want to help them. Those who want to kill themselves need alternative choices. They have been likely contemplating suicide for a long time and that has colored their perception of what is happening in their life.

Encourage them to look at their situation through your eyes, the eyes of others, and the eyes of God and Scripture.

Try to identify specific events or circumstances that have precipitated this crisis and encourage them to share as much as they can. This may help you get to the real engine that is driving them and the real pain that they are suffering. A concern about damaging the family car may reveal an ongoing struggle in their relationship with their parents. A disappointment about not being asked to the prom may uncover a deep sadness about being alone, or unattractive, or being ostracized from others. Personal despondency may be rooted in serious problems in marriage or family. Despair over whether or not they are really Christians may uncover a sexual or substance addiction or some serious transgression.

As a general rule in counseling, I frequently urge those who are struggling with a problem to pursue a less radical, rather than a more radical, solution. For example, it is better to get a tutor or seek extra help from a teacher rather than to quit school. It is better to try to change your attitude toward a job situation and make it better than to simply resign and find a new one. It is better to try and sort out the problems in a marriage and seek reconciliation rather than to divorce. Suicide is the most radical solution of all. Press the point that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It is far better to pursue alternatives where there is hope and help available. This may provide some traction for further ministry

Assess the Risk

Try to discover how likely the possibility is that they will do themselves harm. Ask them point blank if they are planning to take their own life. If they admit they are tempted, ask them what means they have in mind, if any. Try to discern if they

have a specific plan, if the means of taking their life are accessible, and how lethal they are. Try to confiscate pills or remove firearms, car keys, or anything else that they might identify as a means.

Find out if they have a medical condition. Ask them if they have been abusing any substances like drugs or alcohol and if they are presently under the influence of any medications. If this is the case, your ministry to them is complicated because you are speaking to the abused substance not the person. But encourage them that help with the substance problem is available. Assure them that they are not in any condition to make such a serious decision while they are under the influence.

If you are talking to a person on the phone, try to get them to reveal where they are. If they are reluctant to tell you, try to weave into the conversation comments or questions that might help you figure that out: "Are you with someone?" "If so, are you at their house?" This could be vitally important in case they hang up and you need to direct emergency help to them.

Offer Them Biblical Hope

This is vitally important. Point out that others have despaired of life and been tempted to take their life and have been delivered (1 Cor.10:13). Give examples from Scripture or life. Encourage them that you are there to help them handle their present crisis which you believe is serious and painful, but manageable. Remember they are taking a risk in revealing their vulnerability. Be steady. If you are unable to handle the crisis, they may not believe they can trust you.

Remind them that grace is available. Jesus's experience of enduring temptation makes him a merciful high priest who can sympathize with their struggles and give them the mercy and help that they need (Heb. 4:14–16). The accessibility of grace is especially important if they are despairing of life because they feel they have committed some terrible sin. Pray for them.

Make a Covenant with Them

After you have gained some insight into the situation, ask the individual if they want you to help them. If they are willing, press for a commitment or try to make a covenant with the person to promise they will not harm themselves. Explain that you are making a commitment to them and that you want them to make a commitment to you. If they are reluctant, seek a lesser covenant that they will not harm themselves without talking to you face-to-face. Make sure that any means of harming themselves are removed or disposed of. If you are talking on the phone, make sure that someone will be with them in person within the hour (you, if no one else). *Within 24 hours try to have them counseling with someone.*

Avoid getting drawn into an unhelpful covenant. Many people who share deep private thoughts will want to swear you to secrecy. Tell them that you cannot swear to promises that might put them at risk or keep them from getting the help and encouragement they might need. But be clear that you have no intention to gossip about them.

Even if you have made a covenant and the immediate crisis subsides, be alert to any unusual change in a person's mood. If a depressed and despairing person suddenly expresses a new outlook on life, it could be a warning signal that they have decided to take their life. Their mood may have shifted because they are relieved of the agony of making the decision and are in the process of carrying out their plan. This situation needs to be addressed quickly.

What to Do If You Are Suicidal

Much of what I have said about ministering to others also applies to ourselves if we are despairing of life. First, talk to somebody. This is non-negotiable. Do not trust your own perceptions of the situation. You have been confined to your own thoughts for too long. You need some objective input from outside of yourself. Reach out to someone. It may be a family member, a trusted friend, pastor (or fellow pastor), or counselor.

Have hope. Remember the question of Psalms 42 and 43: "Why are you cast down, O my Soul?" The Psalmist is depressed. He does not even know

why. But he speaks to himself to hang on and to hope in God. Why? Because he will again praise him. How we feel at any given moment is not a predictor of how we will feel tomorrow. Remember, "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." This testimony is true. Do not forget it. Do not end your life. Ask for help. Reach out to somebody.

If your despair of life flows from feelings of anger or revenge, remember what the Bible teaches. We need to deal with our anger, not by killing ourselves or someone else, but by repentance. Grace gives us both the means and the motivation to be reconciled, to offer forgiveness and receive it, and to bring healing to broken relationships. Bitterness only destroys our inner life.

Remember that while suicide might seem to relieve our personal pain, it does not remove it. It only passes that pain on to those who are left behind. If you love your family, why would you allow them to suffer as you have suffered?

Make a covenant with someone you trust. If you feel that you might be at risk of harming yourself, reach out to someone and make a covenant with them that you will never do so without speaking to them. It is not uncommon for ministers to make a covenant with another friend or minister to gain support and have a contact person if they ever find themselves in a situation of temptation or compromise. This is a wonderful instrument of protection and accountability. Extend it to the possibility of despair or self- harm.

Minister to your body. Remember that before God addressed Elijah's despair, he gave him lots of good food and rest. If you are struggling with depression and are tempted to harm yourself, get a general medical checkup to determine whether there might be some underlying hormonal or metabolic condition that might be contributing to it such as thyroid problems, diabetes, or anemia. Bad eating habits, lack of exercise, or insufficient quantity or quality of sleep can also be significant factors.

Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship leader Paul Little once offered this wonderful practical advice: "Never commit suicide until you have had at least 12 hours of sleep!" Remember these words. They are words to live by! I have often had the opportunity to apply them to myself and to share them with others.

Some Final Comments

Remember not all people who are despairing of life want theirs to end. They want hope. Offer it with strength and calmness. They are like sheep without a shepherd.

Shepherd them and seek to point them to the Great Shepherd. As officers in the church of Jesus Christ, we have both the obligation and privilege to minister to troubled people. We do what we can. But we are limited in what we can do. There are many who are conflicted about ending their lives. Unfortunately, there are some who are committed to it. As in all helping professions, it is very possible that someone to whom you are ministering may commit suicide on your watch. It may even be a family member or someone else very close to you.

This is a terrible situation with which to cope. However, if it happens, there are several things to remember. First, there is nothing we can do to prevent a person from taking their life if they are intent on doing so. We can try to put obstacles in their way and reach out and offer them hope and alternatives, but we cannot prevent it.

Second, there is nothing you have done or failed to do that is the ultimate cause of someone's suicide. It is not your fault. It is their choice. Most likely you did what you could. It is not fruitful to punish yourself with vain regrets or "If only" scenarios. This, of course, is much easier to say than to embrace. If you struggle with a sense of failure, remember there is grace for you as well.

Finally, it is pure hubris to think that we can control someone else's life. We cannot live other people's lives for them. We are not even able to sustain our own. We must trust God for both ourselves and others.

While we may not have special training, there is still much we can do to promote a ministry of encouragement to those who struggle in our congregations. We have the gospel. We have the Word

of God and prayer. We have a testimony. We have love and hope to give. We should share generously. Be hospitable to those who are lonely or distressed. In this way you can do more than you think in ministering to your congregation in general, and to those who may at times despair of life, in particular.

Let me close with this. As officers of the church, we are called to shepherd the flock and minister to those who are troubled by binding up the brokenhearted. This includes those despairing of life. "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18). ☺

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Loving the Flock When It Seems That They Do Not Love You

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by Alan D. Strange

We are to love the flock to which God has called us to serve as overseers—regardless of our perception of their love for us.[2] To be sure, just as a man seeking a wife, we should, *before accepting a call from a particular congregation*, ascertain that they gladly receive our ministrations and that we enjoy mutual love and respect (as Paul loved, and was loved and respected by, those he references in 1 Thess. 2:1–13). Paul commends the Thessalonians for receiving his ministry to them, particularly his preaching of the Word of God, which they rightly regarded not as the word of men, but as it truly was, the Word of God. Clearly, they loved and received him, even as he did them, speaking to and of them in the most affectionate terms, likening himself to a father and even a nursing mother to them.

So, too, as much as possible, a man who is a candidate for a pastoral call should ascertain that he has a true heart for ministry to those seeking to call him and that they truly receive his ministry to them, particularly his preaching of the Word. This is why the process of the pastoral call should never be perfunctory. It is preferable that a candidate visit the congregation and preach and teach in that congregation over the course of a number of weeks and Lord's Days. Only in this way can all parties have any hope of making a reasonable assessment of the suitability and fitness of both parties for each

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=819.

2 This article is based on "Loving the Flock When It Seems That They Don't Love You," an address by Alan D. Strange to the URCNA Pastors' Conference, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, June 2013.

other.

A congregation's call to a minister is of the utmost importance and they ought not to issue, nor should he accept a call, unless all parties have done all that is reasonable to ascertain whether or not this is the man that the congregation should call. However—as is also true with a man and a woman who think that they should get married—a congregation and pastor may *think* that they know and love each other; however, they can never really love each other until they take the time to know each other. Such real and deep knowledge does not happen apart from a pastor and a congregation living together for some time.

Here again the analogy of a marriage is apt as minister and congregation frequently are said in the early part of his tenure to enjoy a honeymoon and inquiry is made after some time along the lines of "is the honeymoon over?" when problems come to the fore. This reflects the reality that once a marriage ensues it is not simply wine and roses all the time but involves the hard, but immensely rewarding, work of learning to live together, which involves pain and pleasure, as we die to sin and live to righteousness. In a ministerial relationship such occurs as it does in a marriage.

What is a man to do if he discovers that his wife does not trust or respect him as he thought she did (or if she changes or appears to change in this)? This situation is not uncommon as we get to know each other: we are all sinners, and when the bloom is off the rose, we see things about each other that we did not earlier see. A congregation will come to learn in some practical ways, however godly their minister may be, that he is but a man, a man who has many faults along with his virtues (even as a wife will learn this about her husband in practical ways that hitherto eluded her). And, even as a man will learn this about his dear wife—that she, as lovely as she is, has many faults and shortcomings—a minister will come to see that his congregation is not everything that he dreamed, imagined, or hoped it to be (even as he is not all that they had hoped a pastor would be to them).

What are a congregation and a minister to do when they come to see these things about each other? Particularly, in light of this topic, what is a minister to do when he comes to a clearer-eyed assessment of his congregation? Well, what is a man to do when he discovers that his wife is a sinner and not only falls short in her own ways but also is not as loving of him as he thought (or expects)?

He is to love her, even as Christ does the church (Eph. 5:22–33). Remember, Christ loves the church even though the church at times resists Christ and never perfectly submits to him. The church at times resists Christ, even as a wife may resist her husband, a congregation may resist its pastor, failing to respect him and love him as it ought. So, a husband ought to love his wife, even when she fails or seems to fail to respect him, and a pastor ought to love his flock, even when they fail or seem to fail to love and respect him. The love of a husband for his wife and a minister for his flock may be made easier by greater real or perceived receptivity, yet the responsibility to love remains on the part of the one called to love (minister or husband), whether or not he believes that his wife loves and respects him.

A husband, once he has entered marriage and made vows, sticks by his wife through thick and thin. Similarly, once a minister has been installed in a particular congregation, and thus taken the requisite vows, he does not abandon that congregation. Only upon proper process can the ministerial call be dissolved—and that only in the proper circumstances (another valid call is in the offing, for instance), not merely because things have grown difficult, including real or perceived lack of affection on the part of a congregation.

Once you have accepted the call and are within a congregation, endeavoring to serve as their pastor, what are you to do when the congregation does not seem to love you?

Even as a husband does not abandon his marriage because he perceives that his wife does not love him, so a man does not abandon a call as pastor because he perceives (real or not) that the congregation lacks love for him. By the way, this husband/wife, pastor/church analogy is, as we have seen, appropriate for several reasons, not the least being that a minister represents Christ to the

congregation (as a man in his own way represents Christ to his wife, see Eph. 4:33).

Why does a man love a wife who he perceives lacks love? Because God loves him, and he loves God and delights to obey him. Why does a man love a church that he perceives fails to love him? Because God loves him, and he loves God and delights to obey him. God calls you to love the flock regardless of their real or perceived lack of reciprocation. If one keeps in mind that our duty is first to God and then to our neighbor, we can continue loving our neighbor even when we perceive them as unlovable, because God loves us and thus gives us the strength to love them. Additionally, since God loves them, we are to love them.

We are to love the flock regardless of their response because God never stops loving us or them, even though, especially in light of his ineffable holiness, he has no reason to love us or them. We may feel that we have no reason to love our flock, but we are empowered to do so in loving a God who loves the unlovely and by that love beautifies them. Here is a wonderful thing: in loving, a husband beautifies his wife, as a minister beautifies his congregation. Maybe it is a congregation that has a reputation for being difficult or inhospitable. A kind, loving minister, after some time, will likely help shape, by God's grace, his congregation to become kinder and more loving, welcoming of the stranger, caring for one another.

When a man takes a call, he is to endeavor then to love and serve that congregation, even if he senses or believes that they lack love for him. He is to give himself to them, to wash their feet (John 13): preach, pray, visit, counsel, and administer among them (to be among them as Paul was among the Thessalonians). Or as a father and mother give themselves for their children, as Paul compares himself to parents, as we have seen, in 1 Thessalonians, so a minister gives himself for his congregation. These are the people God has given to you and you to them: love and serve them.

Yes, preach to them the living Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13) in the context of a loving father/mother/husband/Christ-like relationship. Not only preaching, though—here is the point—but being like Paul was to the Thessalonians, even as a nurturing mother and guiding father. Do we love our people like this in any respect? Listen to what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." Does this language, in its depth and intensity, capture our love for the flock? Or does Paul's language embarrass us in our cold, loveless, cynical culture? Look at Paul's language and check yourself against it.

Relatedly, John Piper reminds us that we are not professionals in the ministry. While there is a professional aspect to what we do, we are never merely professionals. We are more like caring husbands or parents to our flock—or dear friends who employ the most affectionate terms to the sheep under our care. They long to see Christ formed more and more in them and labor in fervent love to that end. Pray without ceasing for yourselves for this heart to be formed in you and this love to characterize your ministry.

The minister's service to his people is not conditioned on their conduct or understanding and not conditioned on your perception of their affection for you. As long as one is the pastor of a particular congregation, he has a divine obligation to love those under his care, regardless of their real or perceived lack of love for him. Again, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, even our Lord Jesus Christ, continues to love us though we are very unworthy of his love and though we never love him as we ought. Pastors need to be willing to love and never receive in return the kind of love that they bring to the people. They are ambassadors of Christ to the congregation and he never receives in return anything close to what he gives. Let us learn to love regardless of the love that the flock returns, remembering that Jesus loves us in this way and keeps loving us though we keep failing to love him as we ought.

Notice, also, the proposition that I have been given to address—"loving them when it *seems* they do not love you." We must recognize that we only have our perceptions. There are times when,

because we misunderstand something, we *perceive* that someone does not love us, or respect us. This sense sometimes stems from our own sin: a person or persons fail sufficiently to admire us, praise us, recognize us, etc., so we conclude that they do not love us. In other words, someone may not fail to love us truly but only fail to fill our love buckets, because we are looking to them to provide what only God can.

When we look to our parishioners this way, we are bound to be disappointed with them, even as they with us, when they look to us for what only God can give them.

We must remember that we do not have a "God's eye" view of our people. We cannot read their hearts, as tempting as we may find that notion, and as much as we may attempt to do it. We may quite misunderstand "the signals" from this or that person by mistaking something cultural or temperamental for a lack of love ("these quiet Midwesterners don't appreciate me; these noisy New Yorkers don't respect me"; the various ethnicities and regions all have their ways of expressing things that may differ from our desires or expectations).

Only Christ is the truth incarnate, and we need to be very careful and humble by not pronouncing that we know what is really going on with people. This would be an ungodly judging of our brethren, of our flock. It is important, then, to remember the "seems" in this equation, because our *feeling* of a lack of love, or perception of a lack of love, can say more about us than them.

The perception can stem from our own sins and idols. We crave adoration, and when people fail to give it to us as we think they should, it is easy to dismiss them and to think, "they do not love me." We may think others do not love us because of our own pride and envy (and the other deadly sins). We should be careful not to mistake the "feeling" of not being loved with the fact of not being loved. The truth is that we can often make the mistake of thinking that our deepest feelings are the truth and end up worshipping our emotions and letting them control us rather than being controlled by him who is truth. God's Word, however, not what I feel most deeply, is what determines truth (Eph. 4:25). This is important to remember when we "speak the truth." I may think that I am speaking the truth to my wife or my friend or someone else that I "tell off" and "let have it." But such venting often misses the truth of God about that person. I may wish to tell my friend that he is this or that. But if he is God's child, he is precious to God, and the ultimate truth about him is not the frustration that I feel with him that prompts me to call him a "loser." He is not, in Christ, a loser, even if he has much lamentable behavior.

We need to learn to speak of each other, and to each other, the way that Christ thinks and speaks of us. He regards us as his dear children despite our sin and misery, and when he confronts us about sin, he never does so in a way that indicates that that is all that he thinks about us. No, when he confronts us through his Word and Spirit, it is always contextualized with the truth that we are his, and that what he calls us to is not something alien to who we are as new creations in Christ, but simply to be who we are in Christ as new creations.

Having considered that we must love others, regardless of their love, or lack thereof, to us—how do we love them when, perhaps, they really do not love us? Perhaps, the first thing that we need to address is this: what are some reasons that people might have for not loving us?

Let us address a few reasons that are "our fault," while still acknowledging that the congregation ought to love us regardless of what our shortcomings may be. Our sins are many and not easy to hide, especially as we engage our people. Think of sins on our part as ministers that may irritate and put people off: a proud, dismissive, lording-it-over-them spirit; a lack of respect for them; being (or seeming) greedy—mercenary; being controlling, manipulative—though "for their own good" (some very gifted men are like this); being angry and throwing tantrums, or bullying by your behavior; being lazy, lustful, gluttonous, self-seeking, self-promoting. We manifest these sins in the flesh far more than we wish to acknowledge (even as we walk in the flesh more often than we care to admit).

We need to acknowledge, though we are all commanded to love one another, that we are not always loveable. We must be actively at work on this in our lives by pursuing holiness in humility, kindness, and approachability; real holiness is always approachable. Because of the things mentioned above, God's people are often challenged to love those of us who serve as their ministers. There are, in other words, many reasons that the flock may find us unlovable and thus have a hard time loving us. The right response for ministers is repentance, chiefly for the sake of Christ, who is our gracious Lord and Savior and to whom we should render joyful obedience. We also respond for the sake of those to whom we minister—not only because we are to be examples to the flock, but because repenting of what makes it hard for them to love us is how we ought to treat them. By doing this we help them to fulfill their obligation to love us as their minister.

Parishioners' own sins meet ours—they are impatient with our impatience, they are greedy and do not like our greed—and they fail to love. Particularly, they may sense our lack of love for them and tempts them not to love us. Perhaps, they cannot accept our temperaments and personalities: we are quiet and they prefer louder or we are voluble and they prefer more reserved. We need to change in many ways, though not our basic personalities.

While a congregation is to love its minister even if he is genuinely unlovable for some unmortified sins, they do not have the right to seek to make their minister over into something that he is not. This is not to say that a man cannot grow in his social skills, for instance, that will allow him to engage people more readily. It is to say that the congregation is not to expect someone who is of a more retiring disposition to become a glad-handed extrovert.

Consider the ways, in which we respond to a lack of love (or a perceived lack of love). Perhaps the chief temptation is to engage in withdrawal—this is a very real temptation that often also occurs in our families. Do not withdraw. Rather *ora et labora* (pray and labor) for and with them. Give yourself selflessly to them. Even when they are envious, greedy, proud, etc.—all the things for which they resent you. Give and give, and you can, because you have received superabundantly. Remember you are a sinner and your people are sinners. God's grace is sufficient for you all.

We can also lash out, if withdrawal is not our response to a perceived lack of love from the flock. Do not pitch a fit in or out of the pulpit. Do not slander or gossip about your real or perceived enemies. Do not be bitter toward those who oppose you.

Understand the use that God intends to make of opposition in your life. (Remember that some people will hate even the most godly persons, certainly something experienced by our Lord and the Apostle Paul). Some will resist the truth and will resent your confronting them with their sin. Do not "let them have it" in the pulpit; do not "preach searchingly" so as to expose hypocrisy that we are certain of because some people do not love us. Preach searchingly in love, not "beating them up" because of a lack of love on your part.

We ought to respond not by clamming up or blowing up, but by learning patiently how to deal with those who do not love us. We should seek to win them by firm yet loving engagement, disciplining in love when needed (be careful here). Engage, in fact, in the sort of self-sacrifice for the flock that Princeton Professor Benjamin Warfield counseled in his masterful sermon, "Imitating the Incarnation:"

> Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, His followers, not away from but into the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will we be to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self- sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them. It means forgetfulness of self in others. It means entering into every man's hopes and fears, longings and despairs: it means manysidedness of spirit, multiform activity, multiplicity of sympathies. It means

richness of development.[3]

Our people know that what we preach to them is what we preach to ourselves and are struggling to love just as we call them to do. A people who know that you love them will be, in the main, receiving and loving in return.

Sometimes parishioners are resistant to Christ's Lordship and resist you as his ambassador. But do not be too quick to conclude that the flock's disaffection is persecution for righteousness' sake (again, it may be, but it is self-serving, and often self- deceiving, to quickly conclude this).

Above all, remember that, while you were yet a sinner, Christ loved you and died for you. He washed the feet of his confused, doubting disciples. It is when poor, doubting souls are drawn to Christ that the minister and congregants most love each other. And this is what you, as Christ's minister, are privileged to do: minister, so that you and your people are drawn to Christ, drawn to love him with all your being, and you are drawn to love your people, and your people are drawn to love each other, including you, their minister, with a pure, fervent heart.

It is only when we love him, in response to his loving us, that we love each other. So it is that pastors love their people and the flock loves their pastor. This is a loveless world. Only in Christ, as we commune with him and each other, as members of his mystical body, only then are we very unlovable people able to love him and each other. ©

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3 B. B. Warfield, "Imitating the Incarnation," in *The Person and Work of Christ* (1914; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1970), 574–575.

Introducing the Committee on Ministerial Care of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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by Matthew R. Miner

> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."
> (1 Tim. 5:17–18)

Ministers (even missionaries!), are men "of like nature" to all the rest of us (Acts 14:15). I have experienced this truth through hundreds of hours spent with ministers in two decades of ordained service as an elder and a deacon. Ministers need the gospel applied in their lives. Ministers need prayer for their ministries. Ministers need friendship and fellowship in the local church. Ministers need money to buy groceries and housing, and beyond that, to prepare for a future when they no longer serve actively in the ministry. Ministers need encouragement and help on an ongoing basis and at specific times in their ministries.

Regarding retirement-readiness, there are two kinds of ministers: ministers in retirement and those who, in the ordinary course of life, will retire in the future (Num. 8:24–26). There is one kind of minister as it relates to "care" broadly construed: ministers who need care for their bodies, minds, and souls (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A #1). The Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) exists to care for the ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as these men face unique challenges be-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=827.

cause of their calling. That care comes to ministers through means—primarily through the work of congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and the general assembly.

In Matthew 6:25–26 our Lord says,

> Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

The Lord gives this command and in his glorious wisdom supplies the means of obeying his Word. Ministers are freed from anxiety when they cast their cares on the Lord in prayer and when their congregations and sessions pray that their minister may rest in Christ. The Lord answers these prayers and ministers receive food, drink, and clothing when the terms of their calls unstintingly provide these necessities throughout their ministries with enough income left over (ideally at least ten percent plus of the total call amount) to be invested wisely for the future. In some cases—ministers who opted out of Social Security, began investing after age forty, live in a manse or rent a home, are burdened with high student debt, or have children with special needs—even more is needed.

John Calvin, after affirming the distinct work given to ruling elders and ministers of the gospel, comments on 1 Timothy 5:17–18:

> Paul . . . enjoins that support shall be provided chiefly for ministers, who are employed in teaching. Such is the ingratitude of the world, that very little care is taken about supporting the ministers of the word; and Satan, by this trick, endeavors to deprive the Church of instruction, by terrifying many, through the dread of poverty and hunger, from bearing that burden.
>
> "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox" This is a political precept which recommends to us equity and humanity . . . for, if he forbids us to be unkind to brute animals, how much greater humanity does he demand towards men!
>
> . . . "The laborer is worthy of his hire" [Paul] does not quote this as a passage of Scripture, but as a proverbial saying, which common sense teaches to all. In like manner, when Christ said the same thing to the Apostles, (Matt. 10:10), he brought forward nothing else than a statement approved by universal consent. It follows that they are cruel, and have forgotten the claims of equity, who permit cattle to suffer hunger; and incomparably worse are they that act the same part towards men, whose sweat they suck out for their own accommodation. *And how intolerable is the ingratitude of those who refuse support to their pastors, to whom they cannot pay an adequate salary!* (emphasis mine)[2]

Calvin believed inadequate care and compensation for pastors was a trick of Satan to deprive the church of teaching! In striving to care for ministers in the OPC, the CMC's mandate addresses physical needs and spiritual needs of our pastors as Satan preys upon an entirely understandable "dread of poverty" in the ministry.

The CMC's History and Mandate[3]

The CMC's mandate is to care for ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CMC got its start in 2014 as The Temporary Committee to Study the Care for the Ministers of the Church. This group was asked to "investigate needs of OPC ministers and suggest ways [to provide or enhance care for these men and their widows] during all phases of ministry."

The study committee worked throughout 2015 and 2016 considering two main approaches for the future. First, they considered expanding the roles of several existing standing committees whose work

2 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 139–140.

3 Portions excerpted from Matthew Miner, "Caring for Ministers in the OPC," *New Horizons* (Dec. 2018): 9, 16.

touches on aspects of ministerial care: The Committee on Diaconal Ministries, The Committee on Pensions, The Committee on Christian Education, and the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. However, after wrestling with how this could work out to serve OP ministers, the study committee determined that the wide range of work would be hard to fit into an existing committee structure and would be difficult to coordinate across so many committees.

The second idea was a single, new committee, with a mandate to handle all areas of ministerial care. The study committee concluded that this would be the best way forward, and so in 2016, the committee asked the eighty-third General Assembly to approve the establishment of a Committee on Ministerial Care and to propose to the eighty-fourth General Assembly a change in its standing rules that the Committee on Ministerial Care would replace the Committee on Pensions. The CMC would consist of nine church officers: ordained ministers and ruling elders (or deacons), with "the purpose . . . to provide financial direction and ministries of encouragement and support to ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church." The eighty-fourth General Assembly ratified this plan, and the Committee on Ministerial Care was born; its inaugural meeting was held July 5th, 2017. The assembly determined that:

> The mandate of the CMC shall include:
> - Maintaining, managing, and providing oversight of the OPC Pension Fund.
> - Providing and recommending counsel and assistance in risk management (health, life, disability, counseling, and such other types of insurance as may be advisable).
> - Providing or recommending counsel and assistance in financial planning.
> - Including retirement planning and investment portfolio management.
> - Maintaining, managing, and providing oversight of the OPC Obadiah Fund; and providing for the diaconal needs of all OPC ministers.
> - Informing presbyteries and local sessions of tools available for the care of their ministers.
> - Consulting with North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches regarding their experience and best practices in the care of their ministers.
> - Assisting presbyteries with resources to improve the terms of calls.
> - Maintaining denominational salary scale guidelines.
> - Maintaining a comprehensive and confidential database of OPC ministerial compensation.
> - Providing direction to the general assembly regarding our Book of Church Order and retirement related matters.
> - Providing financial instruction and counsel in educational venues, e.g., the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC.
> - Considering other means of strengthening the care of ministers, e.g., ministerial mentoring, counseling, retreats, and sabbaticals.

The committee began work to fulfill its GA mandate. The initial membership included Rev. Lendall Smith, Elder Bruce Stahl, Rev. Darren Thole, Elder David Nakhla, Elder David Vander Ploeg, Rev. Clark Brooking, Rev. Douglas L. Watson, and Elder Greg DeJong. It also included Elder David Haney who became the CMC's director.

On August 11, 2019, the committee received an email from Vice President Greg DeJong titled "Urgent Prayer Request & Meeting Postponement." We learned that David Haney had collapsed in the exercise room of his hotel in Milwaukee. Five days later, on August 16 at the age of fifty-six, David finished his earthly race and was welcomed into glory by our Lord Jesus. He is deeply missed by his wife Becky and his children and grandchildren. His death is mourned by the OPC at large, including the CMC. David's death created new challenges for the young committee.

Describing the start of the CMC in a eulogy to David Haney, David Nakhla, administrator of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries writes,

The newest denominational committee, the Committee on Ministerial Care, which was inaugurated in 2017, was David's brain-child. The CMC became the successor to the work of the previous Committee on Pensions, and it also absorbed some of the work of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, specifically the care of ministers and their widows through the administration of the Obadiah Fund. David was serving as the Inaugural Director of the CMC at his passing.

Throughout the fall of 2019 and early winter of 2020, the CMC labored without a director. At the committee's January 2020 meeting, the work of our search committee bore fruit in the unanimous decision to call Rev. John Fikkert as the new Director of the Committee on Ministerial Care. John began his work April 1, 2020.

Tasks of the CMC

The CMC strives, by God's grace, to fulfill its mandate by providing tools and resources that are specifically useful to ministers and their wives and that equip sessions and presbyteries to care for ministers.

Members of the CMC have addressed most of the presbyteries of the OPC, and John Fikkert will continue this work in coming years. John Fikkert and Greg DeJong presented a well-received session at the ReChex conference in Orlando, Florida in November 2019. The CMC conducted focus groups with ministers' wives at the Church Planter's conference in January and at a Chicago-area ministers' wives' brunch in March 2020.

Matt Miner presented to the OPC interns on the topic of financial planning for pastors in the summer of 2020.

Much of the committee's work resides on our website, opccmc.org. This includes previously recorded video content on investing for retirement, avoiding burnout in ministry, and structuring financial terms of pastoral calls to take full advantage of the Minister's Housing Allowance in the Internal Revenue Code.

The website includes resources on Salary Scale Guidelines, the recently re-released Pastoral Compensation Tool, and Sabbatical Guidelines (new in 2020).

Future of the CMC

Per our general assembly mandate, the CMC exists to provide "encouragement and support" to care for ministers. That care comes to OP ministers through congregations, sessions, presbyteries, and the general assembly. Further, ministers have a responsibility for godly self-care, getting adequate rest and exercise, stewarding the gifts they have received, and praying that God would provide and bless in every way.

The Lord gives unique callings to each of his servants, but we do not fulfill those callings alone. The minister is upheld in his preaching by the prayers of the elders. Elders are freed to lead in prayer, to teach, and to discipline by the loving work of the deacons. Deacons are supported in their ministry to the emotional and physical needs of the congregation by church members who lay down their lives for the cause of Christ. All believers are blessed as we care for one another by lifting up our prayers, sharing our time, and by giving out of the abundance which we have received. The church is blessed as each member works and prays that the gospel may advance all around the world and in the hearts of believers everywhere. The prayer of each member of the CMC is that the Lord himself would care for the ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—God's gifts to his church—and that all God's people would be richly blessed through the work of these beloved men! Ⓢ

Matthew R. Miner *serves as a ruling elder at Pilgrim Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, and is a member of the OPC's Committee on Ministerial Care.*

How a Faithful Elder Can Make a Difference: Reflections on the Life and Death of a Friend

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant December 2020[1]

By Ryan M. McGraw

What difference can a ruling elder make? Many people do not know what elders are supposed to do and often even less of what they actually do. Yet ruling elders are vital to the life of the church, as well as to our lives personally. On June 26, 2020, John Leding, who was a fellow elder and one my close personal friends, went to be with Christ when he died unexpectedly in a car wreck. His work as an elder behind the scenes illustrates why we need faithful ruling elders and the influence that they can have on our lives and ministries.

John and I served together on the session of First OPC Sunnyvale, CA. We usually kept in touch every other week long after I left the congregation to teach at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The following reflections illustrate how a busy and successful businessman can serve Christ and his church to further the gospel, often behind the scenes. Often our views of church offices are two-dimensional, resting on abstract principles and qualifications alone. Reflecting on the godly example and service of a faithful elder can help make that person three-dimensional, realistic, and concrete.

He Was a Spiritual Man

John was more concerned with godliness than he was even with orthodoxy. This may sound jarring at first. Our denomination has "orthodox" in its name, showing how highly we value right thinking about the Lord and his Word. Yet, the truth we confess is the truth that accords with godliness (1 Tim. 6:3). We should never study Scripture or sound doctrine as ends in themselves. The Triune God's purpose in revealing doctrine is so that we would know the right God in the right way (John 17:3). John's concern was that many Reformed Christians were more concerned with being right than they were with right living. While we would argue the finer points of predestination, he would ask young men and candidates for the ministry whether they were viewing pornography. While we would argue over justification and union with Christ, he was concerned with whether the Spirit was conforming God's people to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). While many wanted to form the best arguments for infant baptism, John wanted to press us to improve our baptisms and to live for God's glory. While many are concerned with the right interpretation of the law of God, he wanted the law to be an instrument of the Spirit to love the God of the law.

John was as zealous for sound doctrine as any faithful OPC elder, but he never lost sight of why we should care in the first place. In short, everything he pursued and promoted in the church revolved around union with Christ and the glory of the Triune God. He was consumed with knowing Christ and with rooting the benefits of the gospel in him, rather than merely debating theology and getting the system of doctrine right for its own sake. He always reminded me that the end of good theology is the reason for good theology. This, above all else, is what made him a good elder and a godly man.

These characteristics are precisely what our churches need from our officers.

He Was a Businessman

John was a successful businessman, running one of the largest tour bus companies on the West Coast. Sometimes congregants elect elders because they are leaders in the community and not because they are spiritual men. This only harms the church. We want men who are full of wisdom

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=856.

and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). Yet, we should not go to opposite extremes. Sometimes sessions and presbyteries need men with good business sense simply because they know how to do business and how to get things done. Frankly, we often take too long to make decisions in governing the church and shepherding the flock. We take too long to approve men to serve churches as ministers and to keep church discipline on a timely track. Often exasperating our churches, we linger when we need to take action. John kept things moving.

He had a good sense for how we use church and presbytery funds and make decisions. While others saw no problem, for example, with people serving on committees that also paid their salaries, arguing that we were the church and not the world and we should expect the best, John had a healthier and more realistic view of human nature. He had a way of showing a session or presbytery that adding new information would not change our final decisions, and he would press us to act. He was always concerned with getting pastors in pulpits, and he was instrumental behind the scenes in bringing at least four pastors into three different pulpits in our presbytery. A good businessman, who is a godly and wise Christian as well, can be precisely what a session needs to be responsible and timely in making important decisions that affect the church.

He Was a Churchman

John attended every presbytery meeting, served on various committees, augmented sessions in other churches, and persevered through many day-long session meetings on Saturdays. He participated in prayer meetings faithfully, even via conference calls when work and travel would not permit him to attend in person. Loving the church, he showed commitment to its worship and work at every level he could. He was a model of someone with a busy schedule who never neglected his family and made time to serve the church. Maybe it takes a successful businessman to teach us how to manage our time well enough to do all that the Lord calls us to do.

John also humbled, and sometimes shamed, me through his public prayers. He had the gift of brevity and could say what most of us tried to communicate in half the words and with greater meaning and profit to the congregation. We have a lot to learn from men who know how to get to the bottom line, especially in public prayer.

Ruling elders are not in full-time ministry. They have full-time jobs and busy schedules. Participating in session and presbytery meetings, serving on committees, attending visitation, leading new members classes, and being part of similar activities take time. These commitments cannot be all-consuming and no one can do everything. Elders should pace themselves and not overcommit. Doing a little bit every month in service to the church is better than setting unrealistic goals and burning out or holding a place on a session without doing much of anything. John's labors give us an example of how far devoting a few hours at a time, a few times a month, can stretch into fruitful and necessary labor in spreading Christ's kingdom. The old saying rings true that where there is a will there is a way, with Christ opening the way and the Spirit making us willing and able to serve the Father.

He Was a Faithful Friend

John and I frustrated each other at times. Maybe we even irritated each other once in a while. Yet, we also trusted and loved each other. All of these things go along with friendship. He was not afraid to tell me when I was preaching too long, even though he loved preaching. He would tell me when my sermons lacked warmth for the congregation, even when I thought I had poured my heart out to them. He was willing to press me to be more concrete and give more examples in my application, even when I labored to do so. He was willing to confront hard pastoral issues with church members, even when the rest of the session wrestled with how to broach difficult subjects. Yet, none of us ever doubted his love when he did these things. He was patient, kind, generous, prayerful, open-hearted, straightforward, and sensi-

tive. He was constructive and supportive without being critical. Pastors rarely need more critics, but they do need elders who love them enough to help them do better when they know that they can with the Spirit's help. I am a much better preacher, and a better man, for John's faithful service as an elder.

Pastors need elders who are their friends. Many ministers complain about being lonely in the ministry with no one really understanding the challenges that they face. I never felt lonely laboring with my elders in Sunnyvale. John was my friend (as are the other men on the session there), and we truly bore the burdens of ministry together, including the ministry of the Word. Those who do not understand the trials of the ministry are probably not investing adequate time into people's lives through regular (even if once a month) visiting, hospitality, counselling, and having fellowship with people. A minister should never be lonely if he has ruling elders who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, who love their pastor, and who share life and genuine friendship with him and with the people they serve. Men like this make our ministries more fruitful and more joyful.

On one occasion, two ruling elders, whom I knew well, asked me what was the best thing they could do to help the new minister that the church was calling. I responded without hesitation, be friends with him and do not merely work with him. We only need read Paul's epistles, especially 2 Corinthians, to see the strong bonds of friendship and love that existed between Paul, the churches, and his fellow church officers. We need less of the mentality that ministers and elders should never be close to people in the church because they will likely be betrayed. Jesus was betrayed by Judas and forsaken by the other eleven apostles (Matt. 26:31), yet he laid down his life for his friends (John 15:14).

He Was a Persistent and Kind Evangelist

John brought the gospel to people everywhere he went. Every time someone complained that our churches needed more evangelism, while I agreed with them generally, I would point to John as a faithful example. He knew people in his town. He really got to know them, and he genuinely cared about what mattered to them. This was why so many were ready to receive the gospel from him. He taught me that we need more empathy with non-believers. We must confront people with their sin and with their need for Christ. Yet, we must not forget how strange we are to them and that they are real people with real values, even if those values are wrong or misguided. If we want people to take Christ seriously, then we must learn to take them seriously. John was unafraid to talk to a lesbian couple and find out what made them tick and what they were passionate about before sharing his passion for Christ. This is why they often gave him the time to tell them about the Savior. Christ was always in his heart and never far from his lips. This is the best way to evangelize the lost. Jesus treated people as real people with real concerns and problems. He ministered to them body and soul. He was a friend of tax collectors and sinners. We need ruling elders to lead in evangelism by example, but this takes ruling elders who are willing to care for people who share few of their beliefs or values. John helped show me how this should be done.

Conclusion

I have preached at funerals and, like all of us, I have experienced the death of loved ones. When some people die, my memories of them are clouded by selfish lives that ran like a thread even through their acts of service to others. People can buy gifts for others, do kind things for them, spend time with them, and entertain them with an eye primarily on what they want, on their self-esteem, their possessions, and how people will remember them. Sin teaches us to love ourselves, then others, and then God, if there is any room left for him. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love God first, then our neighbor for his sake, then ourselves, if we have any room left to do so. When I think of John's life, I am moved to praise and thanksgiving because I see such clear evidence of a life reoriented by grace. I don't need to call the comforts of the gospel to mind under the weight of losing him

because they cannot stay out of my mind. They come flooding in without bidding.

Reflecting on my friend's life impresses me with the power of the Spirit of Christ. Elders must first be Spirit-filled men if they hope to have Spirit-filled ministries. We need elders who have good Christian sense, and maybe a dose of good business sense, and who are committed to the church without neglecting their families. We need elders who are friends to their ministers and to the members of their congregations. We need men who live in Christ and whose lives spill into those of the lost in everyday living.

Faithful ruling elders may not receive much recognition in this world, but they can make a world of a difference, storing up treasures for the life to come. This is a three- dimensional picture of the difference that a faithful ruling elder can make, rather than a two-dimensional definition of office and list of qualifications. Elders need to be men we can serve with and under, and whom we can imitate as they imitate Christ, rather than men we can simply define theologically and fill open slots when elections come around. ©

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Servant

History

The Pilgrims: Forgotten, Remembered, Celebrated

A Review Article

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by Darryl G. Hart

They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and the Contest for American Liberty, by John Turner. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020, x + 447 pages, $30.00.

Most Americans, if they know anything about the Pilgrims, think of this small group of Protestant settlers in connection with Thanksgiving. That may also be true for American Protestants, who are as likely to associate the settlers of the colony at Plymouth Plantation with the rest of New England Puritanism. In 1999 residents of Southampton, New York, for instance, objected to the town's official seal which featured a man in Pilgrim attire and claimed, "First English Settlement in the State of New York." The chairperson of the town's Anti-Bias Task Force explained that the seal assumed the area's history began in 1640 and neglected the presence of native Americans who had lived in the region for thousands of years. The revelation that "our heroes were other people's oppressors" was more important than distinguishing Pilgrims from Puritans. The real problem was not the variety of English Protestantism, according to the *New York Times*, but the divide between whites and people of color.[2] Nevertheless, a follow up story in the *Times* returned to the distinction between Pilgrims and Puritans. The newspaper clarified that not Pilgrims, but Puritans were the original English settlers in Southampton. The region of Long Island that includes Southampton, Southold, East Hampton, Oyster Bay, and Huntington "was established as an outpost of the New Haven Colony," a branch of Puritanism.[3]

If Americans pay attention to the presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving as a national holiday—arguably the best of the annual bunch—they will likely hear reminders about courage in the face of adversity, cooperation with native peoples, and a meal of fall produce and wild fowl. In 1961 during his first year in the White House, John F. Kennedy declared, "more than three centuries ago, the Pilgrims, after a year of hardship and peril, humbly and reverently set aside a special day upon which to give thanks to God for their preservation and for the good harvest from the virgin soil upon which they had labored." He added that "by their faith and by their toil they had survived the rigors of the harsh New England winter" and so rested from "their labors to give thanks for the blessings that had been bestowed upon them by Divine Providence."[4] In 2010 when President Barack Obama declared a national holiday, he mentioned both the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe, and asked Americans to "reflect on the compassion and contributions of Native Americans" who helped the English colonists survive.[5] Last year, Donald

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=841.

2 Elizabeth Kiggin Miller, "Anti-Bias Task Force Says No to a Pilgrim," *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/10/nyregion/anti-bias-task-force-says-no-to-a-pilgrim.html, accessed August 10, 2020.

3 Parnel Wickham, "Separating the Pilgrims from the Puritans," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/24/nyregion/l-separating-the-pilgrims-from-the-puritans-080128.html, accessed August 10, 2020.

4 Kennedy, "Proclamation 3438—Thanksgiving Day, 1961," https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-3438-thanksgiving-day-1961, accessed August 10, 2020.

5 Obama, "Presidential Proclamation–Thanksgiving Day," https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the- press-office/2010/11/23/presidential-proclamation-thanksgiving-day, accessed August 10, 2020.

Trump found a middle way between Kennedy and Obama. He underlined the Pilgrims' great hardships and tribulations, and their "unwavering" faith and foresight. Yet, through divine providence, the Pilgrims forged a "meaningful relationship" with the Wampanoag that led to a bountiful harvest. The meal the Pilgrims shared with the native people not only captured a spirit of "friendship and unity," but also "provided an enduring symbol of gratitude that is uniquely sewn into the fabric of our American spirit."[6]

The irony buried deep in this annual appropriation of the English people who came to North America in 1620 on board the Mayflower is that Thanksgiving honors the Pilgrims, a group that most Americans assume were Puritan, who came almost a decade later. And because the Puritans went on to establish institutions such as Harvard and Yale, most Americans think the celebration of Thanksgiving looks back to the New Englanders who left an important heritage for American politics, intellectual life, and higher education.

Even the name, "Pilgrim," obscures as much as it distinguishes one group of New England Protestants from another. The word derives from William Bradford, Plymouth Colony's governor, who wrote a history of the settlers. When he asserted, "they knew they were pilgrims," Bradford was not distinguishing the Protestants in Plymouth from the ones in Boston. He was acknowledging that these Protestants were keenly aware that this world was not their home, that their ultimate residence was a heavenly country.

The study of English Protestants who wanted further reformation in the Church of England has received of late remarkable attention from historians working in the United States. First came Michael Winship's *Hot Protestants*, then David H. Hall's *The Puritans*, and now John G. Turner's, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*. The latter book is almost exclusively about the Protestants who boarded the *Mayflower* and landed in 1620 at Plymouth Rock. These "Pilgrims" were responsible for Plymouth Colony, a territory that today comprises Boston's South Shore and Cape Cod. It was distinct from Massachusetts Bay Colony of John Winthrop fame, though adjustments in Britain's administration of the colonies in 1691 made Plymouth part of Massachusetts. The key religious difference between Puritans and Pilgrims was separatism. Although "Puritan" did not stand for one coherent set of convictions, Puritans generally sought further reform of the Church of England (in Scotland Puritans desired and had greater success with the Kirk). As such, they mainly stayed inside the religious establishment (until forced out).

Puritans could be friendly to Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or Independency; Congregationalists in Massachusetts Bay still regarded themselves as part of the English religious establishment.

In contrast, Plymouth's Pilgrims were separatists and refused to tolerate imperfections in the Church of England. They left England as early as 1610 to settle in the Netherlands which had fewer hopes for religious uniformity. The Dutch setting gave the Pilgrims a chance to set up congregations according to their beliefs. Economic considerations and a desire to retain English identity in their young were important factors that prompted migration to the New World. Perry Miller, the Harvard scholar who resuscitated Puritanism in the mid-twentieth century in American studies and history departments, deemed the Pilgrims far inferior to the Puritans. His dismissal has largely been responsible for American scholars' more general disregard of Plymouth colony.

Turner's account pushes back against Miller and company but is not an attempt to show that the Pilgrims are intellectual and institutional rivals to the Puritans. Not only did Plymouth eventually become part of Massachusetts, but the Pilgrims did not come anywhere near the Puritans in establishing institutions that could transmit their convictions. That was even true for Pilgrims' church history where their quirky beliefs posed a challenge to calling ministers and starting congregations. The colony's first minister, John Lyford, arrived

6 Trump, "Presidential Proclamation on Thanksgiving Day, 2019," https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-thanksgiving-day-2019/ accessed August 10, 2020.

in 1624 but under the warning that ordination required a call from a congregation (even though he had already ministered in Ulster). After receiving approval, Lyford ran afoul of the colonists for not being willing to renounce his former attachment to the Church of England. The pastor retaliated by sending negative reviews of the colony to authorities back in England. In turn, he started his own parish within the colony which attracted some of the settlers but also merited the disapproval of Plymouth's leaders. The colony finally banished Lyford who settled and began to minister in Massachusetts. (He finished his career in Virginia.)

That challenge of finding pastors and creating structures to nurture "the Pilgrim way" was repeated throughout the colony's seven decades. Roger Williams ministered for a time as an unpaid assistant in Plymouth. His tenure came in between a rocky pastorate at Salem where he first challenged Massachusetts' established church and his later banishment and establishment of Rhode Island. Another instance of the Pilgrims' difficulty in cultivating a reliable ministry was Samuel Gorton, a layman from London, who migrated in the late 1630s and began his own congregation. His reason was that the Pilgrims had departed from their own religious principles. He too ran afoul of Plymouth's authorities and wound up in Rhode Island with Williams and other spiritual rejects from both Massachusetts and Plymouth. Charles Chauncy (not to be confused with the eighteenth-century opponent of the Great Awakening) was a pastor who arrived in Plymouth and ministered at Scituate. He was well trained with degrees from Cambridge and also taught at the English university. But he, too, had odd views about the sacraments—such as only administering the Lord's Supper after sundown and immersing candidates for baptism rather than sprinkling. His departure from Pilgrim expectations prompted him to start a rival congregation in Scituate to the one that Pilgrims had founded. For Chauncy all ended well. His academic qualifications earned him a call in 1654 to be Harvard College's second president. But his time in Plymouth was typical of the colony's religious instability due to high standards, few followers, and no institutional support.

Piecing together the church history of the Pilgrims is a challenge not only because the colonists themselves were demanding but also because Turner's book is a broader history of the colony. That voyage and its resulting settlement did begin as an explicitly religious enterprise. But the early colonists knew that they could not live by piety alone, hence the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving fame for enduring the first winter, enjoying their first harvest, and dining with native Americans. Turner organizes his material around changing conceptions of liberty—religious, political, economic, soul—throughout the seventeenth century. But his narrative extends to biographies of most of the colony's leaders, settlement patterns, the economic conditions that sustained the English colonists' existence, and especially their contested relations (and wars) with native American tribes. In many ways Turner's book is as much a history of the place and its people as it is of a religious movement. Beliefs may have inspired the original Pilgrims, but work, politics, and warfare sustained Plymouth.

Of course, this is a similar narrative to that of many "hot" Protestants—from Puritans in Boston to Quakers in Philadelphia—who looked to the New World as a place to implement their beliefs and create a society based on them. In one sense, all of these stories are narratives of declension or secularization. The demands of physical existence (including how to assimilate younger generations that did not make the original step to be part of a godly community) soon overwhelmed religious ideals. Pilgrims did not abandon their Protestant convictions. But they maintained them (usually awkwardly) in the context of creating and nurturing a society that could last beyond the initial settlement.

What that part of North America (southeastern Massachusetts) became was distant both economically and religiously from what Plymouth Colony was originally. As it happens, this reviewer was reading Joseph E. Garland's history of Boston's North Shore while also reviewing *They Knew They Were Pilgrims*. Garland's book, published in 1978

and a *New York Times* bestseller, follows the development of resorts and vacation properties during the nineteenth century as Bostonians looked for escape from the city's heat, congestion, and disease.[7] Of course, locals know that the North Shore (and Cape Ann) is distinct from Boston's South Shore (and Cape Cod). At the same time, the terrain is similar on both sides of Boston and the proximity to the sea dominated economic development, real estate, and recreational activities, such as sailing, swimming, and horseback riding. What Garland's book shows is that the original English Protestant settlers in Massachusetts and Plymouth grew up to be sufficiently prosperous to build any number of resort properties that later turned into year-round communities.

Although Garland devotes only a few pages to religious institutions, in a sense his book is an extension of Turner's. The Pilgrims did not intend to become middle-class Americans who were nominally Protestant. But that is what became of most of the original English settlers in North America. The religious enterprise was an activity that settlers performed alongside of hard work which in turn generated economic conditions that attracted other immigrants and allowed the United States to develop into a prosperous society. To be sure, America's wealth also sustained a vigorous church life for its citizens. But as states such as Massachusetts matured, religion played less and less a role in ordinary affairs. This was already becoming true for the Pilgrims in the seventeenth century as Turner indirectly shows. That reality became obvious, however, when in the nineteenth century towns from Nahant to Gloucester (north) and Quincy to Chatham (south) became summer homes for the descendants of Puritans and Pilgrims.

That change in the fortunes of Massachusetts and Plymouth left the religious zeal of Puritans and Pilgrims to take root in denominations such as the Congregationalists (latter the United Church of Christ). Margaret Bendroth's *The Last Puritans* (2015) is a study of the way Congregationalists remembered, celebrated, and honored the legacy of both Puritans and Pilgrims.[8] Anyone familiar with the theological liberalism of mainline Congregationalism will not be surprised to learn that the piece of Puritanism (also true for Pilgrims) to which the UCC became most attached was congregational polity. The denomination has constantly debated the creation of national structures that threaten local autonomy of congregations even while showing little resistance to liberal theological trends.

Such loyalty to church polity also facilitated Congregationalist displays of patriotism.

Throughout much of its history, the UCC was home to Protestants who tied American ideals of democracy and liberty to the original political and church structures of both Puritans and Pilgrims. Bendroth charts the popularity of celebrations and re-enactments of the Pilgrims' customs that peaked between 1890 and 1920. "By the time of the Pilgrim Tercentenary in 1920, the trend was reaching an apotheosis of sorts," she writes, "as Americans everywhere became participants in the historic landing at Plymouth" (123).

By 1970, however, even the political significance of the Pilgrims became objectionable to mainline Protestants who wanted to address questions of justice for blacks, women, and pacifists. The past might provide "historical background" or context for the denomination, but as examples of liberty, courage, or piety the Pilgrims and their Puritan counterparts no longer served the interests of the UCC (187).

What is left of the Pilgrims (along with the "hot" Protestants with whom they shared space both in Old and New England) is a society largely indifferent to their beliefs and piety. They do pop up in the nation's imagination every year in late November while families dine on turkey and pumpkin pies. Tourists go to the town of Plymouth to see Plymouth Rock and other memorials. For

7 Joseph E. Garland, *Boston's North Shore: Being an Account of Life Among the Noteworthy, Fashionable, Wealthy, Eccentric, and Ordinary, 1823–1890* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978).

8 Margaret Bendroth, *The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Puritans, Salem seems to have cashed in best by turning the witch trials of the 1690s into a vehicle for tourists and merchandise. But the Pilgrims' major contribution to the United States was to transplant English ways in North America. Their social norms, with their distinct economic, political, familial, and legal structures were significant influences on the society that sprouted from the soil of British colonies. And without the Protestant zeal that motivated the likes of the Pilgrims to seek a home in the New World, the development of the United States would look very different.

In the larger scheme of things, however, Americans remember better the places that Pilgrims settled and the meals that they ate than the churches they formed. This may explain why the best Turner can do in his otherwise masterful "expansive and colorful history of Plymouth Colony," is to conclude enigmatically. The Pilgrims, he writes, "left behind both a complicated legacy of human bondage and unresolved debates about liberty" (365). Their governor, William Bradford, would likely have been disappointed to hear that this was the extent of the Pilgrims' contribution. Indeed, Turner's story is hardly inspiring for Protestants who may look back to the Pilgrims (or even the Puritans) as models of godliness and forming a righteous society. But Turner's judgment is arguably the correct one. After all, zeal for worship and holiness co-exists with needs to eat, sleep, and rear children. As the later history of Massachusetts shows, sustaining physical existence is arduous but much more manageable than instilling spiritual life. ©

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Servant Classics

Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant June-July 2020[1]

by David C. Noe and Joseph A. Tipton

Introduction

This new translation of a portion of John Chrysostom's *Commentary on Galatians*, based on the Frederick Field text of 1862, was done by David C. Noe and Joseph A. Tipton. Before beginning to read it, the reader may want to know why Chrysostom's work is important to their own appreciation and understanding of Holy Scripture. First, though, here is a brief biography.

John Chrysostom was born in 349 A.D. in Greek-speaking Antioch, the most important Christian city of that region, and enjoyed a classical education typical of the time. He read Homer, Plato, Demosthenes, and other important authors, and in 368 was baptized, beginning his life of service in the church. His career eventually led him through the offices of Lector, Deacon, and finally Archbishop of Constantinople. Along the way he made many enemies at the Imperial court and among ec-clesiastical rivals; one of the central reasons for this enmity was his fearless resistance to Arianism and royal meddling in church discipline. This eventually led to his exile in 404 after the events of the famous Synod of the Oak. Three years later in 407, he died while being forced into a more distant exile. Chrysostom's career was marked by careful exegesis of Scripture, particularly homilies on Paul's letters, and brave, unflinching intolerance of immorality among fellow priests and in the political families. In particular, as a preacher Chrysostom was known for a frank and non-allegorical interpretation of biblical passages, in contrast to the Alexandrian school that still was very much influenced by the writings of the famous polymath Origen. His preaching earned him widespread acclaim among the people and the title "Golden mouth."

Chrysostom's exegetical example, as well as his understanding of the sacraments, proved espe-cially helpful to Reformers like Calvin and Beza in controversies with their Roman opponents. Calvin, for example, listed him among the five Greek fathers most to be read, along with Irenaeus of Lyon, Basil of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Athanasius. In the preface he contributed to the French Bible of his cousin Pierre Robert Olivétan, Calvin said: "Why is it that Chrysostom contends that the reading of holy scripture is more necessary for common people than for monks?"[2] Calvin quotes him approvingly dozens of times in the 1559 addition of his *Institutes*. Beza, likewise, made extensive use of Chrysostom's Pauline homilies in his controversy with Roman Catholics and Lutherans alike, famously saying at the Colloquy of Poissy (1561) that he had read a portion of Chrysostom "eighteen times" and had not found within it the transubstantiation view his opponents alleged.

Though Chrysostom's exegesis is marred by some weaknesses prevalent at the time, specifically on the topics of soteriology and hamartiology, he remains a very valuable resource for those who would understand both the history of the fourth and fifth centuries and the Scriptures themselves. Few theologians have ever worked as hard to understand Paul's meaning in many passages nor grasped the Apostle's personality more directly. Chrysostom said of him: "nothing is more combative than Paul's soul."[3]

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1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=828.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. and ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), Appendix IV, 373. Corpus Reformatorum, Calvini Opera, 9, cols. 787–8.

3 οὐδὲν τῆς Παύλου ψυχῆς ἀγωνιστικώτερον (*ouden tēs Paulou psuchēs agōnistikōteron*).

The interested student should consult the following volumes for further reading:

- Attwater, Donald. *St. John Chrysostom: Pastor and Preacher* (London: Harvill Secker, 1959).
- Brändle, Rudolf. *John Chrysostom: Bishop, Reformer, Martyr* (Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's, 1999).
- Kelly, J.N.D. *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- Mayer, Wendy, and Pauline Allen. *John Chrysostom* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians

This introduction teems with much passion and great fervor. In fact not only the introduction, but indeed the whole letter, so to speak, is like this as well. For those who always speak calmly to their students, when the students require sternness, this is characteristic not of a teacher but of a corrupter and an enemy. Consequently, even our Lord, though he often spoke gently with his disciples, sometimes used a more rough style, at one time blessing, at another rebuking. So, when he announced that he will lay the foundations of the church on Peter's confession, he said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah."[4] But not long after these words he said: "Get behind me, Satan. You are my stumbling block."[5] And in another passage, again, he said, "Are you also so completely foolish?"[6] Moreover, he inspired them with such fear that even John said that when they saw him conversing with the Samaritan woman and reminded him about eating, yet: "No one dared to say to him, 'What are you looking for?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'"[7] Paul understood this, and following in the steps of his teacher he varied his speech with an eye to the need of his students, at one time cauterizing and cutting and at another applying a gentle salve. Thus, to the Corinthians he said: "What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?"[8] Yet with the Galatians he took a different tack, "O you foolish Galatians."[9] And not just once but even a second time he employed this sort of threatening. He upbraided them at the end of the work, saying, "Let no one cause me troubles."[10] And again he seeks to minister gently as when he says, "My little children, whom I again bring forth with labor pains."[11] There are in fact many such expressions as these.

But it is evident to all, even on a first reading, that this letter is full of passion. So, we must explain what it was that had aroused Paul's anger against his students. For it was no minor issue, nor something trivial, since Paul would not have employed such a marked thrust.[12] Becoming angry in the face of misfortunes is typical of cowardly, cruel, and miserable men, just as losing nerve at major obstacles is the habit of those more sluggish and dull. But Paul is not such a person. So then, what was the particular sin that had stirred him up? It was something great and excessive, and something alienating them all from Christ, as he himself said a little further on: "Look! I Paul tell you plainly that if you submit to circumcision, Christ will do you no good at all."[13] And again, "Whoever of you seek to be justified by the law, you have disqualified yourselves for grace." So, what in the world was this sin? We must identify it rather precisely: those of the Jews who had come to faith were at the same time both holding to their former commitment to Judaism and inebriated by empty doctrine. And wanting to arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of teachers, going to the people of Galatia they began to teach that it was necessary to be circumcised, and to keep sabbaths and new-

4 Matthew 16:17.

5 Matthew 16:23

6 Matthew 15:16.

7 John 4:27.

8 1 Corinthians 4:21.

9 Galatians 3:1.

10 Galatians 6:7.

11 Galatians 4:19.

12 The vivid metaphor Chrysostom employs here is a military one. καταφορά (*kataphora*), prevalent in the Roman historians Polybius, Josephus, and others, and is typically used to describe the sudden downward stroke of a sword.

13 Galatians 5:2.

moons, and not to tolerate Paul who was removing such practices. "For Peter, James, and John (the first[14] of the apostles who were with Christ)," they say, "do not forbid such practices." And truly they did not forbid them. Yet in doing this they were not presenting it as authoritative teaching, but rather accommodating the weakness of the believers who came from the Jews. But Paul, because he was preaching to the Gentiles, had no need of such accommodation.

Therefore, when he was in Judea, he himself also employed this sort of accommodation. But his opponents, in their deception, were not stating the reasons why both Paul and the other apostles were making an accommodation. Instead, they deceived the weaker brothers in claiming that they should not tolerate Paul. For he had shown up "yesterday and a moment ago," while they had been with Peter. He had become a disciple of the apostles, while they were disciples of Christ. And he was by himself, while they were many and the pillars of the church. So, they were casting at him the charge of hypocrisy, alleging that he was himself abrogating circumcision, "though he has clearly made use of such things elsewhere and preaches one thing to us, but differently to others."

Therefore, when Paul saw that the whole Gentile world was aflame, that a troubling fire had been lit against the church of the Galatians, and that the whole structure was tottering and ran the risk of falling, he was gripped on the one side with righteous anger and on the other with despair. He made this very clear indeed when he said, "I wanted to be present with you then, and to change my tone."[15] He is writing the letter to respond to all this. And from these opening comments he refers to that which they were saying while undermining his reputation, saying that the others were disciples of Christ, though Paul himself was a disciple of the apostles. Thus, he began like this: "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through men."[16] For those cheats were saying (as I mentioned before) that he was the last of all the apostles and had been taught by them. For Peter and James and John were called first, and were the main leaders of the disciples. They received their teaching from Christ, and thus more obedience was owed them than him. They, moreover, did not forbid circumcision nor keeping the law. Thus, making these claims and others like them, Paul's opponents were seeking to diminish him and were at the same time exalting the glory of the other apostles. This they did not in order to extol them, but that they might deceive the Galatians by inappropriately persuading them to pay attention to the law. So, naturally he began in this fashion. For because they were treating his teaching with contempt, saying that it was from men, while Peter's was from Christ, he immediately, from the introduction, set himself against this notion, stating that he was an apostle "not from men, nor through men." For Ananias baptized Paul,[17] but he had not freed him from error and did not lead him to faith. Instead, Christ himself after ascending sent that astounding voice to him, through which the Lord caught him like a fish. For while Christ was walking along the sea, he called Peter and his brother and John and his brother. But Paul he called after ascending to heaven. And just as the other men did not need a second voice but immediately, dropping their nets and all their other affairs, followed him, so Paul also from that first call ascended to the most important position, was baptized, and undertook an implacable war against the Jews. And it was in this respect most of all that he surpassed the other apostles. "For I labored more than they," he said.[18] But for the time being he does not argue this. Rather, Paul is content in claiming equality with the other apostles. For he was eager not to show that he surpassed them, but to refute the premise of the error. Thus, his first statement, "not from men," was common to all men. For the gospel has its origin and root from above. But the second statement, "not through men," is particular to the

14 πρῶτοι (*prōtoi*) indicates both chronological priority and preeminence.

15 Galatians 4:20.

16 Ibid., 1:1a.

17 Acts 9:18.

18 1 Corinthians 15:10.

apostles. For Christ did not call them "through men," but of his own accord "through himself."

Why did he not mention his call and say, "Paul, called not from men," but instead mentioned his apostleship? It is because his whole argument concerned this point. For his opponents said that the apostles had been entrusted with this teaching by men, and thus it was necessary for him to follow them. But Luke made clear that it was not delivered to him "from men" when he wrote: "And while they were worshiping and fasting before the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now set apart for me Paul and Barnabas.'"[19] From this it is clear that the authority of the Son and the Spirit is one. For Paul says that in being sent by the Spirit he was sent by Christ. And it is clear from elsewhere that Paul attributes the things of God to the Spirit. Thus, when he is speaking to the elders of Miletus he says, "Keep watch for yourselves and for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has set you as pastors and overseers."[20] And yet he says in another letter, "Those whom God has established in the church, first apostles, second prophets, then pastors and teachers."[21] So, he uses this expression indiscriminately, saying that the things of the Spirit are of God, and those of God are of the Spirit. And in another way he also stops up the mouths of heretics, saying, "through Jesus Christ and God his Father."[22] For because heretics say that this word was attributed to the Son as though he were lesser, see what Paul does: he uses the word in the case of the Father thereby teaching us not to apply any principle whatsoever to an inexpressible nature, not to establish measures or degrees of divinity between the Son and the Father. For after he said, "through Jesus Christ," he added "God the Father." If in mentioning the Father by himself he had said, "through whom," then they would have devised some sophism,[23] saying that this expression "through whom" is applied to the Father, since the works of the Son reflect on him. And yet Paul mentions the Son and the Father at the same time; and in applying this expression to them jointly he no longer allows their argument any place. For he does not do this as though attributing now the deeds of the Son to the Father. No, he shows that this expression admits no difference in substance whatsoever. And what then would those say who, with respect to baptism, consider it somehow lesser because one is baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit? For if the Son were lesser than the Father, then what would they say now that the apostle here begins with Christ then moves on to the Father? But we shall speak no such blasphemy. We must not in contending with them depart from the truth. No, even if they should rage ten thousand times, we must keep our eyes on the standards of piety. Therefore, just as we would not say that the Son is greater than the Father simply because he mentioned Christ first—for that would be the very height of absurd foolishness and consummate impiety—so neither would we say that because the Son is placed after the Father we must suppose that the Son is lesser than the Father.

Next we read "who raised him from the dead."[24] What are you doing, Paul? Though you desire to lead the Judaizing men to faith, you do not bring before them any of those great and brilliant expressions such as you wrote to the Philippians. You said, for example, "Though being in the form of God he did not consider equality with God something to be laid hold of."[25] You also later said to the Hebrews that "He is the radiance of God's glory, and the express image of his nature."[26] And

19 Acts 13:2.

20 Cf. Acts 20:28ff.

21 Chrysostom has here conflated, whether deliberately or as a consequence of quoting from memory, two different passages: Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. From the latter he took the words οὓς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας (*hous men etheto ho theos en tē ekklēsia prōton apostolous, deuteron prophētas*), while he finished the quote with a portion from Ephesians 4, namely ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (*poimenas kai didaskalous*).

22 Galatians 1:1b.

23 Chrysostom uses here the verb σοφίζω (*sophizō*), "to act like a sophist." In this he alludes to a long tradition stretching back to Gorgias, Prodicus, and other opponents of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues who made the weaker argument the stronger.

24 Galatians 1:1c.

25 Philippians 2:6.

26 Hebrews 1:3.

then the son of thunder in his introductory words shouted forth that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[27] Many times Jesus himself, when discussing[28] with the Jews, used to say that he is as powerful as the Father, and that he possesses the same authority.[29] But do you, Paul, not say here any of those things? Instead, omitting them all, do you mention Christ's dispensation according to the flesh, making his cross and death the main point? "Yes," he says. For if Paul were addressing people who had no grand conception about Christ, then saying those things would be called for. But since those who believe that they will be punished if they depart from the law are opposing us, Paul thus mentions the acts through which Christ abolishes the need of the law. I mean, to be precise, the benefit that arose for all from his cross and resurrection. For the statement "in the beginning was the Word," and "He was in the form of God" and "making himself equal to God" and all such—these would suit someone demonstrating the divinity of the Word, not someone adding anything to the present topic. But the statement "who raised Him from the dead" is characteristic of someone calling to mind the chief point of the kindness on our behalf, the very thing that serves Paul's purpose for the question under discussion. For many people are in the habit of not attending to words that represent God's majesty as much as they are to those that manifest his kindness toward men. Therefore, declining to say those kinds of things he spoke about the kindness that was done for us.

But then heretics counterattack, saying, "Look, the Father raises the Son." But now that they have become diseased, they are willingly deaf to lofty doctrines and select the lowly doctrines as well. And these statements were expressed this way: 1) for the sake of the flesh, 2) for the Father's honor, or 3) for some other purpose. The heretics, by selecting from among these and scrutinizing them one by one, disparage themselves (for I would not say that they succeed in harming the Scriptures). Such persons I would gladly ask, "Why do you make such claims? Do you want to prove that the Son is weak and not strong enough for the resurrection of a single body?" And truly, faith in him made even the shadows of those who believed in him raise the dead.[30] Then those men who were believing on Him, though remaining still mortal, by the mere shadow of their earthen bodies and from the shadow of the clothes that were attached to those bodies raised the dead.[31] And yet Christ was not strong enough to raise himself? So then how is this lunacy not obvious and the intensity of this madness? Did you hear him saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up?"[32] And again, "I have the authority to lay down my life, and I have the authority to take it back again"?[33] Why then is the Father said to have raised him up? To show that the Father does all the same things as the Son. And yet this is especially said for the sake of the honor that is due the Father and for the weakness of the listeners.

Paul says, "And all the brothers that are with me."[34] Why has he never once done this elsewhere in the course of his letter writing? In other places he provides only his own name, or that of two or three others by name. Here he speaks in terms of a whole group and consequently does not mention anyone by name. So why does he do this? His opponents were slandering him as the only one who was preaching as he did, and that he was introducing something new into his doctrines. Thus, because he wanted to remove suspicion and show

27 John 1:1.

28 Chrysostom uses here the somewhat unusual participle φθεγγόμενος (*phthengomenos*). This is done apparently *variationis causa*, since he has in previous sentences made use of a range of synonyms including γράφω (*graphō*), λέγω (*legō*), ἀναφωνέω (*anaphōneō*), and ἀναβοάω (*anaboaō*).

29 In his use of the terms δύναται (*dunatai*) and ἐξουσίαν (*exousian*), Chrysostom registers the long-held distinction between ability and authority and ascribes both to Christ. This distinction is perhaps more common to students of the Latin language, where it is represented by the terms *potentia* and *potestas*. Though the two do not mutually entail the other, in the persons of the Trinity the distinction is not consequential.

30 Acts 5:15.

31 Acts 19:12.

32 John 2:19

33 John 10:18.

34 Galatians 1:2a.

that he counted many who shared his opinion, he wrote the "brothers." By this he makes clear that the very things he is writing he also writes in accordance with their judgment.

Next he adds "to the churches of Galatia."[35] For this fire of false teaching was spreading not just to one city, nor two or three, but to the whole nation of the Galatians. Look with me here how Paul felt so much indignation. For he did not say, "to the beloved," nor "to the saints," but "to the churches of Galatia." This expression was indicative of someone irritated in spirit and exhibiting his distress, that is, not addressing them by their names with love nor with honor, but by their assembly only. And he does not address them as the churches *of God* either, but simply "the churches of Galatia." In addition, he hurries to engage the rebellious element. Therefore, he also used the name "church," shaming[36] them and drawing them into unity. For since they were divided into many factions, they could not be addressed by this title. For the designation "church" is a designation of harmony and concord.

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."[37]Paul everywhere uses this tag by necessity, but he especially does so now when writing to the Galatians. Since they were in danger of falling from grace, he prays that it might be restored to them yet again. Since they made themselves God's enemies, he beseeches God to lead them back again to that same peace. He says, "God our Father."[38] And here the heretics again are easily caught. For they claim that when John in the introduction to his Gospel says, "And the Word was God,"[39]he says this clause without an article for this reason: so as to diminish the divinity of the Son. And again that when Paul says the Son is "in the likeness of God,"[40] he did not say that concerning the Father because of the fact that this too is used without the article, what answer would they make here when Paul says, not, "from God"[41] but, "from God the Father"?

Then he calls God "Father," not with a view to flattering them, but vigorously upbraiding and reminding them of the reason why they have become sons. For it was not through the Law but through the washing of regeneration that they were counted worthy of that honor. Therefore, he sows the traces of God's kindness everywhere, even in his introduction, as though he were saying, "How is that you, who were slaves and enemies and estranged from God, suddenly call him Father? Surely it is not the Law that gave you this kinship? Why then indeed, abandoning the one who has led you so close to him, are you running back to your tutor?"[42]It is not only in the case of Father, but also in that of the Son that these titles suffice for demonstrating their benefaction. For the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when carefully examined, clearly shows all his kindness. Indeed, he shall be called Jesus for this reason, it says, "Because he will save his people from their sins."[43] And the appellation "Christ" calls to mind the anointing of the Spirit.

We come next to the phrase "who gave himself for our sins."[44] Do you see that he did not merely submit to the service of a slave nor a compulsory service, nor was he handed over by someone else, but rather "gave himself"? Consequently, whenever you hear John saying that the Father gave his only-begotten Son for our sakes, do not for this reason disparage the value of the Only-begotten, nor suspect anything merely human is meant. Even if the Father is said to have given him up, this is not said in order that you should consider his service that of a slave, but in order that you might understand that this was also acceptable to the Father. The very thing Paul here makes clear

35 Ibid., 1:2b.

36 The word Chrysostom uses here, ἐντρέπων (*entrepōn*), Paul employs in a similar context in I Cor. 4:14.

37 Galatians 1:3.

38 Ibid., 1:4.

39 John 1:1.

40 Heb. 1:3.

41 Here the article τοῦ (*tou*) is used with θεοῦ (*theou*), while in the subsequent clause it is *anarthrous*.

42 Chrysostom here references Galatians 3:24, in which Paul compares the Mosaic Law to a tutor, leading the underage Israel to himself.

43 Matthew 1:21.

44 Galatians 1:4a.

when he says, "According to the will of our God and Father."[45] It is not "according to a command" but "according to the will." For since the will of the Father and the Son is one, whatsoever the Son desired, these things also the Father willed.[46] Next we read, "For our sins."[47] We pierced ourselves, he says, with a thousand evils and were liable to the harshest punishment. And the law did not free us but condemned us in rendering our sin more manifest and not being able to free us or turn God away from his anger. But the Son of God both made possible that which was impossible—doing away with our sins and turning us from enemies to his friends—and gracing us with myriad other good things.

So, Paul next says, "That he may free us from this present evil age."[48] Other heretics again snatch at this phrase, casting aspersions on this present life and using Paul's testimony to do so. "For look," the heretic says, "Paul has dubbed the present age evil." And tell me, then, what is an age? Time, measured in days and hours. So what? Is the mere passing of the days evil, and the course of the sun too?[49] No one would ever say that, even if he veers to the extremes of stupidity. "But he did not say, 'time,'" the heretic says, "no, he called the present life evil." And to be sure the actual words do not say this. But you do not stop at those words which you twisted into an accusation: instead, you are hacking out a path for your own interpretation. You will therefore permit us also to interpret what has been said, all the more so since what we say is pious and reasonable. So, then what should we say? That none of those evils would ever be responsible for good things, and yet this present life is responsible for thousands of crowns and such great rewards. The blessed Paul himself, at any rate, unmistakably praises this life when he says as follows: "If my living is in the flesh, this is for me fruitful labor; and as to what I shall chose, I do not know."[50] And as he sets before himself the choice between living here and casting off this life to be with Christ, he prefers to pass through the present life. But if it were evil, then he would not have said such things in his own case, nor would anyone else be able to make use of it for the end of virtue, no matter how zealously intent on doing so. For no one could ever use wickedness and turn it to a good end. Such a person could not use prostitution as a stimulant to self-control nor envy as a goad to friendliness.

For indeed, Paul says about the presumption of the flesh that "it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it do so,"[51] he means this, that wickedness which remains wickedness cannot be virtue. Consequently, whenever you hear "wicked age," understand that it means that its deeds are wicked, that its will has been corrupted. For neither did Christ come in order that he might kill us and lead us away from the present life, but that, when he has freed us from this world, he might make us ready to become worthy of dwelling in heaven. For this reason he said while speaking with his Father: "They are also in the world, and I am coming to you…I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one,"[52] that is, from wickedness. And if you are not content with these words, but still persist in holding that this present life is evil, you should not criticize those who commit suicide. For just as he who extricates himself from wickedness does not deserve reproaches but rather commendation, so also the man who ends his own life by a violent death as through hanging or other things like that would not, according to you, deserve to be blamed. But as it is God who such persons more than murderers, and all of us, quite appropriately, find such persons loathsome. For if it is not a good thing to destroy other persons, it is much more

45 Ibid., 1:4c.

46 Chrysostom here varies the vocabulary in each clause, from ἐβούλετο (*ebouleto*) in the first to ἤθελεν (*ēthelen*) in the second. Presumably this is to demonstrate both the unity and distinction of the will of the Father and Son in their intra-Trinitarian relationship.

47 Galatians 1:4a.

48 Ibid., 1:4b.

49 Chrysostom means here that by which the days are measured, i.e., the sun's rising and setting.

50 Philippians 1:22.

51 Romans 8:7.

52 John 17:11a, 15.

ignoble to kill oneself. Yet if the present life is evil, we ought to reward murderers because they free us from that evil!

Still, apart from these things, they also trip themselves up because of what they themselves say. For when they claim that the sun is god, and after that the moon, and they worship these as the causes of many good things, they make mutually contradictory statements. For the use of these and other heavenly bodies does nothing else but contribute to the present life for us, which they call evil, sustaining and illuminating various objects and bringing fruits to their ripeness. So how then do those who are gods in your view introduce into the composition of an evil life such a great public benefit? But neither are the stars gods—heaven forbid; they are the works of God made for our use—nor is the world evil. But if you object to me that there are murderers, and adulterers, and grave robbers, I answer that these do not at all pertain to the present life. For such are not sins that come from life in the flesh, but from a corrupted will. Because if these were the deeds of the present life, as part and parcel with it, nobody would be free nor pure. Yet see how it is impossible for anyone to escape the peculiar qualities of life in the flesh. What are these? I mean things like eating, drinking, sleeping, growing, being hungry, thirsty, being born, dying, and all things similar to these. Nobody would be exempt from these things—not the sinner, not the righteous man, not a king nor private citizen—but we all are subject to the necessity of nature. Consequently, no one would escape the performance of even sinful acts if such were apportioned to the nature of this life, as such actions are not.

Do not tell me that the those who succeed are scarce. For you will find that no one has ever overcome these natural necessities. So, until even one person succeeding in being virtuous is found, your argument will not be at all diminished. What do you mean, you wretched and miserable man? Is the present life evil, when in it we have come to know God, in it we philosophize about the things to come, in it we have gone from being men to angels, and join in the chorus of the heavenly powers?[53] And what other proof will we look for that your understanding is evil and corrupted?

"Why then," our opponent says, "did Paul say that the present age is evil?" He was using a common manner of speaking. For we are quite accustomed to say, "I had a bad day." We mean by this not the time itself but lay the blame on what transpired or the circumstance. Thus, Paul used a common expression when he blamed acts of the wicked will. And he shows that Christ has both freed us from our former sins and secured our future. For by saying, "who gave himself for our sins," he made clear the former. And by adding "that he might free us from the present evil age," he indicated safety for the future. For the law was weak compared to the one, but grace has proven effective against them both.[54]

Next we read, "according to the will of our God and Father."[55] For because they thought that they were disobeying God, as the one who had given the Law, and they were afraid of abandoning the old covenant and come to the new, he also corrects this assumption of theirs by saying that these things also seemed good to the Father. And he did not say simply, "the Father," but "our Father." So, he uses that word immediately, reprimanding them by saying that Christ has made his Father our Father.

There follows this: "To whom be glory forever. Amen." This expression is also unfamiliar and strange. For we find the word "Amen" placed nowhere at the beginning or the introductory remarks of a letter, but rather after many other words. Then, showing that the things he used already are a sufficient charge against the Galatians, and that his argument is adequate, he added this preface. For incontrovertible charges do not need a long build-up. So, reminding them of the cross and resurrection, of the ransom for sins, of security for their future, the intent of the Father, the will of the Son, of grace, of peace, of all God's gifts, he

53 Chrysostom may have in mind such passages as Ephesians 2, where Christians are said to be "seated with Christ in the heavenly places."

54 Sc. present and future.

55 Galatians 1:4c.

ended his argument with a doxology. Paul did this, not only for the reason I just mentioned, but also because he was contemplating what God did in a single blow and in the smallest amount of time to us, given who we were.

These ideas, which he was unable to set out plainly in argument, he summarized with a doxology—offering up praise on behalf of the whole world. It was not one worthy of the subject, but simply what he was able to express. Therefore, he afterward used an even more forceful expression, just like one greatly inflamed by consideration of God's kindnesses. For after Paul says, "To whom be glory forever, Amen" he embarks on a quite pointed rebuke. So, he says, "I am astonished that you are so quickly moving away from him who called you in the grace of Christ for another gospel."[56] Because they supposed that they were pleasing the Father through keeping the Law, as the Jews thought when they were persecuting Christ, Paul first shows them that they are not provoking Christ alone in behaving this way but also the Father. For he says that in doing this they are defecting not just from Christ but also from the Father. In the same way that the old covenant is not only from the Father but also from the Son, so also grace is not from the Son alone, but also from the Father, and all things are held in common between them. "For all that belongs to the Father is mine."[57]

And yet when he said that they abandon even the Father, he posits two faults: that there was a change and that this change was very rapid. Yet surely the opposite is worthy of accusation as well, namely, to have abandoned the Father after a long time. But here his argument deals with a deception. For the one who abandons after a long time deserves accusation, and the one who falls at the first charge, and in the light skirmishes, furnishes a singular example of total weakness. He in fact charges them with this, saying:

> What is this, that those who deceive you need no time at all, but a first assault was enough to subdue and capture all of you? So what sort of excuse do you have? For if this arose among your friends, I mean the accusation, and someone had abandoned his former friends and useful intimates, he would be worthy of reproach. But the man who runs away from the God who calls him, just think how great a punishment he would be liable to!

So, when Paul says, "I am amazed," not only does he say this to upbraid them because— after such a great gift, after such a great forgiveness for their sins, and an extravagance of kindness—they deserted to the yoke of slavery. At the same time he is also showing what kind of opinion he holds about them, that it is a sort of serious and earnest one. For he would not have been surprised at what happened if he had supposed that they were the sort to be deceived easily. "But since you are of noble character," he says, "and of the type that have suffered a good deal, this is why I am amazed." This should have been adequate to regain them and bring them back to their former beliefs. Paul makes this clear in the middle of this letter when he says, "Did you suffer such serious trials in vain, if indeed it was in vain?"

Next Paul adds, "You are changing your position." He did not say, "Keep going," but "you are changing your position." In other words, "I do not yet believe, nor do I suppose that the deception is complete," which itself also is, again, the statement of one who is recovering. Consequently, he makes this point more clearly later on: "I am confident in your case, that you will consider nothing else."[58]

Next Paul adds that they are departing "from the one who called you in the grace of Christ."[59] The calling is of the Father, and the reason for the calling is the Son. For the Son himself is the one who reconciled and gave that reconciliation freely. For we were not saved according to works in righteousness.[60] But rather these belong to the Father,

56 Verse 6.

57 John 16:15.

58 Cf. Galatians 5:10.

59 This is the continuation of v. 6 of chapter 1.

60 Cf. Titus 3:5.

and those works belong to Christ.[61] "For my things are yours," he says, "and yours mine."[62] And note that Paul did not say, "You are turning back from the Gospel," but "from the God who called you." For the latter expression was more likely to inspire horror; and he has used this to strike them more deeply. For those who were wanting to deceive them did not do this all at once, but while gently drawing them away from the idea, they did not draw them away from the terms. For this is how the devil's cunning works: it does not set obvious traps. For if the deceivers had said, "abandon Christ," of course they would have been on guard against such tricksters and corrupters. But as it is, allowing them to stay in the faith yet attaching the title of "gospel" to their deception, they were undermining the whole structure with great impunity. The speech concealed the wall-breakers, through their phraseology, like a curtain.[63]

Thus, since they were calling their own deception the "gospel," Paul himself does well to fight back verbally and speaks quite boldly. He says, "You have gone over to another gospel, one which is not another gospel at all." Well put! For there is not another one. But nevertheless, the very thing that those who are diseased suffer—that they are harmed by healthy foods—Marcion[64] suffered. For he snatched at what was related here, saying, "Look, even Paul said that there is not another gospel." For they do not accept all the evangelists, but only one, and they mangled and rendered them of no effect, however they pleased. So then, what about whenever Paul himself says, "According to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ"?[65] Therefore, the things they have said are really ridiculous, except that even if they prove to be ridiculous, it is necessary to disprove them for the sake of those who are easily beguiled. What then shall we say? That even if tens of thousands write gospels, and write the same things, these many are one, and the fact of their being one will not be at all harmed by the multitude of the authors. Therefore, just as if someone writes one thing and then on the other hand says something opposite, the things written would not be one. For what is one and what is not one is judged not by the number of those writing, but by the identity and difference of what is said. Thus, it is clear that even the four gospels are actually one gospel. For whenever four say the same things, they are not different things because of the difference of the persons, but there is one because of the complete harmony of the things they say. For Paul is not here speaking about the number but about the discordance of the things said. So if, then, there is one gospel in Matthew and a different one in Luke as far as the meaning of the contents and the sense of their doctrines is concerned, they rightly criticize the Word. But if these accounts are really one and the same, they should stop acting so foolishly and pretending that they do not understand things that are really very clear to mere children.

Next Paul says, "Unless perhaps there are some people harassing you and wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ." This means, so long as you remain of sound mind, you will not recognize another gospel; so long as you look at things that are right and not imagine those that are perverted, those that do not exist. For in the same way that the eye mistakenly sees one thing for another, so also the mind, roiled up by an admixture of wicked arguments, typically suffers this same kind of disruption. So, for this reason, those who are addled in their wits, mistakenly imagine one thing for

61 Chrysostom very artfully employs here a concatenation of pronouns with specific referents to Father and Son in an interlocking ABAB order, also known as synchysis or sometimes chiasmus: Μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ἐκείνου, καὶ ἐκεῖνα τούτου (*Mallon de kai tauta ekeinou, kai ekeina toutou*). Cf. H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), §3020.

62 A paraphrase of John 16:5, quoted above.

63 The metaphor which Chrysostom employs is that of siegers and sappers seeking to undermine a city's defenses. Concealing screens were carried by some, behind which the engineers sought to dig beneath the walls' foundations in order to topple them.

64 Marcion of Sinope (c. 85–c. 160). Much of our knowledge of him and his thought comes from Epiphanius of Cyprus in the fourth century. Briefly, he held that the God of the Old Testament, whom he labeled a "demiurge," was different than the God who sent Christ Jesus. This heretical view involved him in, among other things, a wholesale rejection of continuity with the church of the old covenant and a radically truncated canon of Scripture.

65 Cf. Romans 16:25.

another. But this kind of madness is more troubling than what I just described: it is not the kind that produces harm in our sense perceptions but in the things we think about; not that kind which occasions destruction in the pupil of the eyes of the body but in the eyes of the understanding.

"And wanting to distort the Gospel of Christ."[66] And surely they were introducing only one or two commands, instituting anew only the command of circumcision and of special days. But in showing that a whole, when slightly modified, is ruined, he says that the gospel has been rendered void. For just as in royal coins the one who cuts off a small part of the impress renders the whole coin counterfeit, so also the one who distorts even the least significant portion of a healthy faith thereby defiles the whole of it, moving away from the original toward things that are worse. Where then now are those who criticize us as lovers of strife on account of our disagreement with heretics? Where now are those who say that there is no gap between us and them but that the difference arises from a lust for power? They should heed what Paul says, that those who innovate even just a little bit have distorted the gospel. And these people[67] are not changing just a little. For how could they be, since they claim that the Son of God is something created? Have you not heard that even in the Old Testament someone who gathered wood on the Sabbath, violating only one commandment, and not even the greatest one, paid the ultimate penalty for it?[68] And when Uzzah steadied the ark as it was about to topple over, he immediately died because he touched a ministerial function[69] that was not permitted to him. Thus, both the transgression of the Sabbath and touching the ark when it was about to fall rendered God so indignant that those who dared such acts received not even a little leniency. So, the one who defiles the awe-inspiring and ineffable articles of the faith, will such a person find any defense or leniency? No, not so. But this very thing then is the cause of a whole host of evils, namely, when we do not become irritated over the small matters. For this reason, greater sins were introduced among them because the lesser ones did not receive the required correction. And just as those who ignore the wounds in their bodies provoke fevers, putrefaction, and death, so also when it comes to souls, those who overlook even the smallest problems compound it with greater ones.

A certain person, one might say, stumbles over fasting, and it is no great concern. Another man is strong in the faith that is correct, but acting like he is not for the moment loses his confidence. Nor is this anything very terrible. Still another man became irritated and threatened to abandon the correct faith. But neither is this worthy of punishment. For he sinned in anger, one might say, and by impulse. And someone could find ten thousand such examples of sins introduced into the churches each and every day throughout the churches. Therefore, we have become utterly ridiculous to both Greeks and Jews since the church is splintered into ten thousand pieces. For if those who were attempting at the beginning to turn away from the divine ordinances and cause some slight disturbance had met with a deserved rebuke, the plague that is present would not have arisen, and such a great storm would not have overtaken the churches.[70]

Note that Paul at least says circumcision is an annulment of the Gospel. And yet now there are many among us that observe the same day of fasting that belongs to the Jews and similarly keep the Sabbaths. And we bear with these things generously, or rather like the wretches we are.[71] And why should I talk about the practices of the Jews since some of our people also observe many customs of

66 Verse 7.

67 Sc. heretics.

68 Cf. Numbers 15:32, 36.

69 Cf. 2 Samuel 6:6ff. The noun Chrysostom uses, διακονίας (*diakonias*), is surprising, as one might expect here a reference to the actual object which Uzzah touched, διακόνημα (*diakonēma*). He apparently has in mind, however, not Uzzah's act of touching the ark but his usurpation of an office that did not belong to him.

70 Chrysostom perhaps has in mind here, in addition to the conflict in Galatia, Paul's mention in 1 Corinthians 11:30ff. of those who had died as a punishment for their abuse of the Lord's table.

71 Note Chrysostom's typical change of mind, for rhetorical effect, in the midst of conveying an exegetical point.

the Greeks, like watching of omens, the flight of birds, signet-rings, the observance of days, an interest in genealogy and booklets, which when their children are being born, they compose to their own detriment.[72] In this they teach their children at the outset to give up efforts at virtue and lead them, for their part, under the yoke of the deluded tyranny of fatalism.

But if Christ is no benefit to those who are circumcised, how much will faith, in the end, work for the salvation of those who have carelessly involved themselves in such great wickedness? And though circumcision was given by God, nevertheless since it was defiling the gospel by not being performed at the proper time, Paul did everything so as to cut off[73] circumcision. So, then since Paul showed such great zeal in the case of Jewish customs, when they were being observed in an untimely fashion, will we not cut off the Greek custom? And what sort of a defense might we have? Because of this our affairs are now in disarray and confusion, and those who are studying, filled with much presumption, upended the proper order. What was right side up has become upside down. If someone raises some small objection, they spit on their rulers, since we "trained them poorly." And yet even if their superiors were quite wretched and filled with ten thousand evils, it would not be right for the student to disobey. For if Christ says about the Jewish teachers that since they sat in the seat of Moses it would be right for them to be listened to by the disciples[74]—and yet they possessed works so evil that he ordered his students neither to emulate them nor to imitate those things they do—what leniency would they deserve, those that spit upon and tread underfoot the presiding officers of the church, they who by the grace of God live morally? For if it is not proper to judge one another, how much more improper it is to judge one's teachers.

"But if even I, or an angel from heaven should preach to you something other than what you have received, let him be anathema."[75]Notice Paul's apostolic wisdom. For, so that someone won't say that for the sake of self-aggrandizement he was cobbling together dogmas peculiar to himself, he even anathematized himself. And since they were fleeing for excuse to titles of dignity, that is James and John, he also mentioned angels. "Don't talk to me about James and John," he says. "For even if it is one of the firstborn angels from heaven who corrupts this preaching, let him be anathema." And he did not simply say, "from heaven," but since the priests were called angels: "For the lips of a priest will guard knowledge, and they will seek out the law from his mouth, because he is an angel of the almighty Lord." Now in order that you not think that priests are now called angels, he implicitly refers to the powers above with this addition "of heaven." And he did not say if they proclaim things that are opposite or if they pervert the whole. But he said even if they preach something "just a little different" from that which we have preached, and if they disturb something minor, let them be anathema.

Paul continues, "As I have said before, I also say again now." For lest you suppose that these are impulsive words or were said with exaggeration or a kind of haste, he uses the same things again a second time. Someone driven to say something in anger would likely soon have a change of heart. But the man who says the same things a second time shows that he spoke after weighing matters carefully, and after earlier becoming sure of it he stated it. Abraham, for example, when asked to send Lazarus, said, "They have Moses and the prophets. If they do not heed these, neither will they heed the risen dead."[76] Christ introduces Abraham as saying these things thereby showing that he wants the Scriptures judged more valuable than those raised from the dead.

And Paul (and when I say, "Paul," I again mean Christ) places Scripture on a higher level

72 This is a reference most likely to the composition of horoscopes.

73 Chrysostom here and in the next sentence introduces two puns for dispensing with circumcision, namely περικόψαι (*perikopsai*) and περικόψομεν (*perikopsomen*).

74 Matthew 23:2ff.

75 Verse 8.

76 Cf. Luke 16:29–31.

than angels descending from heaven, and quite rightly. For the angels, though they are very important, are but in reality servants and ministers. But the Scriptures were all delivered not by slaves but by God, master of all, to be written down. That is why Paul says: "If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you." And with a great deal of understanding and inoffensively, he did not say, "a certain so and so." For why would it, after all, be necessary to mention peoples' names since in employing such comprehensive language he includes all entities, both those above and those below? For through his anathematizing of evangelists and angels, he encompassed every rank. And through himself he included everyone similar and like unto himself. "Don't tell me that your co-Apostles and others are saying these things. For I do not even exempt myself if I preach such doctrines!" And he does not make such comments as though he were condemning the apostles, nor as though they were turning aside from proper preaching. Far from it! "Whether we, or they," he says, "this is how we preach."[77] But he wants to show that he does not make allowance for persons whenever the message deals with the truth.

"For am I persuading men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? Yet if I were now seeking to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."[78] "So even if I were deceiving you," he says, "in saying these things, can I really mislead God who knows the secret things of the conscience, whom it is always my entire goal to please?"

Do you see the apostolic high-mindedness? Do you see the sublimity of the gospel? Writing to the Corinthians he said the same thing: "We do not defend ourselves to you, but we give you cause for boasting."[79] And again, "From my perspective it counts for very little that I am judged by you, or by a human tribunal."[80] For when a teacher is compelled to defend himself to his students, he both submits to this and chafes against it. He does this not because of rebellion—heavens no—but because of the fickleness of the knowledge of those who were being deceived and because they do not trust him much. Therefore, he said this and all but made the following point:

> Is my message really before you? Is it men that are going to pass judgment on me? My message is actually before God, and for the sake of the scrutiny that rests with him we do all things. And we would not have come to such a great degree of wretchedness as to defend ourselves to the master of all things for what we preach, for corrupting his doctrines.

Consequently, at one time making a defense and at the same time struggling against such persons, he has said this. For it is appropriate not that students sit in judgment on their teachers, but that they trust them. "And when order is turned upside down, and you sit as my judges," he says, "understand that I do not have a long argument against you as my defense, but everything we do is for the sake of God, and thus we defend ourselves to him concerning these doctrines."

The one who wishes to persuade men causes many ills and perversions and uses deception and deceit, so that he can win over and capture the sentiment of his listeners. But the one who seeks to persuade God and is eager to please him has need of a simple and pure conscience. For the divine is not subject to deception. "From this it is clear that even we," he says,

> not for the sake of lording it over others, nor merely to gain students, nor desiring from praise do write and send these doctrines. For we are not eager to please men, but God. If we were wishing to please men, I would still be with the Jews; I would still be persecuting the church. But one who has disdained his whole nation, and his family, and his friends, and relatives and such a reputation, and has exchanged these things for persecutions and hostilities and wars and daily deaths – it is quite clear that even these statements that I now make, I say them and send them to you

77 Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:11.

78 Verse 10.

79 Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12.

80 Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:3.

not desiring glory from men.

And he said this, since he intends to narrate the earlier part of his life and his sudden conversion and to show through clear proofs that he truly had changed, lest they suppose that he is defending himself to them in doing these things and become agitated. For that reason he said to them in advance, "So am I pleasing men?"

You see he knows how to say something lofty and great at the right time, to correct those who are learning from him. And yet he could have made use of other proofs that he was preaching truthfully, that is, with signs, wonders, dangers, imprisonments, daily threats of death, hunger and thirst, nakedness, and other such things.[81] But since his argument at this point was not against false apostles, but against the true Apostles, and the latter had shared in these things—I mean Paul's dangers—he aims his argument from another vantage point. For, when he went against the false apostles, he develops the comparison thusly: he introduces the notion of his patience in the midst of dangers, saying, "Are they servants of Christ? I speak like one who is delirious. I am a servant even more. I have been in hardships more abundantly, been beaten more, imprisoned more, at the very brink of death so often."[82] Now, however, he speaks of his former way of life, and says, "I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not one that is according to man. In fact I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."[83]

Note how confidently and thoroughly he affirms this point, that he became a disciple of Christ, with no man as his mediator, but with Christ deigning through himself to reveal to Paul all knowledge. And what sort of a demonstration could there be to those who disbelieve that God has revealed to you by himself, and not through someone else's mediation, these inexpressible mysteries? "My former way of life," Paul says. "For I would not have experienced such a sudden conversion unless God were the one who made the revelation." For those that are taught by men, whenever they are impetuous and incendiary toward those who oppose them, need time and much skill in order to be persuaded.

But Paul was converted so suddenly and became absolutely sober while at the very pinnacle of his raving, that it is quite clear that he encountered a divine and instructive vision and immediately returned to complete health. Therefore, he is compelled to give an account of his earlier way of life, and he calls them as witnesses of the things that happened.

> You do not know that the only-begotten Son of God condescended, from the heavens, to call me. How could you know, unless you were there? You know though that I was a violent persecutor. Indeed, my violence had spread even toward you. And yet there is such a great distance between Palestine and Galatia that my reputation would not have crossed so much distance, unless the things that were happening were truly excessive, and none could endure it.

So then, he says, "For you heard about my former way of life, that I was persecuting the church of God excessively, and seeking to destroy it."[84]

Do you see how he sets down each point emphatically and is not ashamed? He did not simply persecute the church, but he did so with all vehemence, and he did not only persecute the church but even sought to destroy it, that is, he tried to snuff it out, to overwhelm, ruin, and obliterate it. Such is the work of one "seeking to destroy." "And I was excelling in Judaism beyond many of those of my own age in my own nation, abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers."[85] Now lest you think that this was a deed of passion, he shows that he was doing all of it with zeal. Even if his persecution was not according to full knowledge, it did not arise from vainglory, nor was he avenging some

81 Chrysostom's sources for these experiences of Paul are Romans 8:35 and 2 Corinthians 11:25ff.

82 Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23

83 Vv. 11–12.

84 Cf. v. 13.

85 Cf. v. 14.

private injury, but "abounding in zeal for the traditions of my fathers." And in saying this he means the following:

> If I was doing these things against the church not because of man but because of a righteous zeal—misguided for sure, but zeal nonetheless—how could I now, as I strive on behalf of the church, since I know the full truth, be doing these things from vainglory? For if that kind of passion did not rule me when I was deceived, but zeal for God led me to that, how much more now that I know the truth would it be right for me to be exempt from this suspicion? At the same time I was converted to the teachings of the church and put off the whole Jewish system, then I took on at that point a far greater zeal. This is proof that my conversion was genuine and was brought about by divine zeal. If this were not the case, what else was it, tell me, that caused so great a change to happen, to forfeit honor for contempt, tranquility for dangers, and safety for hard work? There is nothing else at all, but only the love of the truth that would do this.
>
> When God, who set me apart and called me through grace, was well pleased to reveal his Son in me that I may proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately take counsel with flesh and blood.[86]

See what he is eager to point out here, that for the time during which he was passed over he was disregarded for a certain inscrutable purpose. For if he had been foreordained from his mother's womb to be an apostle and to be called to this ministry and was called at that time and when called obeyed, it is clear that God was postponing it for a certain reason. So, then what was this dispensation? Perhaps you expect while listening to the introduction to hear an exordium as to why in the world God did not call him with the twelve apostles. But in order that I may not get distracted from the matter at hand, prolonging my explanation too far, I appeal to your love, that you not learn everything from me, but seek them out from among yourselves and appeal to God to reveal them. We have, in fact, already received some explanation of these matters when we were discussing with you the change in his name and why God renamed the one called Saul, Paul. And if you have forgotten, when you read this very book,[87] you will come to know all the details. But for the time being let us keep to what follows; let us also examine how he again shows that what happened to him was not at all of human origin, but rather that God managed all things for him with great foresight.

"And he called me through his grace." God said that he had called Paul because of his excellence: "For he is my chosen vessel," he said to Ananias, "to make my name known before the Gentiles and kings."[88] That is, he was sufficient both to serve and to display a great work. And God set this down as the cause of his calling. But Paul himself says everywhere that the entire business was of God's grace and inexpressible benevolence. For he says, "But I was pitied,"[89] not because I was sufficient, nor because I was suitable, but "in order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him unto everlasting life."[90] Do you see the extreme perfection of his humility? Because of this, he says, I was pitied, so that no one would despair, learning that the worst of all men enjoyed God's benevolence. For he makes this clear when he says, "In order that in me God might display all his long-suffering as an example for those who were going to believe in him."

Paul next says, "To reveal his Son in me."[91] In another passage Christ says, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son desires to reveal him."[92] Do you see that the Father reveals the Son, and the Son reveals the Father? It

86 Cf. vv. 15–16.

87 The *NPNF* identifies this as the *Hom. de Mut. Nom.* iii, p. 98.

88 Cf. Acts 9:15.

89 Cf. I Timothy 1:16.

90 Ibid.

91 Verse 16a.

92 Cf. Luke 10:22.

works the same way also when it comes to glory: the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father the Son. "Glorify me," Jesus says, "that I may glorify You."[93] And, "Just as I have glorified you." So then, why did Paul not say, "to reveal his Son *to me*," but "in me"? He shows that he not only heard those things which concerned the faith through words, but also that he was greatly filled with the Spirit, that the revelation completely illumined his soul, and that he possessed Christ speaking within him.

So, he says, "That I may proclaim him among the nations."[94] For it is not only his believing that has come from God but also that God elected. "Thus, he has revealed himself to me, not only so that I may see him, but that I may carry him to others." And Paul did not say simply to "others," but, "That I may proclaim him among the nations."[95] He is hereby giving a sampling of a not insignificant point in his defense, the identity of his disciples. It was not necessary to preach similarly to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Paul next says, "I did not immediately consult flesh and blood."[96] Here he mentions the apostles obscurely, referring to them by their nature. And if he also says this about all men, we do not at all deny it.[97] "Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me."[98] If then someone should examine these very words individually, it might seem like they are full of much boasting, and that they are far from an apostolic disposition. For self-endorsement and taking no one as a partner in your knowledge seems to be the mark of foolishness. The Scriptures say, "For I saw a man who seemed to himself to be wise, and yet the fool has more hope than he."[99] And, "Woe to those who are understanding in their own eyes and seem knowledgeable in their own sight."[100] Again, Paul himself says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes."[101] So, one who has heard so much of such admonitions from others, and who himself gives the same admonitions to others would not fall victim to this, not just Paul but really any man at all. But, as I was just saying, when this expression is scrutinized by itself, it can raise suspicion and give offense to some listeners. So, let us establish the reason why Paul was making these claims, and then all will applaud and be amazed at him for saying this.

We proceed as follows. We do not need to pour over the mere words, since many other absurdities will follow. Nor is it necessary to interrogate the expression itself but to pay close attention to the writer's intention. In our lectures if we do not use the same procedure and examine the thinking of the speaker, we will incur much hostility, and everything will get thrown upside down. For in our own arguments we would not have used this kind of figure, and we would scrutinize the knowledge of the one who said such a thing. We will be subjected to much hatred, and all things will become confused. And why is it necessary to speak about particular words, when even in the case of deeds if someone does not keep to this standard all things become topsy-turvy? Even doctors cut and break a person's bones, and thieves often do such things. Therefore, how wretched would it be if ever we are unable to tell the difference between a thief and a doctor? Another example is murderers and martyrs when they undergo the same tortures. But there is a very great difference between them. And if we do not hold closely to that standard, we will not be able to know these things, but we will say that even Elijah was a murderer, and Samuel and Phineas as well, and that Abraham was indeed a killer of children, if we intend to scrutinize just the bare actions.

So then, let us examine Paul's intention, the reason why he wrote these things. We must look at his purpose and how he behaved, generally speaking, toward the apostles. Then we will understand

93 Cf. John 17:1, 4.

94 Verse 16b.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 In other words, Chrysostom means that Paul received instruction neither from the Apostles nor from anyone else but only Christ.

98 Verse 17.

99 Cf. Proverbs 26:12.

100 Cf. Isaiah 5:21.

101 Cf. Romans 12:16.

his comments and his thinking in saying these things. For he was not disparaging others, nor was he exalting himself when he said these things, nor when he made the prior comments. How could he be, when he also anathematized himself? But everywhere he maintains the steadfastness of the gospel. For because those who were destroying the church were saying that they had to follow the apostles—who were not forbidding the practices at Galatia—and not follow Paul—who did forbid what they were doing—then little by little a Judaic deception was introduced.

So, Paul is compelled to stand nobly against these practices. He does this, not because he wants to speak ill of the apostles, but from a desire to repress the folly of those who were improperly elevating themselves. Therefore, he says, "I did not consult flesh and blood." For it would have been extremely inappropriate for someone who had learned from God to subsequently refer to men. The one who learns from men naturally accepts men again as partners. But he who has been counted worthy of that divine and blessed voice and has been taught all things by the one who possesses the storehouse of wisdom, what reason does he have subsequently to refer to men? Such a man would be acting justly not in learning from men, but in teaching them. So then, he did not make these claims insolently but to show the value of his own message.

He next says, "I did not go up to those who were apostles before me." For since they kept saying this over and over—that they were apostles before Paul, that they were called before he was—he says, "I did not go up to them." And if it had been necessary to associate with them, the one who revealed his message to Paul would have ordered him to do this. So then, did he not go up there?[102] Indeed, he surely did go up, and not only that, but he also did so in order to learn something from them. When was that? When in the city of Antioch, a city that had again shown much zeal, the public discussion became concerned with this very topic which now lies before us. And they were asking whether it was necessary to circumcise Gentile believers or whether it was not at all necessary to subject them to any such thing.

Then Paul himself and Silas went up.[103] Therefore, why does he say, "I did not go up, nor did I consult anyone?" It is because, first, he did not go up on his own initiative, but was sent by others. Second, because he was not there in order to learn from others, but to persuade them. For he himself had this opinion from the beginning, the opinion which afterward the apostles confirmed, namely, that circumcision was unnecessary. So, since those in Antioch did not for the time deem him trustworthy, but relied upon those in Jerusalem, he went up, not so that he might gain some greater knowledge, but to persuade those who were speaking against him that even those in Jerusalem were voting with him. Thus, even from the beginning Paul could see what things were required and had need of no teacher. But the apostles, after much discussion, were intending to confirm the very doctrines that Paul himself possessed firmly within himself, from above, even before that discussion.

Luke clarifies these matters when he says that Paul had many long debates on these topics against those men even before coming to Jerusalem.[104] And because it seemed good to the brothers[105] to learn from them, he went up, but not for his own sake. So, if he says, "I did not go up," this is what he means, that he did not go up in the beginning of his ministry, nor, when he went up to Jerusalem did he go up to learn. He makes both of these points clear when he says, "I did not immediately consult flesh and blood."[106] He did not simply say, "I did not consult," but "immediately." So, if he went up after those events, it was not in order to gain something.

Paul continues: "But I went away into Arabia."[107] Observe how fervent his soul is. He was

102 I.e., to Jerusalem.

103 I.e., to Jerusalem. Cf. Acts 15.

104 Cf. Acts 15:2.

105 Sc. in Antioch.

106 Ibid.

107 Cf. v. 17.

striving to lay claim to places that had not yet been planted, but lay still mostly uncultivated. For if he had remained with the other apostles, not able to learn anything, his preaching would have been hindered. For they needed to distribute the Word everywhere. Therefore this blessed man, bubbling over with the Spirit, was completely devoted to teaching barbaric and rustic peoples, choosing a life of contention and one that contained much labor. And look with me at his humility. For after saying, "I went to Arabia," he then followed it with "I returned to Damascus." He does not talk about his accomplishments nor list what sort they were and how extensive, and yet at the same time as he was baptized, he showed such great zeal that it confounded the Jews and so exasperated them that both they and the Greeks wished to ambush and kill him. This would not have happened unless he had made a great addition to the believers' number. For since Paul's opponents were inferior in their teaching, they at length resorted to murder. This was an unmistakable indication of Paul's victory.

But Christ, watching over him for his message, did not allow him to die. Nevertheless, Paul says nothing of these accomplishments. Thus, all the things that he says he does not mention for love of glory, nor so that he can be thought better than the other apostles, nor from a sense of irritation at being so greatly disparaged. No, he does so because he is afraid that some harm might befall his message. He calls himself one "late-born,"[108] and the "chief of sinners,"[109] and "least of the apostles,"[110] and "unworthy of such a great title."[111] And he was saying these thing even though he labored more than all of them, so pronounced was his humility. The one who knows that there is nothing good within him and says such humble things about himself is actually just reasonable, not humble. The one who is conscious of no good in himself is reasonable, but the one who says such things after so many crowns knows how to be modest.

Paul continues with these words: "And again I returned to Damascus." And yet how many successes is it likely he accomplished there? Concerning this city, he says that the governor under king Aretas was keeping guard over all of it, wanting to catch the blessed man as a fish in a net.[112] This would be a clear sign of his gaining great and forcible victories over the Jews. But here he says nothing about these events, nor would he then have mentioned them there[113] unless he saw that the particular occasion required a recounting of what happened. Otherwise he would have kept silent. Therefore just as also here, when he said that he came and then went away, he no longer gives an account of what happened there.

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to inquire of Peter."[114] What could be more humble than this soul? After such great and unusual accomplishments, having no need of Peter nor of conversation with him, but instead being equal to him in honor (I will not say for now anything more), nevertheless, Paul goes up as to a superior and an elder. And inquiring of Peter was the only reason for his journey. Do you see how he renders proper honor to the Apostles and not only does not consider himself better than they[115] but does not even consider himself their equal? This is evident from his travel there. For just as now many of our brothers leave their homes to go visit holy men, so also Paul, being at that time so disposed towards Peter, went to him. But in his case it is rather far more humble. For those now leave home to gain some benefit. But this blessed man did so then not in order to learn something from Peter, nor to receive some kind of correction, but for this reason alone: that he might see Peter and honor him with a personal visit.

Paul says he went "to inquire of Peter." And he did not say, to see Peter, but "to inquire of Peter," as those say who go to examine big cities.

108 Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8.

109 Cf. 1 Timothy 1:15.

110 Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:9.

111 Ibid.

112 Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:32.

113 I.e., in 2 Corinthians.

114 Chrysostom here continues with v. 18 of chapter 1.

115 Chrysostom alludes here to Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:3–4.

Thus, Paul thought that it was worth much effort merely to see the man. And this point is also quite clear from the book of Acts. For when he went to Jerusalem, after converting many Gentiles and performing works of great note—more than any of the other apostles had done, like reconciling and leading to Christ Pamphylia, Lycaonia, the nation of the Cilicians, and all those throughout that region of the world—he first approaches James with tremendous humility, as to someone greater and more honorable.

Then Paul patiently endures while the other apostle gives counsel, advising things that were opposite of what we are now discussing. "For you see brother," James says, "how many thousands of Jews there are that have believed? But shave yourself and be purified."[116] And Paul shaved and fulfilled all the Jewish requirements. So, where the gospel was not being harmed, Paul was humbler than everybody. But when, due to his position of humility, he saw certain men being treated unjustly, he no longer made use of this excessive virtue. For to do so, in the end, would not be acting humbly but horribly mistreating and corrupting those who were learning from him. "And I remained with him[117] for fifteen days."[118] Therefore it was indicative of high honor that Paul left his home for Peter's sake; and the fact that he remained with him for so many days shows how intense were Paul's friendship and love toward him.

Paul continues in verse nineteen as follows: "But I did not see any of the other apostles, except James the Lord's brother." Note how he holds Peter in greater affection, since he journeyed there for his sake and stayed with him. I say these things repeatedly and think it worthwhile to keep them in mind so that whenever you hear the things which Paul seems to have said critically of Peter, you will not mistrust the apostle. Indeed, Paul himself makes these comments for this reason, to forestall this misunderstanding, so that whenever he says that he opposed Peter no one might think that these are words said in rivalry and enmity. No, Paul honors him and loves him more than all the rest. For he does not say that he went up because of any of the apostles, but rather for Peter alone. "But I did not see any of the other apostles," he says, "except James." "I saw," he states; not "I was taught by."

But note also how honorably Paul mentions James. He did not simply say, "James," but also adds a mark of distinction. This shows he was free of all envy. Because if Paul were wanting to signify whom he meant, he could have made this clear using some other mark and said that James was the son of Clopas, which is how the evangelist identifies him.[119] But this is not what Paul said; instead, because he believed that the dignifying titles of the apostles pertained to himself, he dignifies James as though elevating himself. Paul did not call James that, as I said. So, what did he call him? "The brother of the Lord." Still he was not really a brother of the Lord according to the flesh, but was only considered to be so. Nevertheless, Paul does not in this way refuse to uphold the man's dignity. He shows in one passage after another that he was disposed towards all the other apostles as he ought.

Next he says, "With God as my witness, I am not lying about the things I write to you."[120] Do you see how the humility of this holy soul shines in the same way through every circumstance? Just as though he were in a courtroom and about to undergo examination, he is eager to vindicate himself. "Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia"[121] after seeing Peter. Paul now resumes his argument and the conflict that lies before him, not touching on Judea. This was both because of his

116 Cf. Acts 21:20 and 24. Chrysostom recasts the verb "to shave" here, namely ξυρήσονται (*xurēsontai*), as a second person singular imperative. He also concludes that James is the speaker who addresses Paul in vv. 20–26, though the verb in verse 20, namely εἶπον (*eipon*), is third person plural, not singular, and therefore likely refers to a plurality of leaders and not merely to James.

117 Sc. Peter.

118 V. 18b.

119 Cf. John 19:25. By comparing this text with Mark 15:40, Mark 16:1, where a Mary is mentioned as the mother of James, Chrysostom and others have held that the James of Acts 20 was the half-brother of Christ and the son of Clopas, Clopas in turn being the brother of Joseph, husband to the virgin Mary.

120 Cf. v. 20.

121 Cf. v. 21.

commission to the Gentiles and because he would not have chosen to build upon another's foundation.[122] Therefore Paul did not visit them as a mere chance occurrence, and this is evident from the comments that follow: "For I was," he says, "personally unknown to the churches of Judea. And they had only heard that 'he who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith, which before he sought to destroy.'"[123]

What could be more moderate than this man's soul? For when he was discussing those things brought against him as a charge—for example, that he was persecuting the church and seeking to destroy her—he set out those items with much detail, parading out his former life. But the things that are likely to show his excellence he bypasses. Yet though he could speak about all his fine accomplishments if he wanted to, he mentions none of them but passes over the vast sea of them with a single word and says, "I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia," and "they heard that "he who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith, which before he sought to destroy." He does not add a word more.

And what does he mean by the statement "I was unknown to the churches of Judea"? Paul says this so that you may learn that he was so far from preaching circumcision to them that they didn't even know him at sight. He next adds, "And they were glorifying God in me."[124] Notice here as well the standard of his humility, how he keeps that standard very carefully. For he did not say, "they were astonished at me," "they were praising me," "they marveled." Instead he showed that everything which happened was of grace: "For they were glorifying God, "he says, "in me." Ⓢ

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122 Cf. Romans 15:20.

123 Cf. v. 23.

124 Cf. v. 24.

Servant Reading

Book Reviews

A Labor of Love: Puritan Pastoral Priorities

by J. Stephen Yuille

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant January 2020[1]

by Charles Malcolm Wingard

A Labor of Love: Puritan Pastoral Priorities, by J. Stephen Yuille, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2013, x + 136 pages, $15.00, paper.

Faithful ministers experience bouts of discouragement, some of them long and intensely painful. Our hearts go out to them: hard work and steadfast prayer have yielded little in the way of visible fruit. Their discouragement can be so severe that they lose sight of the nobility of their work—they are men sent by God to care for his blood-bought church.

A second danger may come from the opposite direction: times of growth in God's church produce pride. If ministers are not careful, they end up claiming for themselves the glory that belongs to God alone.

Both dangers—discouragement and pride—can cripple ministers and their work. Fortunately, there are safeguards, one of which is a book that reminds pastors of their calling and character while offering a fresh vision of their indispensable work. J. Stephen Yuille's splendid *A Labor of Love: Puritan Pastoral Priorities* is such a book.

The author writes in an era of "diminished appreciation of pastoral ministry." Frequently, ministers and churches possess "a clouded perception of pastoral ministry." They fail to distinguish between *success* based upon worldly calculations of "power, prestige, privilege, and prosperity," and *excellence* that is measured by faithfulness to God, an excellence that the world—and even unthinking Christians—dismiss as failure (1–2).

Given the dangers, pastors need constant reminders of the fundamentals of their work lest they stray from their God-given duties. They also must understand the proper motivation for their work, which is "an insatiable desire to please God" (3). Truly, ministers must keep vigilant watch over their hearts, for "whatever rules our hearts, controls our ministry" (36).

A Labor of Love has two major sections: pastoral priorities (part one) and George Swinnock's farewell sermon upon leaving a beloved congregation after eleven years (part two).

In part one, Yuille presents sixteen pastoral priorities that he found in a section of Swinnock's *The Christian Man's Calling*, "wishes" the seventeenth-century Puritan had for his own ministry (3–4). Each chapter heading identifies one aspect of the pastor's identity; a quotation from Swinnock is followed by the author's own instruction and reflections.

A comprehensive portrait of the Christian minister emerges. He is . . .

- A royal ambassador, heralding God's words of reconciliation
- A true vessel, knowing experientially the power of the great truths he preaches
- A sincere suitor, earnestly seeking the spiritual well-being of men
- A wise builder, laying the foundation of sound doctrine
- A skilled physician, distributing what men need most in their various spiritual conditions
- A diligent student, studying hard, reading

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=794.

hard, and praying hard
- A tender mother, affectionately disposed toward those entrusted to his care
- A courageous soldier, facing danger to protect his people
- A prudent preacher, preparing to preach in the way that tends most to God's glory and his people's good
- A ceaseless intercessor, praying privately and publicly for the salvation of his flock
- A patient instructor, helping the unstable believer find balance
- A discerning judge, ready to speak the truth and act with firm and loving discipline
- A faithful shepherd, visiting and counseling his flock
- A powerful example, modeling a life of good works
- A humble instrument, neither discouraged nor proud but obedient
- A watchful overseer, taking heed to his own doctrine and life

In Chapter 7, the pastor as a *tender mother* serves as an example of Yuille's approach.

In the opening quotation, Swinnock prays:

> Lord, when I behold wounded, bleeding, dying souls, let my eyes affect my heart with sorrow. May I seek Thy blessing upon my diligent efforts for their recovery. Make me such a tender and affectionate mother that I patiently bear their offenses. May I willingly bear the burden of instructing my children. (37)

The image of minister as tender mother comes from 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8 (KJV): "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Paul was "torn away" from his spiritual children by persecution (1 Thess. 2:17)—a separation, explains Yuille, that is costly, but only temporary, bodily, and involuntary. The Thessalonians will never be far from his heart (39).

He proceeds to identify and warn of two attitudes that destroy a pastor's love for his people: envy and anger. Taking his cues from Jonathan Edwards, Yuille notes four "occasions" when anger is sinful: when it is distinguished by envy, errant judgment, loss of self-control, and is out of proportion to its cause. "As pastors, we must mortify in us all that disrupts 'sincere affection' for our people" (39–41).

Both Swinnock and Yuille are eminently quotable. Here are two of my favorites:

> We must not give people the impression that we love them (kind words, warm hugs, beautiful smiles, firm handshakes), when in reality we feel quite different. We must not deceive ourselves into thinking that externals will mask what lurks inside. (Yuille, 19)

> Some Christians erroneously assume that good works and good manners are inconsistent. Although Christianity removes the pretentious expressions of courtesy, it does not destroy courtesy. Civil language and courteous behavior are not essential to Christianity, but they do adorn it. God's saints are always courteous. (Swinnock, 99)

The title for this book comes from the dedication of Swinnock's farewell sermon: "There are two things which I have always judged chiefly requisite in a pastor—labor and love. The former is a work of the head, the latter a work of the heart: faithful labor will speak his love, and sincere love will sweeten his labor" (4).

Taken to heart, this fine book will encourage pastors to make their work a labor of love. ☺

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Entering God's Rest

by Ken Golden

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant January 2020[1]

by Michael J. Kearney

Entering God's Rest: The Sabbath from Genesis to Revelation (And What It Means for You), by Ken Golden. Lancaster, PA: Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 2018, 81 pages, $7.99, Kindle.

Ken Golden has provided a brief introduction to the importance of Sabbath rest in God's purposes for humanity, something that could be read in under three hours. This is not an exhaustive, in-depth study. It is useful, rather, in acquainting readers with the biblical concept and reality of entering God's rest and how this is to be tasted through observance of the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day. The book also goes out of its way to respect Christian liberty in terms of what Sunday is to look like for Christians. Judging from his interactions in certain footnotes with another author (Joseph Pipa Jr., in his writing on *The Lord's Day*), along with the book's overall content, it is safe to say that Golden is offering a more moderate alternative to strict Sabbatarianism.

In accordance with the subtitle, Golden traces the development of biblical Sabbath rest from Genesis to Revelation, starting of course with the creation ordinance in Genesis 2:1–3, whereby God's rest on the climactic seventh day of creation becomes the basis for humanity sanctifying the seventh day of the week. Mankind in Adam would fail to fulfill the covenant of works and thus fail to enter the rest divinely held out to God's image-bearers (Gen. 2–3), but the hope of God's rest is not dashed to pieces. Beginning with Genesis 3:15 and the first announcement of the gospel promise, the future Savior is hinted at—the One to be bruised, but whose bruising would be his and his people's victory, displayed in his bodily resurrection from the dead, ushering redeemed humanity towards its appointed rest, grounded upon God and his faithfulness to the covenant of grace. As Golden points out, we enter God's rest by faith in Another, in this seed of the woman, the "second Adam," Jesus Christ, through the perfection of his active obedience.

While his treatment is nuanced enough to recognize a temporary, judicial-law aspect to it, as operative in Israel's life as a theocracy, Golden goes on to demonstrate that the fourth commandment is reflective of God's abiding moral law, and in substance therefore still in force under the new covenant. This is a key point to make for those unaware of the relevance of the Ten Commandments for the church today (like those from a dispensational background), perhaps especially when it comes to the commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Related to this, Golden takes pains to unpack how the designated day of rest would change to Sunday, starting with Christ being raised from the dead on the first day of the week, what could also be considered the eighth day, with the number eight suggestive of a new beginning.

Golden, however, does move on to "what it means for you." One part that stands out is "Present and Future Rest," in which he mines some of the riches of Hebrews 3–4 (with Psalm 95 as the backdrop) to draw out the already/not yet dynamic of Sabbath rest as we know it as Christians. We have not yet fully experienced it, and yet worshiping God together on the Lord's Day is like participating in a "dress rehearsal" for the glories of the heavenly rest to come, namely the eternal Sabbath.

Finally, though some of what he says about Isaiah 58 in an earlier section anticipates it (check out his appendix on this passage as well), Golden more fully addresses the issue of current Lord's Day practices in the concluding chapter on "Sabbath Wisdom." Here, he argues for it being a matter of wisdom as to how one or one's family is to pursue rest on Sunday. While seeking God with

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=795.

the church publicly as his worshipers and being given to the means of grace is non-negotiable as the focal point, how the day is otherwise spent is a matter of debate. Golden is concerned that while some of us may have scruples that govern what we do or don't do on Sunday, we ought to exercise caution lest we unduly impose these standards on others. In particular, he comes down in favor of allowing some measure of freedom as to how one handles certain activities that could, but might not necessarily, interfere with resting in the Lord and worshiping him. Moreover, there are conceivable scenarios where these activities might even enhance it.

Personally, I think it might have been helpful to also, or at least more explicitly ask, "How can we most glorify and enjoy God in our Lord's Day activities?" Golden openly wrestles over the problem of what is actually forbidden by Scripture (cf. the prohibition of needless involvement in "worldly employments and recreations" in WLC 119). Yet, in fairness, it must be said that he raises a host of practical questions that are valid, doing so in a pastorally sensitive manner (e.g., about eating out or watching sports or engaging in recreation on a Sunday, under certain conditions). More absolute, hard-and-fast interpreters and practitioners of the Sabbath principle need to reckon with these challenges. Even in Reformed circles, there has been, and remains, a range of beliefs and approaches, and Golden does a pretty good job of representing his end of the spectrum.

Controversies aside, though, it should not be lost that Golden has made an accessible case for the positive recovery of the Christian Sabbath. There are other perspectives on the topic, to be sure, but this would be a solid book to share with someone who is unfamiliar with these themes and interested in learning more—that person who is just beginning to follow Christ or investigate Christianity, or is coming out of broad Evangelicalism, or is new to one of our churches. In fact, as David VanDrunen points out in his foreword, any book that takes the Lord's Day as seriously as Golden does in this work should be appreciated by a wide variety of readers. Ⓢ

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Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans

compiled and edited by Robert Elmer

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans, compiled and edited by Robert Elmer. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019, 321 pages, $23.99.

The title of this book comes from a saying of the well-known Puritan Thomas Watson, "That prayer is most likely to pierce heaven which first pierces one's own heart."[2]

The piety founded in the theology of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms is the piety of the Puritans. Anthony Burgess, Jeremiah Burroughs, and Edward Reynolds, who wrote several of the prayers in this volume, were all members of the Westminster Assembly.

This newly published prayer book combines the prayers of thirty-two writers, mostly seventeenth-century Puritans or in a few cases men of Puritan sympathies, like nineteenth-century Octavius Winslow. I say "men," but there is an exception, the exceptional Puritan poet and preeminent

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=796.

2 Quoted on dedication page. I have not been able to locate the source.

woman of letters in the American colonies, Anne Bradstreet. She (along with several prominent theologians like William Ames and Richard Sibbes) has only one prayer, presumably because she did not write many prayers. Other lesser-known writers, like Lewis Bayly and Robert Hawker, were prolific prayer authors. Hawker wrote the most in this volume with more than fifty. Well-known devotional writer and preacher Philip Doddridge comes a close second with almost forty. There are also international connections; theologian-preachers such as William Bridge and William Ames had a strong connection with the Calvinists of the Netherlands. William Guthrie was a pastor in the Scottish Covenanter movement. Ezekiel Hopkins was a bishop in the Church of Ireland. It is notable, too, that while all of these authors, with the exception of Anne Bradstreet, were preachers, the majority were also theologians. Doctrine and life were never separated, and many risked their lives, fortunes, and honor for what they believed and preached, due to the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which prescribed conformity to the Church of England and its *Book of Common Prayer*.

As to content, the combination of fervent devotion, sound biblical foundation, and carefully articulated theology makes these prayers a treasure to be explored and enjoyed. The prayers are divided into sixteen categories, ranging from "Teach Me to Pray" to "Your Kingdom Come." Three categories deal with beginning, living, and closing the day. Along with a section on forgiveness of sins is a unique category "Help Me Give the Gospel to Others." It is obvious that the editor and compiler Robert Elmer has done his work with great care and discernment.

The publisher's blurb is informative and sums up my reason for heartily recommending this book.

> For the Puritans, prayer was neither casual nor dull. Their prayers were passionate affairs, from earnestly pleading for mercy to joyful praise. These rich expressions of deep Christian faith are a shining example of holy living. The Puritan combination of warm piety and careful intellect have fueled a renaissance of interest in their movement. This combination is on display in *Piercing Heaven*, a collection of carefully constructed prayers from leading Puritans. The language in these prayers has been slightly updated for a modern audience while retaining the elevated tone of the Puritans. With prayers from Richard Baxter, Thomas Brooks, and many more, each entry reminds us that heartfelt prayer is central to the Christian life.

Not only will this little volume assist Christians in their private devotions, but it will also help ministers of the Word in their preparation of prayers for the pulpit (Samuel Miller's *Thoughts on Public Prayer* is one of the best sources of instruction on this topic). There is a great need for better preparation for public prayer in our ministries. ☉

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The Christian´s True Identity: What It Means to Be in Christ

by Jonathan Landry Cruse

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant February 2020[1]

by Andy Wilson

The Christian's True Identity: What It Means to Be in Christ, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019, x + 155 pages, $14.00, paper.

To be human is to reckon with the matter of one's identity. People have always had to answer the question, "Who am I?" But in our day, this question seems more complicated than ever. Proponents of identity politics claim that a person is defined by the racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexuality groups in which the person locates his or her identity. It is not surprising that this has contributed to the increasing fragmentation of our society. What is surprising, and troubling, is that a number of Christians are embracing the tenets of identity politics and seeking to apply them to life in the church.

We can be thankful that Pastor Jonathan Landry Cruse has written a book that sheds biblical light upon this situation. In *The Christian's True Identity*, he essentially unpacks what is expressed in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism, where the Christian confesses that his only comfort rests upon the assurance that "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." As Christians, our identity is not rooted in our race, our ethnicity, or our gender. It is certainly not located in the struggles that we experience with sin and temptation. Instead, our identity is grounded upon the glorious reality of being "in Christ."

In ten chapters, Cruse explores various aspects of our union with Christ. While other books have been written on the subject of union with Christ, several features make this one stand out. In addition to being solidly grounded in the Reformed confessional tradition, it is compellingly written and accessible to ordinary Christians. Each chapter explains the Bible's teaching in a faithful and clear manner that connects with the world in which we live. This is reflective of the fact that the book is based upon material that was first delivered from the pulpit.

The opening chapter shows how the teaching of Scripture confronts the misguided yet popular assumption that true liberty means having the right to define your own conception of existence and identity. As Cruse explains, believers in Christ have "an identity that the world cannot offer and with which the world cannot compete. Nothing but an identity founded in Christ is sustainable through all the changes of life and will satisfy even into eternity" (15).

The book's treatment of the doctrine of election is especially noteworthy for how it focuses our attention upon the fact that our election is in Christ. Cruse writes, "God was thinking of us not in and of ourselves, and certainly not in and of our sin, but truly in and of His Son. We are in His Son in the sense that we were the people given to His Son" (28). This is what makes election a source of immense comfort instead of a subject that generates incurable anxiety. As John Calvin put it,

> If we are chosen in Christ, we shall find no assurance of election in ourselves; nor even in God the Father, considered alone, abstractly from the Son. Christ, therefore, is the mirror, in which it behooves us to contemplate our election; and here we may do it with safety.[2]

Cruse relates justification and sanctification to union with Christ in a manner that avoids

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=801.

2 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.24.5.

common pitfalls, such as rejecting the logical and theological priority of justification to sanctification, or making our justification dependent on our sanctification. His exposition of sanctification emphasizes how our growth in grace is the working out of the new identity and standing with God that we already possess by virtue of our union with Christ. The book concludes with chapters dealing with how our union with Christ delivers us from the world, the flesh, the devil, and death, and how the outward and ordinary means of grace function to deepen our communion with Christ.

This book would be an excellent resource for an adult Sunday school class or book study. It could also be used in ministry to high schoolers or college students, many of whom may be especially vulnerable to our culture's false assumptions and assertions about identity. Study questions are included at the end of each chapter. Ⓢ

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The Lion in the Waste Land

by Janice Brown

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant February 2020[1]

by Judith M. Dinsmore

The Lion in the Waste Land: Fearsome Redemption in the Work of C. S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and T. S. Eliot, by Janice Brown. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018, 216 pages, $45.00.

In *The Lion in the Waste Land*, Janice Brown, who taught literature at Grove City College for two decades, draws together the prominent works of literary giants and contemporaries Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot, and considers them in context of these themes: Christ, conversion, angelic interference, redemptive suffering during World War II, pilgrimage, and redeeming the times. "I believe that the key ideas of Lewis, Sayers, and Eliot are most powerful when considered simultaneously," she writes on the last page of the book. Given the breadth and variety of the three authors' output, Brown's work is ambitious and her transitions from the ideas in one work to the next occasionally seem contrived, but she does ably demonstrate, especially in her line-by-line expositions, the shared Christian imagination that fired these three. And by so doing, she fires our own.

Brown first describes the actual relationship of the three authors, which is a story quickly told. They ran in different circles. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) was an Oxford professor and author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but also numerous apologetic essays and a science fiction trilogy. Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957) began as a writer of detective fiction but, during World War II, became known for her Christian drama—most famously, *The Man*

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=802.

Born to Be King. (Sayers was the sole subject of Brown's previous book.) T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) was a poet and literary critic living in London as an American expatriate. Sayers and Lewis became friends and correspondents, but Sayers venerated Eliot only from afar, and Lewis in his early career mocked Eliot's modernity. Alluding to the first lines Eliot's famous 1915 poem "Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Lewis once wrote, "For twenty years I've stared my level best / To see if evening—any evening—would suggest / A patient etherized upon a table" (10). After Eliot's conversion to Christianity, however, their relationship, always professional, grew warmer.

As Brown records, the tempest of the Blitz and World War II shook all three out of the shelves they likely would have perched on indefinitely. It was the "crucible in which the prophetic function of Lewis, Eliot, and Sayers was refined and focused" (162). They became apologists for the faith, in print and on the radio:

> Though Lewis, Eliot, and Sayers made no claim to speak for the church in any official capacity, their words rang with authority. The essays and lectures they produced in response to the war were not precisely "theological" in nature, yet they were shoring up and rebuilding something that had been crumbling into ruin—Christian witness in the midst of a secular culture. (170)

This came at a personal cost: The Blitz pulled T. S. Eliot, the consummate gentleman of letters, onto the streets as an air raid warden to patrol London on foot all night before heading to the office in the morning. (What he saw on patrol fed the images that later appeared in "Little Gidding.") Lewis's wartime writing and speaking on religion, which was not his subject of study, "meant the loss of the approval of his Oxford colleagues" (200). He was never given the promotion to full professorship that he deserved, Brown claims.

These three were apologists for the faith out of compulsion, each in their own way crying out against a culture gone wrong. But their vocation was always art. Brown draws out that difference: "Their apologetic effectiveness was the greatest the modern world had seen; yet . . . to point people to Christ through pictures, symbols, and stories was their highest calling" (62).

In explaining how these authors' texts are drenched in biblical imagery, Brown is at her best. For example, she demonstrates how one angelic being in Sayers's play *The Zeal of Thy House* carries out duties of account-keeping and calculation-making that is similar to the angel measuring the house of God in Ezekiel 40–47 and the angel measuring Jerusalem in Zechariah 2. "The angels' painstaking verification of physical dimensions indicates God's familiarity with minute details," Brown writes (120). For another example, Brown connects a scene from C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra* in which the *eldila*, an other-worldly being, is attempting a form that the mortal protagonist can handle and appears as rolling concentric wheels (135–36) to the angelic beings in Ezekiel 1:16, "their appearance and construction [is] as it were a wheel within a wheel," and then to the lines from Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*: "that the wheel may turn and still / Be forever still" (140). "Eliot's wheel imagery harmonizes with the imagery of Lewis and Ezekiel, in which wheels represent the relentless and inscrutable purposes of God," she writes (140).

Calvinists will quibble with Brown's soteriology. She seems to push too hard to see conversion in the texts as "choosing to be the chosen of God" (88–91).

Why do these authors matter to us now? Their apologetic works are exemplary and still worth reading, to be sure, although written for a different era. But I do not think Brown wrote *The Lion in the Waste Land* to display anything but the incredible Christian imaginations of Sayers, Eliot, and Lewis. Their images, built on their not-slight knowledge of biblical imagery and Christian tradition, bring the unseen spiritual conflict all around us within our ken. The wasteland of the modern world, Christ as a fearsome lion, Christ as a wounded surgeon, conversion as being devoured by three white leopards (103), angels as troubling guests at a cocktail party (149), our lives as a

pilgrimage—all these images ripple with meaning and help us to truly see, silencing the false images streaming from our screens and our earbuds. True images speak powerfully to the horror-struck or broken-hearted. When faced with the needs of congregants, pastors and teachers do well to imagine well: "Although preaching is a didactic form of rhetoric, seeking to teach and persuade through reasoned argument, preaching may also employ the imaginative devices of poetry, like metaphorical language and pictorial images" (34).

World War II came unexpectedly and terribly to England in 1940. We do not know what will come unexpectedly and terribly to us, personally or nationally. When it comes, we need not just the terms *redemptive suffering* or *perseverance of the saints* but also lines like "three trees on the low sky" or "no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, / With an alien people clutching their gods. / I should be glad of another death" (218). ©

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Faithful and Fruitful: Essays for Elders and Deacons

edited by William Boekestein and Steven Swets

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant March 2020[1]

by Shane Lems

Faithful and Fruitful: Essays for Elders and Deacons, ed. by William Boekestein and Steven Swets. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2019, 328 pages, $16.99.

Elders and deacons have important roles in the life of the local church, and Scripture is clear that these men need to carry out those roles in a godly, wise, and biblical way. Most men simply are not born with elder or deacon intuitions, so training is a good and necessary part of becoming an elder or deacon. We should welcome Reformed resources that help local churches in training these men to carry out such important roles in Jesus's church. *Faithful and Fruitful* is one of those Reformed resources that is worth putting on the "officer training" book list.

Faithful and Fruitful—a companion to *Called to Serve*[2]—is a collection of essays on the roles and services of elders and deacons in the local church. The essay topics include hospitality, ministering to the sick and dying, managing the tithes and offerings of a local church, knowing the congregation's needs, sabbaticals, how to be a clerk at meetings, catechesis, singing, and serving on a pastoral search committee. Some of the chapters are specifically for deacons (e.g., managing offerings), some are designed for elders (e.g., evaluating

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=807.

2 Michael Brown, ed., *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2007).

your pastor), but most are useful for both elder and deacon (e.g., avoiding burnout and serving as a clerk).

I appreciated several aspects of this book. Deacons should pay attention to the chapter that helps them learn to know the needs of the congregation. The chapter on a pastor's sabbatical is also a good one that will assist elders to figure out a wise way to give their pastor sabbaticals. Another beneficial chapter is the one on ministering to the sick and dying.

To be sure, if an elder or deacon is experienced or previously has had good training, much of the material in this book will be a review. These essays, however, will be very useful for inexperienced elders and deacons as well as for training would-be elders and deacons. And while for the most part the essays are aimed at elders and deacons in United Reformed Churches, elders and deacons in other confessional Reformed churches also will benefit.

I wish this collection of essays had more overall structure. It would have helped if the book had been divided into sections. As presented, the essays do not seem to have any particular order. Some of the material is found in other officer training resources in print and online (e.g., prayer, leadership, missions). Some essays, however, cover topics that are rarely discussed, such as how to clerk a meeting and how to handle church offerings or tithes.

Faithful and Fruitful is not one of those trendy Christian books. Nor is it a book with "celebrity" selling power. In fact, the men who have contributed to this collection of essays are pastors, professors, and missionaries of Reformed churches, none of whom are superstars. That is one of the strengths of this collection because the writers labor in typical churches with everyday issues. They are therefore qualified to write on elders and deacons serving in local churches.

Faithful and Fruitful is a good officer training resource for Reformed churches. It is well worth putting on the church shelf! ©

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The Ark of Safety: Is There Salvation Outside the Church?

by Ryan McGraw

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant March 2020[1]

by Allen C. Tomlinson

The Ark of Safety: Is There Salvation Outside of the Church? by Ryan M. McGraw. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2018, 125 pages, $10.00, paperback.

This little book is part of The Exploration in Reformed Confessional Theology series, intended to "clarify" some of the more "controversial" confessional statements found in the Reformed doctrinal standards. These books look at controversial issues from four vantage points: textual matters dealing with the variations in confessional texts, the historical background to confessions and to the issues at hand, the theological doctrine and its biblical support, and the pastoral point of view as far as how the issue affects God's people.

The Ark of Safety is concerned with Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2,

> The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

The very last part of article 25.2, "out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" is the particularly "controversial" part of the statement

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=808.

addressed by the author, Ryan M. McGraw. He is the Morton H. Smith professor of Systematic Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The "Ark of Safety" is the church. In an absolute sense, the invisible church. As a general rule with few exceptions, there is no salvation outside of the visible church. We expect very few outside of the visible church to be saved, in comparison with what the Bible would indicate is the "norm" for the vast majority of the redeemed. McGraw summarizes the historical development of the distinction between the invisible church (all true believers) and the visible church (all who profess the Gospel and their children). Bullinger, Ames, the Belgic Confession, Calvin, and Ursinus all recognized on some level, even if only a preliminary level, this distinction. All saw the necessity of the church, some emphasizing the invisible almost exclusively, and others more clearly speaking of both the invisible and the visible church. No one is saved outside the invisible church, and the necessity of the means of grace (particularly the preaching of the Gospel) is so critical that few are saved without the visible church. John Owen, Francis Turretin, Wilhelmus à Brakel, and Herman Witsius are also examined as to their own statements regarding the necessity of the church, and how their views related to this visible and invisible distinction.

In the Westminster Confession, provision is made for elect infants dying in infancy and those elect so mentally handicapped from birth that they are unable to comprehend the Gospel intellectually (WCF 10.3). However, those in pagan lands are not included in this exception (WCF 10.4).

Part two of the book deals with theology. It asks the question, "Is WCF 25.2 Biblical?" First, the Old Testament is examined as far as a "church within the church," that is, those within national Israel who manifested faith and repentance and not just adherence to outward ordinances only. Perhaps something of the distinction between the visible and invisible church can be seen in the old covenant in seed form. Both Isaac and Ishmael are in the visible church, if one considers circumcision. However, Ishmael is not the seed of the promise. Jeremiah 31:31–34 is seen as a prophecy of the coming new covenant and of the relative difference between "old and new covenants." "The difference between the old and new covenants is more in degree than in substance" (66), which seems to be in accord with WCF 7.5–6. The percentage of those in the visible church who are also part of the invisible church is much higher in the new covenant than in the old covenant.

McGraw follows up with two chapters on the New Testament, "The Visible Church in the New Testament" and "The Invisible Church in the New Testament." As far as the visible church, he demonstrates that the New Testament manifests an important expansion of the visible church, as the gospel is taken forth to all nations. He shows that baptism is the sacrament of admission to the visible church, dealing with the theological parallels between baptism and circumcision. As he concludes the chapter on the visible church in the New Testament, at the very least, we see it is the visible church that brings the gospel to sinners. Baptism is part of our message, and baptism puts one into the visible church. He concludes this chapter with Westminster Larger Catechism 63, which stresses the place and importance of the visible church in the new covenant, and with Ephesians 5:25, which speaks of Christ loving the church and giving himself for her. The church is the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) and the members are the true circumcision (Rom. 2:28–29). "Since there is one church with visible and invisible aspects, we cannot undermine one without losing the other" (83).

In the chapter entitled "The Invisible Church in the New Testament," the author especially works with Romans 9–11, and "the reality of hypocrisy and apostasy" in the visible church of both the old and new covenants, and how this distinction between "visible" and "invisible" helps us understand this reality in light of promises that those in Christ will persevere. After a section reminding us that in the New Testament this invisible church manifests itself, at this time, in the visible church, this chapter concludes with a call to love Christ's church both in its invisible and visible aspects

(100). There is no salvation apart from the invisible church; therefore, ordinarily, salvation is not experienced apart from the visible church, which is the outward and physical manifestation of the invisible.

Part three of the book is "Practice: Why Is WCF 25.2 Important?" This final chapter summarizes the ordinary necessity of the visible church: a necessity of means (the church brings lost sinners the gospel according to Christ's command and the Holy Spirit's empowerment), and a necessity of precept. We are commanded to unite in worship, which leads to the perfection of the saints (e.g., Eph. 4:13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" . . .). We are commanded to love, serve, comfort, and reprove one another, and to express genuine unity in our worship and daily practice. How can this be anything other than merely theoretical, except within the context of the visible church? "The church visible is necessary by divine command" (112). Chad Van Dixhoorn's very useful illustrations are referenced:

> A repentant thief on a cross, a Muslim convert to Christianity who has not yet discovered other believers, or a man stranded on the desert island with only a Bible, each has plausible reasons for not being a part of the church. But people who claim to be believers and refuse to join the church in the face of clear biblical instruction and providential opportunity to do so, should deeply worry us. They are like people who say they are in love but refuse to get married. (112)[2]

I highly recommend this little book as a scholarly and very readable explanation of WCF 25.2, cited above. For those outside of our tradition who question the biblical support for such a statement, or for our own folks who might wonder if this statement contradicts "salvation by grace alone," this is an excellent tool. Ⓢ

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2 Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 341.

The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption

by J. V. Fesko

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant April 2020[1]

by Carl Trueman

The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption, by J. V. Fesko. Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, Christian Focus, 2016. xx + 414, $29.99, paper.

John Fesko's study of the covenant of redemption is a most timely and helpful contribution to an important and contested topic. Given the recent resurgence of interest in classical Trinitarianism among confessional Protestants, this book touches on questions which will probably be preoccupying Reformed theologians for some time to come.

As a concept, the covenant of redemption refers to the arrangement, forged in eternity, between the Father and the Son which established the Son as the Second Adam. It thus stands in positive structural relationship to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Indeed, it is the conceptual foundation for making the work of

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=814.

Christ efficacious.

It has nonetheless proved controversial over the years, as Fesko indicates. Criticism has ranged from the simplistic—"Where is the covenant of redemption explicitly mentioned in Scripture?"—to the more sophisticated and dogmatic—"Does the covenant of redemption not posit too great a division in God?" "Does it not neglect the Holy Spirit?" Fesko is aware of these criticisms and seeks to address them.

After a historical introduction, Fesko addresses the exegetical foundations of the doctrine in Part II, drawing on Zechariah 6:13, Psalm 2:7, Psalm 110, Ephesians 1, and 2 Timothy 1:9–10. In this section, he demonstrates that the doctrine does not rest on a single text but seeks to synthesize the implications of a thread of teaching which runs throughout the Old and into the New Testament touching on the identity and the role of the Messiah. This is a sound approach consistent with the original work of the seventeenth century divines who first formulated the doctrine. Dogmatic constructs such as the covenant of redemption do not simply fall from the pages of Scripture or find explicit expression in one or two texts. Rather, these constructs attempt to synthesize the teaching of the Bible as a whole as it touches upon matters of ontological and economic importance. Rather like the covenant of works, which finds its primary motivation in the New Testament teaching of the relationship between Adam and Christ, so the covenant of redemption offers a synthetic concept which helps to make sense of Scripture's teaching as a whole.

In Part III, Fesko offers an account of the dogmatic significance of the doctrine, touching on issues of both ontology (the Trinity) and economy (the elements of the order of salvation). What emerges very clearly in this section is that the covenant of redemption is that which connects the ontological Trinity to the economic Trinity. Indeed, one's understanding of the relationship between these two is going to be reflected decisively in one's attitude to the covenant of redemption.

It is in this section that Fesko addresses many of the standard concerns about the covenant of redemption, but also engages in lengthy interactions with numerous modern theologians—most notably Karl Barth, but also Rudolph Bultmann, Hans Frei, and others. Particularly useful is his defense of the role of metaphysics in theological formulation over against the anti-metaphysical critiques offered by neo-orthodoxy and narrative theology. Yet even here Fesko models good scholarship through his concern to treat his opponents fairly by carefully expounding their critiques before responding.

There are a couple of areas which need further exploration—though I present them here not as a criticism of Fesko's book, but rather as suggestions about how his work should be carried forward.

First, there is more work to be done on the historical origins of the idea. As he notes, the conceptual language emerges in the mid 1640s, although it receives brief mention by David Dickson in 1638. This is why the doctrine is not explicitly taught in the Westminster Standards. But, as Fesko notes, the concept is adumbrated in earlier Reformation work on Christ as mediator. The key here is that the Reformers argued that mediation is the act of a person, not a nature, and that Christ was mediator according to both natures. In doing this, they broke decisively with the medieval tradition which had posited mediation as an act of the human nature. This opened the Reformers to the criticism, made most powerfully by Cardinal Bellarmine, that they were doing damage to the doctrine of God by making God somehow mediator with God. That polemical background is important.

This then leads to a second point: the covenant of redemption raises acute questions about the inner life of God. Fesko addresses the issue of the unity of God's will; but I suspect that, in the light of the welcome recovery of classical Trinitarianism and renewed appreciation for the confessional doctrine of divine simplicity, more work needs to be done on how to understand the covenant of redemption in relation to the unity and simplicity of God. To posit a separate will for Father and for Son is, as Fesko sees, an illegitimate move; and yet for many ordinary Christians, this

is an issue which will need further explanation and refinement. The rise of classical theism is to be welcomed; this will in turn raise the bar for discussions of matters such as the appointment in eternity of Christ as mediator.

This is a very good book which offers a straightforward yet learned introduction to its subject. For anyone wanting to know about the covenant of redemption and its dogmatic, historical, and exegetical underpinnings and implications, this is certainly the place to start. Ⓢ

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The Trials of Thomas Morton

by Peter C. Mancall

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant April 2020[1]

by Richard M. Gamble

The Trials of Thomas Morton: An Anglican Lawyer, His Puritan Foes, and the Battle for a New England, by Peter C. Mancall. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, ix + 278 pages, $30.00.

In 2011, when Deval Patrick served as governor of Massachusetts, the former 2020 Democratic presidential contender and Barack Obama protégée proclaimed March 1 to be "Thomas Morton Day." Most Americans would be hard pressed to say who Morton was or why he ought to be so honored. Perhaps few people in the Bay State knew either. But Patrick praised the seventeenth-century colonist for his "respectful relationship with Native Americans," "intrepid explorations," and for writing the *New English Canaan*— "an invaluable 'first chapter' of Massachusetts history."

The Pilgrims and Puritans would have been scandalized by this encomium. William Bradford and John Winthrop never intended for Morton's notorious maypole to be celebrated, and they would have been baffled by the revelry depicted by Governor Patrick as a symbol of "intercultural prosperity" and an invitation to "respect" and "cooperation." But such is the state of cultural politics in the twenty-first century. The world of 1620 was not the world of 2020.

And yet it could have been. Or at least it could have been an experiment in an alternative New England not engineered by Separatists and Puritans—an alternative more respectful of Native Americans, more tolerant, and a little more fun. Historian Peter Mancall does not endorse everything Governor Patrick proclaimed, but he does ask readers to consider a provocative "what if?" that puts Morton at the center of the story instead of Bradford and Winthrop. In other words, what happens if we recognize how precarious one version of New Canaan was in light of a competing commercial colonial enterprise more loyal to James I and Charles I and adhering to the established Church of England?

With the sense of inevitability removed from the story, the English settlement of North America becomes highly contingent, hanging by a thread on colonial and imperial politics, economic rivalry, and international competition, along with heavy doses of religious controversy in and out of New England. No one in the 1620s and '30s knew the future, no matter how confident they were of their ability to read God's special providences and their proclivity to run all their experiences through the grid of the Old and New Testaments. God's New Israel was hard work.

To say that Morton was a colorful figure is an understatement. The word "trials" in the book's

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=815.

title points to Morton's career as an endlessly litigious lawyer and the ordeals that he himself and the New England magistrates put him through. Morton likely arrived in New Plymouth for the first time in 1622 and the second time in 1624. His trading post threatened the Separatists' fragile economy and his arming of local tribes seemed to imperil their lives, property, and the very survival of their New World haven. Morton seemed to relish his ability to scandalize the pious, and when he erected his infamous eighty-foot-tall maypole on Ma-re Mount (or Merry Mount) and danced around it with English and Natives, Bradford called him the "Lord of Misrule" and exiled him. Morton threatened to bring the corruption of the Old World into the New, the very thing the Separatists had fled. Undaunted, Morton returned and became a thorn in the side of Winthrop as well. Morton ended his days in Maine.

Morton and his company nearly succeeded in the law courts of London and in their appeals to the crown to secure their own charter claim to New England. To explain his vision for New England, Morton published his New England Canaan in Amsterdam in 1637, a sales pitch that was part amateur anthropology, part geology, part history, and part bitter, humorous, and satirical send-up of the (in Morton's judgment) bigoted and insufferable Noncomformists. He painted them as religious and political subversives.

What fascinates Mancall is the way in which Morton "became an outlier in the triumphant narrative of the establishment of colonies in New England" (14). He became, and for years remained, the antagonist in somebody else's story. Only a few copies of his book survived, and it was not rediscovered in any significant way until the nineteenth century. As the national story became the New England story writ large, Morton symbolized for many the would-be obstacles to America's providential founding. Nevertheless, he had his sympathizers along the way, and when the nation turned against "Puritanism" he was remade into a symbol for free thinkers and even a proto-hippy.

Mancall's book is lively, fascinating, and highly readable. His sympathies for Morton are clear, and his relativizing of the past (including religion) may turn off some readers. But it would be a mistake to dismiss Mancall's book as just another exercise in politically correct revisionism. Mancall has reconstructed meticulously a neglected episode in colonial history and the twists and turns of the publishing, reception, and subsequent use of a mischievous book. His research has led him to conclude, with only slight hesitation, that Morton's *New England Canaan* is "the second most important historical narrative" of New England colonization after Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* (215).

Morton failed in his personal ambitions and in the quest to build his vision of English colonization in the North Atlantic. As Mancall promises, his failure pulls us out of "the familiar narrative" (17). This is a tale of two visions. Bradford and Winthrop exiled Morton "because his dream threatened theirs. They were right" (172). Of course, the English colonies and the nation that followed were the product of more than these competing visions. The sheer variety of colonies in North America meant that many visions occupied the Atlantic seaboard by the eighteenth century. The Pilgrims and Puritans defeated Morton, but their vision of a New Israel remained an irritant to the Dutch in New York, the Quakers, the Anglicans, and more than few "Cavaliers" in the South. Ⓢ

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Christianity and Pluralism

by Ron Dart and J. I. Packer

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant April 2020[1]

by David VanDrunen

Christianity and Pluralism, by Ron Dart & J. I. Packer. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019. xii + 70 pages, $8.99, paper.

This is a book with an ecclesiastical context, and that context is not that of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Christianity and Pluralism* was originally published (under a different title) in 1998. A group of conservative Anglicans in Canada commissioned it as part of a response to *Mansions of the Spirit: The Gospel in a Multi-Faith World*, a book by Canadian Bishop Michael Ingham arguing that most of the major world religions share a deep though hidden unity, particularly as expressed in their respective mystical traditions. But although the three main essays comprising this short book have a special eye on the theologically divided Anglican world, the authors do argue that they are defending classical Christian faith and not simply a conservative brand of Anglicanism.

The first two essays are essentially book reviews of *Mansions of the Spirit*. The first, by Ron Dart, welcomes the publication of this book insofar as it challenges the church to consider more deeply what it believes. In a very irenic vein, Dart offers ten short points that affirm some of what Ingham had argued but also critically engage him on other matters, hoping to "nudge" discussion in a better direction (2). The second, by J. I. Packer, also maintains an irenic tone but evaluates *Mansions of the Spirit* more trenchantly. Although Ingham is a "nice man," says Packer, he "in effect abolishes what Anglicans generally, indeed Christians generally, understand Christianity to be" (9–10). In suggesting that there must be many routes of access to the Absolute, Ingham pushes his readers toward a "Gnostic occultism" (19). One rather odd feature of both essays is that they insist on referring to their interlocutor by his first name, "Michael." Perhaps they do so in order to sound as kind and cordial as possible, out of fear that their critics will accuse them of being harsh for defending the view that Jesus Christ is the only true way to God.

The third essay, authored by Dart, is by far the longest. It describes and evaluates "four main models of inter-faith dialogue" (36). The first is "exclusivist," which Dart hopes to rescue from its reputation for intolerance and fundamentalism. The second is "inclusivist," which holds that different religions share many things in common but that ultimately one of them is better and incorporates the best aspects of the others. The third, the "pluralist," supports religious inquiry, yet rejects "theological certainty" while embracing an "ethical pragmatism" (48). It purports to be non-judgmental, but tends to be intolerant toward those who make truth claims about God. The final model is the "syncretist." It believes that most world religions are heading toward the same final destination, while taking different paths, although it ends up ignoring aspects of each religion that are incompatible with this vision. Dart concludes by noting that Christianity came into existence in a pluralistic and syncretistic context, but did not embrace either model. He defends exclusivism of a sort, but also speaks positively of inclusivism and pluralism when understood in a certain way.

To be frank, I do not think *Christianity and Pluralism* will be of much value to most readers of *Ordained Servant*. The third chapter may be of some help for understanding various approaches to the relationship of different religions. But while engaging non-"exclusivist" models critically, the authors take them more seriously than they deserve. Does it really require "inspection" to realize that pluralism has "drifted away from . . . historic Christianity" (22)? And isn't saying that the liberal Anglicanism of recent generations "runs the risk

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=816.

. . . of leveling the religious playing field" (35), putting it rather mildly? Whether Scripture and classical Christianity are exclusivist is not a very difficult question. The issue is simply whether one embraces them or not. But engaging inclusivist, pluralist, and syncretistic views as serious options for the church is, I imagine, a price to be paid for choosing to remain in an ecclesiastical body that welcomes such views. Occasional positive references to Karl Barth and liberation theology (by Dart, not Packer) are also reasons to suspect this may not be the go-to book on religious pluralism for most readers of *Ordained Servant*. ©

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How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches

by Kent Philpott

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant May 2020[1]

by Charles M. Wingard

How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches, by Kent Philpott. Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2008, xiii + 128 pages, $13.99, paper.

Disappointment is a routine part of pastoral life and is especially acute in small churches where personal and financial resources are few and prospects for growth slim. Many pastors wonder if anyone in the congregation really cares about them. Pay is often meagre; expressions of concern for the pastor and his family's well-being come infrequently or not at all. In some churches little energy is spent caring for anyone in the church. The hurt can be deep. Pastors would like to articulate their hurts to the church, but do not—they do not want to offend, appear self-pitying, or expose themselves to rejection.

What many small church pastors are afraid to do for themselves, Kent Philpott does for them. He writes with small churches in mind and counsels them on how they can better care for their shepherds. The author is well qualified; when How to Care for Your Pastor was published, he had more than forty years of experience, much of it in a small California congregation.

Through much of the book I nodded my head in agreement. Seemingly little things—like punctuality and words of thanks—are big encouragements. Money for books and classes must not escape the congregation's notice if they want their pastor to grow as a minister of the Word.

The author encourages a proper congregational mindset. Its pastor is not exempt from the problems common to a fallen world. Not only does he experience the same trials as his flock, but he struggles with many of the same temptations and sins. A fact that should be obvious—the pastor's humanity—must not be forgotten.

Both pastor and congregation should shed the illusion of omnicompetence (my word). Every minister must recognize his own limitations in knowledge and ability, and his congregation must live with those limits. Just as in a healthy marriage spouses do not let flaws obscure the blessings of their partner, so too the congregation must be grateful for God's gift to them of a pastor whose faithful care is demonstrated in a variety of ways.

Poor compensation in small churches is common, if not the norm. The author helpfully shares his own tentmaking experience and his wife's work outside the home. He explains how mutual sympa-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=822.

thy must exist between the pastor and his congregation as this area of potential conflict and hurt feelings is navigated. I would add that as tight as family budgets are for pastors of smaller churches, financial problems are not always the consequence of poor pay. Pastors and their wives can be financially reckless, accumulating unnecessary debt and nurturing sinful discontentment. In these situations, both the pastor and his wife will require the loving, but firm, guidance of the church's leaders.

The author is adamant (and correct) that the pastor and his wife parent their children, not the congregation. With thoughtless words and harsh judgments assertive church members can place unsustainable pressure on the pastor and his family to conform to their personal ideals for the minister's family life.

I found Philpott's counsel to churches with young pastors particularly wise. Maturation is a process; the minister you have now will not be the same man when his ministry is over. Wise congregations look on their relationship with the minister as a partnership, one that over time, can grow and flourish.

Ordained Servant readers are committed to traditional pastoral care and might raise an eyebrow when they read that the author does not like to make hospital or home visits. Pastoral visitation is such a significant part of the Presbyterian tradition that young men preparing for ministry would be well advised to cultivate a desire for it, even if it does not come naturally. To his credit Philpott does make these visits and is appreciative of a care team that assists him.

Contrary to the author and many others, I do not think the pastor's work schedule is unique. True, "pastors do not punch a time clock and do not work regular office hours." But neither do most of the physicians, business owners, salesmen, and farmers in my congregation. I encourage my students to establish a weekly work plan. Be flexible, but remember that bad work habits can easily form without a fixed schedule.

For congregations looking for ideas about how to care for their pastors, this book will prove useful. But to treat it as a definitive guide to pastoral and congregational relationships would be a mistake. The author does not make this claim, but people reading this book must remember that no perfect blueprint exists to guide them. While all pastors expect that their congregations care for them, the shape that care should take will vary from pastor to pastor according to his attitudes toward ministry and the specific needs he and his family face. There is no one solution for care of the pastor. The strength of this book is the author's honesty and openness about his own pastoral experience. With that in mind, I would caution the reader to understand that not every pastor will have the same needs and expectations, or work from the same philosophy of ministry.

To foster enduring relationships there are no substitutes for honest conversations and the cultivation of mutual sympathy and understanding. Get that straight, and this book will provide ideas about how to improve the precious relationship between a pastor and his flock. ©

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Pursuing Health in an Anxious Age

by Bob Cutillo

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant May 2020[1]

by Gordon H. Cook, Jr.

Pursuing Health in an Anxious Age, by Bob Cutillo. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 196 pages, $17.99.

Much of the discussion regarding modern medicine in America focuses on the high costs of healthcare and how to provide affordable care to all. Dr. Cutillo only touches briefly on these subjects, focusing instead on the philosophy which underlies the healthcare system and the important role that faith communities can play in addressing those philosophical underpinnings.

Dr. Cutillo is a physician for the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless in Denver, Colorado. He also serves as an assistant clinical professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and as an associate faculty member at Denver Seminary. In the past he served several years as a medical missionary in Africa.

Cutillo begins with a basic tenet. Our health is not a commodity, nor a right. It is a gift. With this distinctly theological perspective, Cutillo challenges the humanistic myths that underly modern healthcare today: 1) we can control health and obtain the outcomes we desire; 2) we can remove uncertainty from healthcare; 3) we can have life on our own terms independent of God; 4) the physician (or scientist) can be objective in his or her clinical gaze; 5) statistics provide all the answers needed for proper healthcare, defining what is normal and thereby what is abnormal or diseased; 6) the proper application of medical technology and treatment will result in good health; and 7) we can control the day of our death, either by avoiding that day with quality healthcare or by choosing that day and taking our own lives.

These basic assumptions are deeply embedded in our healthcare system. Cutillo is well read and articulate, skillfully dealing with each assumption, providing compelling arguments for each of his points and excellent examples from his medical background. In several chapters, Cutillo brings Scripture and Christian theology into his discussion, to provide a Christian critique of modern healthcare.

By far his most compelling chapter (well worth the price of the book), is entitled "Just Community." It looks at justice issues in healthcare from a community perspective. He focuses on our common vulnerabilities; how our health depends upon the health of those around us; and how the health of a society depends on how it cares for its poorest members. He does not limit this to the national debates over funding healthcare in America. He notes that an Ebola outbreak in central Africa has the potential to impact radically our health here in America; thus, we have a vested interest in providing the highest possible care for others around the world. His case for comprehensive reform in the way healthcare is apportioned is compelling and biblical and will leave even the most progressive among us feeling uneasy about how little we do for others in these matters.

In chapter 10, Cutillo calls for robust cooperation between healthcare and the church, noting that the two are not only compatible, but are also essential to each other. He offers several examples of faith communities that have programs providing quality healthcare for those in their neighborhoods.

Cutillo's conclusion calls for a recovery of wonder in a jaded society which assumes that it understands everything.

The book has a couple of shortcomings that should be noted. The first comes from my perspective as a chaplain. America today is a religiously diverse population, and modern American healthcare should not discriminate based on religion. It must provide healthcare in a manner that is

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=823.

sensitive to, and respectful of, all faith traditions. Particularly in chapter 10, Cutillo focuses exclusively upon the Christian church. This may play well with an Evangelical audience, but to speak to physicians and other healthcare professionals around the nation, those who can actually do something about the nature of healthcare in America today, the author would need to broaden his discussion to include synagogues, mosques, and temples as well. All religious communities have a common interest in addressing the assumptions of a healthcare system which is often indifferent or even hostile toward those faith communities.

Theologically, Cutillo is strongly influenced by the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom he quotes at length several times. I have always found Bonhoeffer's views interesting and provocative, but to use his Neoorthodoxy without qualification should raise questions in the minds of Reformed readers.[2] Given this influence, I would be reluctant to share the book with readers who are unaware of the distinctions between Neoorthodoxy and a true Reformed and biblical theology.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is recommended for healthcare professionals and pastors interested in considering the underpinnings of our modern healthcare system or who are searching for a role for the faith community which extends beyond handholding and prayer. Ⓢ

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2 For a Reformed critique of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology, consider Richard Weikart, "The Troubling Truth About Bonhoeffer's Theology," *Christian Research Journal* 35, no. 6 (2012); or William Macleod's "Bonhoeffer: A Reliable Guide?" Banner of Truth, 2016. Both articles are available online.

The HTML of Cruciform Love

by John Frederick and Eric Lewellen

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By T. David Gordon

The HTML of Cruciform Love: Toward a Theology of the Internet, by John Frederick and Eric Lewellen. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2019, xx + 187 pages, $26.00, paper.

I sometimes exhibit a facial tic whenever I see the words "Toward" and "Theology" in the title of a book; this time I did not (or, if I did, I should not have). This collection consists of a thoughtful introduction and twelve insightful chapters by fourteen scholars from three continents (three Australians, a Scot, one Canadian, five Californians, and one each from Minnesota, Ohio, Texas, and my native Virginia—no partridge, no pear tree). It is only merely "toward" a theology of the Internet in the sense of being a collection of articles by individuals with different competences and different estimates of the Internet; but the thinking in each contribution is very well-developed and exhibits reflection that is both informed and seasoned. Many of the papers were originally delivered five years ago during a webinar hosted at the University of St. Andrews; several others were solicited for this publication.

The authors write from a consistently orthodox Christian perspective; all are trained in theology or philosophy (or both), and their competences cover the range of the theological and philosophical disciplines. Notably, the contributors are not only well-versed in the literature regarding the Internet, but they also exhibit a solid acquaintance with Me-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=831.

dia Ecology; Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul are a regular part of the conversation, and I was delighted that four different chapters demonstrated familiarity with MIT's Sherry Turkle.

After a helpful introduction by John Frederick, Ben Myers and Scott Stephens take us way back to the early church (Chrysostom, Tertullian, et al.) and its characteristic non-attendance at the Roman spectacles, due to their rigorous beliefs about "the morality of the eyes," and "fasting with the eyes," ancient warnings to the shallow ease with which third millennium believers will watch almost anything. Subsequent chapters address such things as the unavoidable nature of various interfaces, anonymity, how databases shape our biblical hermeneutics, narcissism, a "Theology of Work for a Virtual Age," that would be as valuable for its theology of work as for its application to the web, Jesus's community (according to Mark) and the Internet community, the relation of technology and theology (with special reference to the Solomonic temple), an exposé of both the quotidian nature and the surveilling nature of Internet usage, a fascinating introduction to rabbi Emmanuel Levinas's 1964 idea of "The Temptation of Temptation," and its prescient anticipation of the web world, the tension between efficiency and incarnation, warnings about the myth of perceiving our tools as neutral, and much more.

This book should probably be read differently than most books; ordinarily I promote the practice of reading a book at a single sitting (if not literally, at least without the intervention of reading anything else). These chapters, however, each have peculiar insights about particular aspects of digital life. To be appreciated, I believe each chapter should be considered on its own, and perhaps the ideal way would be to read and discuss one a week with several other people. There is too much to savor, critique, and ponder in each of the chapters to rush to the next one. In God's providence, I ended up reading some chapters in London, others in Nantes, and in Paris, and several even in the Cradle of Civilization, Grove City, Pennsylvania. This pacing afforded a decent amount of pondering time.

Some other Christian books have wrestled with the digital world in primarily a practical way, answering people's frequently expressed requests for some practical guidance. The authors in this volume provide a slightly different service. They wrestle with a "Theology of the Internet," how to begin to think about it in theological terms, armed with serious reflection informed by creation/fall/redemption, the two natures of Christ, incarnation, love for God and his image, and the cross. Such a contribution provides practical help indirectly, but probably more lastingly, because the particular devices and technologies may change, but a theology of human communication and human technology will flex with such merely technical changes. For this reason, I might recommend this as the place to start for people who wish to think seriously and Christianly about our tangled digital web. ©

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The Christian and Technology

by John V. Fesko

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By Charles M. Wingard

The Christian and Technology, by John V. Fesko. Durham, UK: EP Books, 2020, xx + 104 pages, $8.99, paper.

Winston Churchill observed, "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=832.

shape us." The same is true of technology. In six crisp chapters, John Fesko explains how six technological advancements have shaped Christian thinking and behavior, for better and for worse:

1. Screens: computer, phone, tablets, TV, and jumbotron.
2. Social media.
3. The automobile.
4. The book: both the mass production of books for the past 500 years and the recent phenomenon of e-books.
5. Virtual reality.
6. Internet access both to helpful services and soul-defiling evil.

The theme throughout this book is this: *You must learn to use technology, or technology will use you.*

The invention of home computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones presents special problems for Christians. Not only do they bring, what Fesko describes as, "unfettered access to evil" into our homes and offices (a fact that should be obvious to every Christian), but they also produce unwanted, and often overlooked, effects: alteration to the brain's wiring—and with it, distraction, reduced attention spans, and the loss of "deep reading" ability.

Social media generates profits by bombarding us with ads and links based on our "likes." Without realizing it, the author wisely warns, we become immersed in a virtual realm shaped by our likes and dislikes, creating an idolatrous world made in our own image.

To believe that we can or should (if we had the power) turn back the tidal wave of technological tools is a fool's dream. They are here to stay and will certainly grow in number and influence, molding our society in ways we cannot foresee. Whether we should use computers and virtual technology is no longer a debatable question. With the exception of groups like the Amish, who attempt to separate from the modern world, this is not an option. Fesko challenges his reader by asking the Christian how he is using this technology.

The chapter on the automobile exemplifies the author's careful reflection of the benefits and costs of technology, and what they mean to the church. Many of us can remember life without computers and smartphones. None of us can remember life without the automobile. How has the automobile shaped church life? Before the automobile, congregational life centered on a parish church within walking distance for most. It was the church into which you were born, baptized, married, and buried—a vital part of the community's life. On Sundays and throughout the week, members remained close to their pastor and to one another.

With the automobile came an autonomous mobility. For the first time, Christians could travel to churches outside their communities. On the positive side, rural believers could easily find their way to church assemblies, and doctrinally-sound believers could leave a theologically liberal church and find an orthodox one. On the negative side closeness of community was forfeited and, where still practiced, church discipline became less weighty—just leave and go to a church that will accept you. Finding a church home became a matter of taste and just another consumer choice; the practice of biblical church discipline waned.

Although church vows and wedding vows are not identical, Fesko urges readers to treat the former more like the latter. Sacrifice for the church; labor and pray for its members; submit to its leaders. "Your car may give you the ability to run away," he writes, "but you might be running from the very thing that you so desperately need" (40).

One of the most attractive features of this book is its strong devotional character. Chapters begin with the advantages that each technological advancement brings, followed by a careful delineation of their potential threats and actual harms. Each chapter concludes with a summons to satisfaction in Christ, watchful obedience, and the diligent use of the ordinary means of grace.

The spiritual tone is set in the book's introduction:

> When Christ fills our vision, we will be able to use technology aright—we will not allow it to lead us into temptation and will be savvy

> to the tendencies toward idolatry and spiritual sloth that accompany it. When we feed upon Christ, the manna from heaven, all else pales in comparison. We find satisfaction in the Lord and seek no other table at which to feed our hungry souls: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6). (xix)

The book's brevity makes each chapter suitable for devotional use and group study (high school age and older). The bibliography shows the breadth of the author's research in media ecology and points readers to resources for additional studies.

As a pastor and professor, I will be sharing this book with both parishioners and students. ©

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Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood

by Aimee Byrd

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant August-September 2020[1]

by David VanDrunen

Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Its Purpose, by Aimee Byrd. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020, 235 pages, $18.99, paper.

Aimee Byrd, an OPC member who supports the headship of husbands and the ordination of males-only to gospel ministry, writes this work in critique of the "biblical manhood and womanhood" movement (hence, BMW). While acknowledging that the movement arose to resist genuine threats, she states that it has harmed "the health of God's church" and is "stifling the force of the biblical message and strangling the church's witness and growth" (18–19). She proposes an "alternative" focusing on "the reciprocity of the male and female voices in Scripture, the covenantal aspect to Bible reading and interpretation, and bearing the fruit of that in our church life" (25).

Byrd identifies many specific problems with BMW. It views manhood and womanhood "through a filter of authority and submission, strength and neediness" (70) and appears "to say that all men lead all women" (22). It utilizes "cultural stereotypes" (18) and "Victorian-age gender tropes" (70), and has not "retracted any of the hyperauthoritarian, hypermachismo teaching about manhood and . . . hypersubmissive and stereotypical teaching about womanhood" (109). It has diverted the church from its chief aim of preparing Christians for everlasting communion with God (26). It also thrives "under popular Biblicist interpretive methods" (27) and teaches that men and women should pursue different virtues (109). Byrd repeatedly highlights BMW's association with the *eternal subordination of the Son*, "an unorthodox teaching of the Trinity" (100–104, 120–21, 170–72).

Part 1 addresses how we read Scripture. Concerned especially about the proliferation of men's and women's study Bibles, Byrd argues that we all read the same Bible, albeit one that includes many "snapshots from a woman's perspective and experience" (43). She discusses accounts of Huldah, Ruth, and many others, in which "we see women treasuring God's Word, meditating on it, and acting on it, not within isolated women's ministries, but connected to the body of faith" (92). These stories break down many common stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Part 2 focuses on the church's mission. She calls for the church to focus

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=838.

on its "ultimate goal," everlasting communion with Christ (109). In doing so, it should encourage theological study among women and value women as co-laborers. Byrd also warns against the prominence of parachurch organizations and says that chief responsibility for Christian discipleship lies with the church, the covenant community that provides proper context for reading Scripture. Finally, Part 3 continues several of these themes, reflecting especially on how women can contribute to the church's life and worship. They are "necessary allies" of men, "not optional, subordinate assistants" (189).

Since Byrd's book is explicitly a critique of BMW, the inevitable initial question is whether she has described it fairly. I am not the right person to make a final judgment on that; people affiliated with or heavily invested in BMW can offer their assessment. But Byrd has documented a lot of evidence for her claims and many of them appear accurate to me, at least regarding some prominent proponents of BMW. In this short review, perhaps it is best if I discuss some substantive moral/ecclesiological issues the book raises, with little further comment on BMW itself.

To begin, I mention several things to appreciate about Byrd's case that confessional Reformed churches would do well to take to heart. First, Byrd's discussions of women in Scripture present, in general, compelling correctives to many non-biblical gender stereotypes that I fear are all too present in confessional Reformed churches. She sometimes wanders into speculations beyond what the texts themselves say, but these do not nullify the many legitimate conclusions she draws. Second, Byrd is correct to emphasize that Scripture calls men and women to the same Christ-like virtues and that the New Testament's many "one another" exhortations describe our mutual responsibilities in a non-gendered way. Men and women have some distinct obligations in Scripture, but these are dwarfed by their myriad of joint obligations. Finally, Byrd's emphasis upon the church—as the God-ordained forum for confessing the faith, making disciples, and studying Scripture—is most welcome.

I conclude by raising two issues worth further reflection in our churches. I believe Byrd's book stimulates reflection on these issues without providing final answers.

First is the metaphysics issue. In two relevant texts, Paul grounds the authority of husbands and male church officers in the creation order, but its "order" is in terms of *sequence*, not *ontology*. That is, husbands and male church officers have authority because God formed Adam first and then made Eve from him (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13), *not* because he created the world in such a way that males are ontologically better equipped to exercise authority than women are. This presents a caution to those appealing to *biblical* manhood/womanhood to claim that there are clearly distinct masculine and feminine traits and that men have a general obligation to lead women and women to be led. Nevertheless, we still face the question of how to understand male and female differences (beyond the obvious physical differences) through natural revelation, or through metaphysical inquiry, as Byrd puts it. She deserves credit for recognizing that this issue needs to be addressed, although her discussion of it (123–30) is neither entirely clear nor obviously consistent with everything she writes elsewhere in the book. I believe confessional Reformed people should keep reflecting on this, in a charitable and mutually edifying way. They should also remember that our metaphysical reflections on natural revelation are not the sort of thing that the church rightly imposes upon the consciences of its members, though they should enrich the wisdom by which we encourage and disciple each other. I suspect that these reflections, if sound, will lead in a direction similar to where Byrd points: that there are real distinctions between males and females, and yet they are not rigid, certainly not in a way that justifies raising our sons and daughters with nice, clean lists of masculine and feminine character traits which point them toward distinct lists of acceptable vocations.

The second issue concerns office and ecclesiology. When reading some BMW proponents on texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11–14, I have found their discussions lacking a robust view of office

and ecclesiology (as perhaps is expected among non-confessional evangelicals). That is, they apply Paul's prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority to relationships and activities among church members generally and to institutions other than the church. In contrast, I believe Paul, in context, is focused on the church (not on other institutions) and on the exercise of ministerial office (not on other kinds of relationships among Christians). Keeping these different perspectives in view might be helpful for understanding Byrd's important contention that laymen and laywomen have the same responsibilities in the church. I believe she is correct about this. Issues she raises such as reading Scripture in worship and passing the offering basket (or, I might add, teaching adult Sunday school) are issues of *office*, not general male/female leadership relations. The proper way to put the question is not whether *women* can do these things but whether *only officers* (or *which officers*) should be doing them. Byrd's broader discussion points us in this office-focused direction, which seems to me is a more confessionally-Reformed (and biblical) way of approaching these matters. We probably will not all agree about what the proper ministries of the church ought to be or what things are properly performed only by officers (and I note that Byrd's opinion on laypeople reading Scripture in worship [232] differs from Westminster Larger Catechism 156). But if we could discuss these things in terms of office and not in terms of men and women generally, that would be a helpful development in churches where it is not already happening. ©

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Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry

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by Darryl G. Hart

Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019, ix + 419 pages, $23.00.

Billy Graham may have been the media sensation that gave post-World War II evangelicalism coherence at a popular level, but Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) was the figure who supplied much of the movement's intellectual substance. The son of German immigrants, Henry grew up on Long Island and after high school worked as a journalist on the island's Suffolk County. His conversion to Christianity as a young adult prompted him to Wheaton College, then presided over by J. Oliver Buswell. There, Henry sat under Gordon H. Clark's teaching and received a B.A. (1938) and a M.A. (1940). From Wheaton he attended Northern Baptist Seminary and was ordained in the Northern Baptist Convention (1941). Henry hoped to be a theologian and pursued doctoral studies at Boston University where he received a Ph.D. in theology (1949). Contacts with Harold John Ockenga, pastor of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, proved to be important. Although Henry's first academic position was at Northern Baptist Seminary where he taught between 1947 and 1949, Ockenga asked him to teach theology at the newly founded Fuller Theological Seminary.

In 1949 Henry joined the faculty in Pasadena, California and held the seminary's first post in theology and officially entered the neo-evangelical movement. From there Henry had a front row seat

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=839.

at the expansion of institutional evangelicalism. He assumed leadership positions in the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Theological Society, attended the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin and the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, became a lecturer-at-large for World Vision International (in addition to guest lectureships at, among others, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and served on the board of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship. As Timothy George writes in his tribute (included in this volume), "Henry was enormously successful as an evangelical networker" (376).

Arguably, the most significant of Henry's connections was his tenure as founding editor of *Christianity Today* (1956–1968). That appointment is the reason for this essay collection, many of which were first published while Henry edited the magazine. Again, according to George, "no one was more pivotal to the emerging movement than Carl F. H. Henry." His intellectual prowess is one reason for that estimate, though it turns out that Henry's ideas sometimes ran afoul of *Christianity Today*'s management. The book is in some sense an ironic tribute to a theologian and pundit whose arguments and manner did not suit the movement he sought to serve. According to Molly Worthen in *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (2014), J. Howard Pew, a chief patron of the magazine, thought Henry was taking *Christianity Today* too far in the direction of social activism. Pew even referred to Henry as a "socialist" (66).

Henry's independence of mind and comprehensive outlook may have been responsible for his critics' objections, and they are certainly plain to see in this book. One conviction that guided his theological judgments was a ringing condemnation of Protestant liberalism. Henry kept abreast of theological developments, from Friedrich Schleiermacher to John C. Bennett, and understood that J. Gresham Machen and Karl Barth had exposed liberal novelties as little more than theological gestures, often on the defensive and timid in their affirmations.

He also monitored developments in theological education, thanks to his own training and experience at Fuller, and defended the propriety of seminaries maintaining doctrinal standards as the basis for faculty appointments and institutional mission. The issue, Henry held, was not between theological commitment and academic freedom, but whether in the absence of "commitment to the intelligible revealed truth of God," theological educators "can long preserve sense for either freedom or academia" (262).

His reflections also ran to politics. Here Henry carved out a political conservatism that drew on evangelical convictions. For instance, he was cautious about the language of human rights that drove international treaty organizations (such as the United Nations) without also reconsidering the importance of "human duties" (281). When it came to questions of character for evaluating politicians, Henry contended that some matters of private conduct had "no bearing on qualifications for the presidency" (359). At the same time, American politics needed both "better persons" and better policies. Political realities, he argued, "often force us to choose the lesser of two evils" (363). This was not something he saw in Jim Wallis and *Sojourners* magazine, an evangelical publication on the political Left. Henry complained that Sojourners "never speaks on abortion, promotes military disarmament, and tends to blame America for the ills of the world" (353).

What may be most intriguing to contemporary readers are Henry's reflections on evangelical identity. At a time when the 2016 evangelical vote for Donald Trump sent scholars and journalists in search of definition that could explain the outcome, Henry's own doubts about evangelical identity from four decades earlier sound remarkably prophetic. In 1972, he wrote that defining an evangelical "is becoming no less difficult in America than defining a Jew in Israel" (59). That did not mean that Henry was at all hesitant to identify evangelicalism with "the doctrinal positions recovered by the Protestant Reformers and their devotion to an authentic biblical faith" (60). By 1980,

he took stock of evangelicalism's popularity and worried that the movement was "going nowhere." "Evangelical Christianity in our generation has come out of the closet," he wrote. "It has yet to discover what it means to come confrontationally and creatively into the culture" (88). That sort of assessment showed Henry's unwillingness to be simply a cheerleader for the movement in which he labored. He was a strategist and a thinker. That meant that he wrote, as this collection indicates, about tactics to enhance evangelical influence as well as with a critical eye for deviations from doctrinal affirmations.

In his 1994 book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark A. Noll remarked that Carl Henry was more of a journalist than a theologian. That verdict may look more negative today compared to twenty-five years ago when evangelical historians, philosophers, sociologists, and biblical scholars were coming into their own. Henry was part of an older generation of evangelical thinkers that did not enter the ranks of the secular academy the way that Noll and others did. And yet, if evangelicalism had possessed more gatekeepers like Henry, people with serious theological convictions and an eye to broader social and intellectual trends, the movement may have turned out better than it has. This book's title is debatable, as if Henry were truly the "architect" of evangelicalism. The constellation of organizations and parachurch ministries that tried to fit under the tent of post-World War II evangelicalism, to mix metaphors, had too many cooks for its own good. But as these essays show, somewhere on the menu was a dish as hearty as it was nutritional—its chef was Carl F. H. Henry. ©

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Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ in the Westminster Standards

by Alan D. Strange

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By Charles M. Wingard

Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ in the Westminster Standards, by Alan D. Strange. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019, xviii + 158 pages, $7.79, paper.

The doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ in the justification of believers is vital to Reformed pastoral care. It is the desire of my heart that every sheep in my flock come to the assurance "that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (WCF 18.1).

Active obedience, correctly understood, is a joy and comfort to the believer, assuring him of his right standing before God. God is righteous and requires that all who come before him be righteous. The good news of the gospel is that Christ has satisfied the demands of divine justice for all who believe. By bearing the wrath of God due to us for our sin (passive obedience) *and* by perfectly keeping the commandments of God for us (active obedience), Jesus has secured our salvation. Christ died *and* lived for us. The Sovereign Judge of all the world credits the righteousness of Jesus to the one who, by faith, receives and rests in Christ alone as he is offered in the gospel (WSC, 33 and 86).

In this small volume, Alan D. Strange offers

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=842.

a spirited defense of the doctrine of Christ's active obedience. He convincingly demonstrates that the Westminster Assembly affirmed this doctrine from the start and never wavered in its commitment.

Before turning to the Assembly and its work, he surveys earlier witnesses to the doctrine. Although neither fully developed nor its articulators numerous, the doctrine appears in seed form early in Christian history (for example, in Irenaeus from the second century and his "recapitulation theory").

The Reformation and the century that followed saw a broad consensus emerge among early and later Reformers affirming the imputation of Christ's active obedience, either implicitly by the incorporation of its key elements into their theologies or by explicit affirmation.

Of special concern to the author is the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649). Critical to the author's argument was the Assembly's parliamentary mandate to revise the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles, and specifically article eleven on justification. Among the Assembly's revisions to the Thirty-nine Articles, which the Assembly made but was never adopted by Parliament, was the addition of the word *whole* as a modifier of *obedience*:

> We are justified, that is, we are accounted righteous before God, and have remission of sins, not for nor by our own works or deservings, but freely by his grace, only for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's sake, his whole obedience and satisfaction being by God being imputed unto us . . . .

The entire Assembly understood *whole obedience* as "a shorthanded way of affirming active obedience" (53). Opponents to the revision were few but vocal. Among their concerns was that antinomians would twist the doctrine to support their position.

In the end, support for the revision exceeded 90 percent of the Assembly (63). Although the term *whole obedience* does not appear in the Westminster Standards, the author contends that there is no evidence that the Assembly later repudiated active obedience. By careful exposition of the Standards, he demonstrates that their teaching on justification is fully aligned with the doctrine of active obedience.

The author explores objections to active obedience by Johannes Piscator soon after the Reformation, from the doctrine's comparatively few opponents within the Assembly, and from contemporary proponents of the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision.

Of special interest to today's presbyters is the author's reminder that in constitutional interpretation, not only is original intent to be considered (what did the Westminster Assembly affirm), but also the intent of the church judicatories who impose the standards upon its office-bearers (what do they understand the Westminster Standards to affirm). The church courts both of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America have affirmed that the doctrine of Christ's active obedience is grounded in the Scriptures and confessed in the church's standards.

I am grateful for this book. Only those pastors and elders who know and affirm this doctrine will be able to offer the full comfort of the gospel to their flocks. The dying words of J. Gresham Machen must be ours: "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." ©

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Churchill: Walking with Destiny

by Andrew Roberts

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by Ann H. Hart

Churchill: Walking with Destiny, by Andrew Roberts. New York: Penguin, 2018, xix + 982 pages, $40.00.

Amid the war against the coronavirus, historian Jon Meacham encourages Americans to look to Winston Churchill during WWII and how he rallied his nation around a common enemy. Rather than seeking a U.S. antecedent for our current crisis, Meacham reminds Americans of the blitz when German planes were dropping bombs on London. In a September 11, 1940 radio address, Churchill said, "Every man and woman will . . . prepare himself to do his duty, whatever it may be, with special pride and care" (595).

To understand Mecham's references in a complete way, one would do well to turn to Andrew Roberts's biography, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*. Roberts had already written four books with "Churchill" in the title or subtitle before tackling this biography. Why another Churchill biography when more than one thousand have been written already?

New archival material animated the author, including King George VI's diaries from WWII recently opened by Queen Elizabeth II. Roberts relished his role as the first biographer to pour through the diaries (King George VI met with Churchill every Tuesday during WWII and kept detailed records of their conversations). The author has stated that there is some new material on virtually every page.

Roberts brings force and speed to his near 1,000-page narrative. While the book is a classic biography told chronologically, the pace is compelling. After gathering all his evidence, the author drafted the book in 100 days! It covers Churchill's long life from his birth at Blenheim Palace to his death at Hyde Park Gate, shortly after his ninetieth birthday.

The book is divided into two major parts and thirty-four chapters. Part 1, "The Preparation," includes twenty chapters covering the years 1874 to 1940. The long narrative is very accessible with its vivid writing, many photographs, maps, and family trees.

We learn quickly that Churchill's paternal grandfather was a member of the aristocracy, a duke, but that Winston's father was distant and hard to please. Churchill's mother, an American beauty, was self-absorbed and inaccessible. Away at boarding school, Winston often wrote to her, begging her to correspond. Yet, it was his father's approval that he sought throughout his life. This unfulfilled desire is a significant theme in this book.

Roberts summarizes large swaths of information concisely and memorably. Consider the close of the first chapter:

> If there were ideal conditions for the creation of a future hero of the Empire, by the end of January 1895 Churchill had fulfilled all of them. A famous name, selfish and unimpressed parents, a patchy but patriotic schooling that taught him how great men can change history by great feats, a first-class military education, a schoolboy ambition to save the Empire, not enough money to become indolent, appreciation of English prose and a reverence for the British history that he felt ran though his aristocratic veins. (31)

Roberts resonates with his subject's love of words and history. He writes admiringly of Churchill's unpublished essay, "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric," where he outlined five elements that he would return to frequently in his rise to "the greatest orator of his age." Those five steps included "[W]ell chosen words; carefully crafted sentences,

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=843.

accumulation of argument, use of analogy; and deployment of extravagances" (50).

Roberts writes that, "Few have set out with more cold-blooded deliberation to become first a hero and then a Great Man" (31). For Churchill, becoming a hero meant demonstrating courage in battle. He joined the Queen's Fourth Cavalry and subsequently was shot at in Cuba, fought in what is now Pakistan, the Afghan border, and Sudan; he escaped Boer captivity in South Africa. He recorded many of these episodes in newspaper accounts and jotted down notes for future books.

Becoming a great man, in Churchill's view, required proving himself as a politician. Always haunted by his father's early death at age forty-five, Winston entered politics and was elected to Parliament at age twenty-five as a conservative from Oldham.

"Churchill embarked on the Great War like a dynamo," (184) Roberts writes. He was the Minister in Charge of the Navy when war broke out. After success in many battles, he made a terrible error. He wanted to invade Turkey at Gallipoli after coming through the Dardanelles. He believed that if you could get the Royal Navy through the Dardanelles, you could seize Istanbul. Overruling the first lord of admiralty, Churchill attempted to invade Turkey at Gallipoli. However, Turkey had laid 350–400 mines in the strait; 157,000 men lost their lives.

After a time away from power, engaging himself in reading, writing, and soul searching, Churchill returned to government as a conservative and Chancellor of the Exchequer. When war broke out in 1939, Neville Chamberlin offered him job as First Lord of the Admiralty. Here begins Part II of Roberts biography, "The Trial." Churchill was one of the first politicians to recognize the threat of Adolf Hitler. In 1940, under extreme pressure and criticism from every side, Churchill stopped the British government from making peace with Hitler. More specifically, he prevented the foreign secretary Lord Halifax from making a peace deal with Hitler. The reader must stop to reflect on how different our lives might have been with a different decision.

But that courageous act was only the beginning of a long and grueling war which looked like Britain's David against Germany's Goliath. Churchill worked tirelessly to gather the right commanders around him. He approached President Franklin Roosevelt repeatedly to join the fight. Roberts meticulously describes the tick tock of these years: battles won and lost, mistakes made, deaths and casualties mounted.

In narrating the unfolding war, Roberts details Churchill's inner thoughts and powerfully captures points of view of those around him—from his military advisors, his top lieutenants, the king, personal aids, his wife, and many others. And when not in his personal war room, he is always thinking strategically.

Through it all, the author presents Churchill as a passionate, hardworking, romantic, and flawed figure full of strengths and weaknesses. Born an aristocrat of entitlement with a sense of *noblesse oblige*, he did not care what others thought. He trusted himself to do the right thing. Yet his mistakes, like trusting Joseph Stalin, are acknowledged, and he is "redeemed" by admitting and learning from his mistakes.

Churchill was a lifelong nominal Anglican. Yet Roberts writes,

> Although he did occasionally hint in later life that he believed in the existence of an Almighty—whose primary duty seems to have been to protect Winston Churchill—he did not acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ. Of all the five million words he uttered in his speeches, he never said the word "Jesus." (43)

Instead, Churchill's missionary zeal begins with his early pronouncement, "I shall devote myself to the preservation of the great empire and trying to maintain the progress of the English people" (949).

Andrew Roberts expresses zeal for his subject in the book's conclusion: he laments, "In a survey of 3,000 teenagers in 2008, more than 20 percent of them thought Winston Churchill was a fictional character" (982). However, he despises the "Black Legend" on the internet, which

> has attached to Churchill's name, in which he is held responsible for the sinking of the Titanic and Luisitania . . . ordering the bombing and strafing of innocent Irish demonstrators, poison-gassing Iraqi tribesmen, promulgating anti-Semitism, . . . genocidally starving Bengalis during the Famine, and very much more. Mostly these arise from (sometimes willful) misreadings of the original sources or from taking them wildly out of context, though some are just entirely invented. (982)

The partial antidote, Andrew Roberts contends, is "a return to the original archives and documents" (982). This absorbing and illuminating biography is the fruit of those labors. It could fill the hours well during an unexpected time at home. ☺

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The Puritans: A Transatlantic History

by David D. Hall

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by Darryl G. Hart

The Puritans: A Transatlantic History, by David D. Hall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, v + 517 pages, $35.00.

Historians of the Reformation in the English-speaking world struggle to juggle Puritanism and Presbyterianism in the development of British and American Protestantism. An easy resolution is to place the Puritans in England and New England, and Presbyterians in Scotland (and Ireland) and the Middle Colonies of North America (and eventually in nineteenth-century Canada). Perry Miller, for instance, the Harvard University scholar who almost single-handedly put the recovery of Puritanism as a field of study on his back, saw Puritanism as an effort to purify the Anglican church of elements that lacked a scriptural warrant. For some Puritans, removing bishops and replacing them with another form of church government was part of the call for purity.[2] But as these Reformed Protestants evolved, they went in different directions on church government, which explains why New England Puritans became Congregationalists. On the other side of the topic, historians of American Presbyterians usually regard their subject and Puritanism to be distinct—not siblings but cousins. For example, Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmeier observe that England Presbyterianism and Puritanism were "intertwined," but also "overshadowed by the Presbyterian successes in Ireland and Scotland."[3] Likewise, Lefferts Loetscher's survey of American Presbyterianism mentions New England Puritanism briefly and identifies the Puritans who went to Massachusetts Bay as those who remained with the Church of England.[4] By implication, Presbyterianism was an expression of Protestantism within the Church of Scotland.

What makes this national differentiation especially challenging is James VI of Scotland, who in 1603 became James I of England as well. His dual monarchy meant that no matter what the difference between the two expressions of Protestantism, Puritans and Presbyterians would have to work their attempts at reform through the same monarch. The King of England and the King of Scotland may have been the same man, but the national churches in each kingdom had a distinct history. To the north, Presbyterians competed and

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=847.

2 Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650: A Genetic Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 19–20.

3 Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmeier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 18.

4 Lefferts A. Loetscher, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978).

eventually triumphed over bishops in Scotland while Puritans—put simplistically—either left for North America over frustration with the king's archbishop or started a war with the crown (i.e., Charles I), only later to become dissenters after the Restoration.

Recent histories of Protestantism in the British Isles and England's colonies in North America have clarified greatly the relationship between Puritanism and Presbyterianism. They also show how chaotic the entire historical process was that eventually produced the Anglican church, Presbyterianism in Scotland, and denominations such as Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the United States. These communions emerged as anything but well-defined institutions with roots in the Reformation. They were all part of what Michael Winship has called "hot" Protestantism,[5] believers who desired a complete reform of the church and its members according to the Word of God. All such "hot" Protestants, or Puritans, could be found on the spectrum of church government. Some favored bishops, others assemblies and synods, and still others congregations.

David H. Hall's book extends the work of transatlantic perspectives on Puritanism that Winship accomplished by adding Scotland to the mix of England and New England. He does so in a way that is truly breathtaking for any scholar, but all the more impressive for a retired scholar, already accomplished and having nothing to prove. Instead of writing a book that builds on a life of scholarship and adds a few novel patches to an existing quilt of scholarly interpretation, *The Puritans* is a sustained and comprehensive account of the effort to reform further the English-speaking churches. It does for England, Scotland, and part of the colonial churches what Philip Benedict did for Reformed Protestantism in *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*.[6] In that earlier book, Benedict covered the history of Reformed Protestantism between 1520 and 1650, from Poland to Ireland and everything in between. Hall, in effect, takes the English piece of Benedict's volume and devotes a book as big as *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* to the subject. One indication of how vast Hall's scholarship is, is its scholarly apparatus. The endnotes section of *The Puritans* is over 150 pages long and should be the basis for the reading list of any doctoral student undertaking study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglo-American Protestantism.

Hall's story follows the rise of Protestants (Puritans) who desired a further reform of the state churches of England and Scotland, often inspired by Calvin's Geneva. It is not a straightforward narrative. After three chapters on the reception of Protestantism in Scotland and Ireland and the politics of reformation before 1600, Hall devotes two chapters to practical theology ("practical divinity") and Puritan efforts to reform manners in England and Scotland. In the remaining part of the book, perhaps the most complicated for any historian, Hall returns to the politics of Puritanism—meaning, how efforts to institute holiness among the clergy and laity were bound up with the structures of a national church overseen by a monarch. As such, the book follows developments in England, Scotland, and New England. He also explains the causes and motivations that led Presbyterians in Scotland and Puritans in England (through civil magistrates) to go to war with Charles I. The picture that emerges is anything but tidy or inspiring. A longing to see the churches of England and Scotland reformed according to the Word resulted in war and even regicide (an act that in ancient Israel, David would not even consider in his contest with King Saul).

Throughout these developments emerges a set of proponents of Presbyterian government. Initially motivated by frustrations with bishops, English and Scottish Protestants argued for a form of church government that Calvin, French Protestants, and others on the continent were using—a system of rule by church assemblies (synods, councils, assemblies). A few examples show the sort of perspective that Hall's study of the wider phenomenon of Puritanism yields for the particular features of Pres-

5 Michael P. Winship, *Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

6 Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

byterianism. For instance, Hall explains in passing why opposition to the *Book of Common Prayer* and episcopacy took shape in the 1570s and 1580s in England and Scotland. One factor was militant anti-Protestantism in places, such as France, that indicated to a younger generation of pastors that for Reformed Protestantism to survive it would need to take institutional form outside the existing structures of bishops appointed by monarchs. What also helped encourage presbyterian polity was the experience of French Protestants, who not only looked to Calvin's Geneva for instruction but also needed to run church life through structures different from episcopacy—which meant councils, synods, and assemblies.

Another way that Hall illuminates Presbyterianism as merely one part of a larger story is in his account of the initial success that John Knox and Andrew Melville had in the Church of Scotland to the point of producing two books of discipline. These road maps to Presbyterian government were no match for James VI who was able by the late 1590s to place bishops back in the Church of Scotland and as King of England (as James I) send Melville into exile. That desire for reform of church government combined with resistance from the British crown explains, as Hall shows, why the Westminster Assembly did not include Presbyterianism in its affirmations about the church. Just as challenging to Presbyterianism, as the Scottish commissioners at Westminster discovered, were the Independents and their political leader, Oliver Cromwell, who from the side opposite bishops, insisted on congregational structures as the best form of rule in the church. The Independents, unlike Presbyterians, also opposed uniformity in the national church.

Although these episodes in Presbyterian history are minor episodes in Hall's history of Puritanism, that larger narrative is essential for understanding the legacy of rule by presbyters in the church. For anyone tempted to think of Presbyterianism's origins as the inspiring equivalent of the American Founding or the Glorious Revolution (1688), Hall's book will quickly disarm any reader of such optimism. At the same time, his judicious and extensive account of British Protestantism between 1550 and 1650 will help readers understand the power and appeal of Presbyterian efforts to recognize not bishops, nor king, but Christ the head of his church. ©

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The Preacher's Catechism

by Lewis Allen

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By Charles M. Wingard

The Preacher's Catechism, by Lewis Allen. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, 226 pages, $10.92.

Years ago someone pointed out to me that a principal value of a catechism is to teach students to ask the right questions. Since the seventeenth century, the Westminster Shorter Catechism has taught believers to ask (and answer) the right questions about the Bible, the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, man's duty to God, the way of salvation, and the means of grace.

Employing the Westminster Shorter Catechism as his model, Lewis Allen's *The Preacher's Catechism* helps preachers ask the right questions about their lives and ministries. He is convinced that it "is an outstanding resource for the heart needs of every preacher" (21), a conviction that he demonstrates admirably.

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=854.

The book's forty-three brief chapters—each in question, answer, and commentary format—are divided into four sections:

- The Glory of God and the Greatness of Preaching
- Jesus for Preachers
- Loving the Word
- Preaching with Conviction

Each chapter of *The Preacher's Catechism* is three to four pages, making it an excellent companion to personal devotions. The author makes good use of classic Puritan and Reformed texts on the preacher and his work.

Just as the Westminster Shorter Catechism covers much territory, so does *The Preacher's Catechism*. It contains brief reflections on a large number of topics. Because of this, perhaps the best way for me to introduce this book is with a sampling from each of its sections. Below, the catechism questions are in bold followed by snippets of his commentary.

Like the catechism, Allen begins with first things:

> Q. What is God's chief end in preaching? A. God's chief end in preaching is to glorify his name. (27)
>
> What is your heartbeat? Do you love to preach, or do you love the One you preach? Do you love to prep your sermons, enjoying the hard mental and spiritual work, or do you love the One you are discovering more about? . . . Our challenge as preachers is to remain lovers, to refuse to let our calling, however important and exciting, obscure our primary calling to be captivated ourselves by God's love in Jesus Christ. (30)

On the hardship that comes to the preacher as he loves and walks with Jesus:

> Q. Surely we preachers don't have to suffer, do we? A. We have no choice but every help as we follow the Jesus who chose to suffer. (83)
>
> Endure hardship. Not because it is good for you, like a diet or exercise, but because Jesus did, and our calling is to be transformed in the image of his holiness. (84)

The Ten Commandments are considered from the preacher's perspective. Take for example the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." As in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the application of the commandment goes beyond one's parents to all who are in positions of authority.

> What does the fifth commandment teach us? You shall honor those who preached the Word of God to you, and obey what they taught you.
>
> Rather than waiting to be respected (which is never taught in the Bible), preachers need to work out how to give honor as they should. . . . All of us have been deeply influenced by other preachers. Some are now in glory, many of whom, known to us only through their books, have been there for centuries; and others we will never meet though their ministries continue to bless us through sermons we download. . . . Honor them. . . . Honor the preachers who are in your life, too. The best and most godly preachers seek out others who share their calling. There's no competition or jockeying for attention. Godly preachers serve each other with support and advice, when requested. Preachers who avoid local brothers engaged in the same work show an integrity gap: who wouldn't want to support and be supported by brother preachers? Where is the honoring in avoidance? (137–139)

In considering the work of the pastor, readers are asked:

> What happens when preachers actually believe in Jesus? A preacher living close to the cross and relying on grace is a fearsome weapon in the hands of God.
>
> Be a man of the cross. We are never more in awe of the work of Christ for us, and then able to serve our hearers than when we are on our knees, confessing our need of forgiving grace in repentance. The gospel we preach must be

> the gospel we consciously rely on. And what we rely on, we love. (171–172)

The author is sensitive to the swings that can take place in a minister's interior life. The pendulum moves back and forth between sinful pride and sinful despair, and between painful insecurity and dangerous self-confidence. At times we preachers rob God of his glory by self-promotion; at other times—when discouraged—we overlook the imperceptible but real growth that takes place as the Word is faithfully preached. Allen reminds us that "self-pity is as much out of place in Christian ministry as self-promotion is" (49).

Asking the right questions and identifying the right answers are indispensable to a fruitful and enduring ministry. *The Preacher's Catechism* supplies both. As I read this book, I came to believe that I was in the hands of a sound physician of the soul. His well-framed diagnostic questions can lead to deeper faith, genuine repentance, and the restoration of joy to ministry.

The pastor works hard and often finds himself weary. Add ministry's trials to fatigue, and even the most faithful minister can become discouraged. Ministers who have been down this path will treasure this book. So too will the pastor who amidst the daily routines of ministry, senses that he, like the Ephesians, is in danger of abandoning the love he had at first (Rev. 2:4).

The Preacher's Catechism is not a book to be hurried through, but rather savored. I have now read it twice in consecutive years. One sentence especially stands out: "Our first calling is not to preach [Jesus] but to love him and to walk with him" (79). Remember that, preachers, and we will glorify and enjoy the Savior we proclaim. ©

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With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ

by A. Craig Troxel

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By Charles M. Wingard

With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires and Will toward Christ, by A. Craig Troxel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020, 220 pages, $13.39, paper.

Every redeemed saint aspires to love God with all his heart—nothing is more precious to him than cultivating a heart for God. But what is the heart? Like so many frequently used words, it can be spoken without much thought. For many, loving from the heart is to have strong feelings for someone else—like a romantic attachment or friendship. At best this is an incomplete understanding and will not satisfy the Christian.

For readers who long for a deeper understanding of the heart, Craig Troxel's *With All Your Heart* will prove valuable. With the skill of a mature physician of the soul, he explores what God's Word reveals about the human heart. This is no small task. Formulating a definition of *heart* taxes the intellect. After all, the various Old and New Testament words for it appear nearly 1,000 times (17). So, the author surveys biblical vocabulary and usage, and concludes that the heart is

> the governing center of the person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=858.

(what we love), and will (what we choose). (21)

The hero of this book, if I may use that term, is the Lord Jesus Christ as he executes his offices of prophet, priest, and king. The author demonstrates that as a prophet, Jesus teaches and assures sinful minds; as a priest, he redeems and renews iniquitous hearts; and as a king, he subdues and strengthens rebellious wills (22).

Although mind, desires, and will can be distinguished, they can never be separated. They are interrelated aspects of the human heart and together provide the inner direction of a man (47). This threefold "unity of the inner self"' furnishes the structure of the book: the heart *knowing*, the heart *loving*, and the heart *choosing* become the headings of the book's first three sections.

The Heart Knowing

In his treatment of the mind (the heart knowing), Troxel offers a much-needed corrective to the prevalent misconception that the mind is wholly distinct from the heart, the former distinguished by thinking and the latter by emotion. Frequently, the two are pitted against each other, as when a person says, "I know in my mind that what you're saying is true, but my heart just doesn't feel it" (35). With ample biblical support, the author demonstrates that "if [the] heart principally does one thing, it thinks" (25). Jesus's interaction with the scribes provides an example: "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" (Matt. 9:4).

As prophet, the Lord Jesus confronts foolish thinking. He transforms us by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The eyes of our hearts are enlightened (Eph. 1:17–18). The Lord sets right twisted views of God, his Word, and world. He punctures inflated opinions of self. Reasons to disbelieve or disobey are overcome. To be certain,

> We do not know anything perfectly, nor can we see as God sees, perceiving everything fully and clearly. . . . But we are getting to know Christ and his truth, better and better. And that is more than those in this world can ever claim, offer, or know—unless the Lord of the heart opens their eyes. (63)

The Heart Loving

Next comes the critical matter of desires (the heart loving). Mature believers know that the heart, with its desires and affections, is the great battlefield upon which the struggle for holiness is fiercely fought. Whether born again or not, "what the heart enjoys is what the heart will explore" (47). What sinners need and find in Jesus is the priest who redeems "from sin's condemning power and corrupting power," and who "now continues to purify [the heart] from sin's residual power" (96). By his Word and Spirit, Christ enables believers "more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness" (WSC, 35).

Many Christians struggle mightily—as they should—to put to death sinful desires. But mortification is only half the struggle. Ungodly desires must be replaced with godly ones. Love of the world must give way to love of God and his kingdom. Holy virtues must be cultivated with diligence.

The Heart Choosing

Section three, with its study of the will (the heart choosing), completes the author's exposition. As Sovereign King, the Lord Jesus delivers the proud and defiant heart from its bondage to sin and renews the will. Sinners are enabled to receive Jesus Christ, offered to them in the gospel, and are strengthened in the inner man to follow him in obedience. Terms that many modern Christians buried long ago—submission, self-denial, self-control, and self-discipline—are unearthed and given both their appropriate prominence and urgency. Christ's renewal of the believer's will is a foretaste of heaven,

> for the day will come when Christ will return and bring us into our Father's heavenly presence. It is there, in that state of glory, that the will of every Christian will be "made perfectly and immutably free to good alone." It will be a

life of glorious and sinless fellowship with God and one another. (149–50, citing WCF 9.5)

Keeping the Heart

With All Your Heart concludes with an eminently practical section on keeping the heart. Three organs—the eyes, the ears, and the mouth—demand our utmost attention. The author identifies the eyes and ears as the heart's gatekeepers. Through them pass the impressions of the world around us. With the eyes we can observe what is beautiful, noble, and godly. We can also fix them on what defiles both body and soul. With the ears we can hear the word of God and speech that edifies. They can also be open and welcoming to degrading language.

The author's comments on media are timely:

> Ongoing vigilance is absolutely required. There is no escape from all the media by which the temptations of the world find their way into our hearts. There is also no escape from the ready alliance between the world's attractions and the sin in our hearts. . . . What we take to heart will, in large measure, come down to how well our gatekeepers do their job. (178)

The eyes and ears are sentinels. Train them to do their duty!

If the eyes and ears guard the heart, the mouth is "the ambassador of the heart" (179). It broadcasts the heart's condition, and a believer will monitor it carefully. When words reveal the sinfulness of the heart, an opportunity presents itself to the believer: first, to repent, and then to walk in renewed obedience to the Lord.

I enthusiastically recommend this book. Life presses upon us its urgent concerns, fierce temptations, and harsh setbacks. The succession of trials is never-ending. In the midst of all the tumult, we dare not neglect the heart—which is why Troxel will not let us forget that "as goes the heart, so goes the man" (20). Failure to tend to the heart leads to ruin. But joys forever belong to those who trust in their Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our prophet, priest, and king.

To a previous generation, J. C. Ryle wrote, "There is nothing in your heart that the Lord Jesus cannot make right" (103). The author shares Ryle's commendable and biblical confidence. To be sure, there are no quick fixes: no instantaneous paths to triumph that put us beyond the reach of sin and temptation. But the Lord Jesus, who desires our holiness more than we do, will never abandon us or cease his work in us. The good work begun in us now will be brought to completion in the age to come (Phil. 1:6).

If you long to love your Lord with all your heart, then you will treasure this book. ©

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The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays, *Edited by Carole Vanderhoof*

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By David J. Koenig

The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays, Edited by Carole Vanderhoof. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2018, xx + 241 pages, $18.00, paper.

"The variety of Dorothy Sayers's work makes it almost impossible to find anyone who can deal properly with it all" (226). So says C.S. Lewis in his *Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers* (226–31).[2] These days the danger seems to be that we neglect the great variety of Sayers's work. Sayers is most well-known for the creation of the memorable gentleman-detective Lord Peter Wimsey, but it would be a mistake to suppose that that is all she wrote worth reading.

From the very beginning of her life it seemed that the word-loving Sayers was meant to be a writer, an idea that she doggedly held onto and that helps to explain the diversity of her work. Words and writing were always at the center of Sayers's life. Even one of her earliest jobs as an advertising copywriter produced the well-known Guinness tagline "My goodness, My Guinness!" The time between the world wars was a golden age of detective fiction in Great Britain, and her detective novels met with quick success, which would allow her the financial security to pursue writing for the rest of her life. Detective novels, however, were only the beginning of Sayers's career, and not surprisingly she left off writing them early in her career and never returned, moving onto what many would consider more rigorous literary endeavors. It is here that Sayers began to delve into more theological themes in her work. The daughter of an Anglican rector, Sayers was, as were so many well-known writers of the day, a high church Anglican. Her popular essays on Christianity also met with success and opened even more doors for her to pursue writing.

Early in her life she bore a child out of wedlock, which fact she kept secret for most of her life, and possibly the fear of this being exposed caused her to shy away from the public eye to a surprising degree. Sayers died of a heart attack in 1957 as she was beginning work on the second volume of her well-regarded translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Sayers's lifelong fascination with Dante pervades her work and sparked a love of all things medieval, taking shape in a lecture that became one of the major beginnings of the Classical Education movement, another accomplishment for which she is noted today.

The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers, the first in Plough Publishing's Gospel in Great Writers series, brings together selections from Sayers's detective stories, plays, cultural criticism, and other genres she worked in. The structure is simple: the editor Carole Vanderhoof opens the book with a brief introduction and biographical sketch; the book then moves into topical chapters, which deal with specific themes, usually opened by a section from one of her mysteries then moving deeper into her other works; the book concludes with Lewis's panegyric.

The book offers a wealth of memorable quotations. For instance, in speaking of covetousness:

> It was left to the present age to endow covetousness with glamor on a big scale, and to give it a title which it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, covetousness has gone forward and never looked

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=859.

2 C. S. Lewis, "A Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 91–95.

> back. It has become a swaggering, swashbuckling, piratical sin, going about with pistols tucked into the tops of its jackboots. (27)

Or concerning work, the book includes "Work is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one does to do" (146).

There is also a particularly vicious attack on advertising that is as accurate as it is incisive (in "Murder Must Advertise," 83–93), not to mention an excellent essay on feminism, "Are Women Human?" (153–64), which is worth the price of the book. Considering these topics, you might get the feeling that titling the book *The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers* is a bit of a misnomer, and you would be correct. While there are chapters in the book on Gospel themes such as "Sin and Grace" and "The Cross," the topics wander far and wide, taking on ethics as well as social issues. While the selections from articles and nonfiction works are very much worth reading, the novels are still the stars, a fact reflected by the editor in the pride of place they are given in each chapter.

The mystery story is a genre that we all too quickly dismiss today as mere "commercial fiction." There is often a truth to that, but at the same time the mystery story gives a latitude to explore themes that might not otherwise present themselves in other genres, a point that Sayers's work seems to prove. One of the strong points of this book is that these are highlighted. An example would be the very first selection in the book (1–14) taken from Sayers's first Lord Peter Wimsey novel, *Whose Body?* In this brief section, amateur detective Peter Wimsey, in a conversation with his professional detective friend Inspector Parker, discusses whether or not it is right to enjoy the work of the detective as it is so intrinsically bound up with the world's evil (1). This is an excellent example of Sayers's integration of theological themes into a very entertaining story.

There are strengths and weaknesses connected with any anthology, and they are all present here. As a rule, I find literary anthologies leave much to be desired. The strength of good writing lies as much in context and a well-constructed story or essay as it does in a good turn of phrase or clear thought. Anthologies naturally, by cutting up an author's work, focus on the latter at the expense of the former. That being said, this particular book offers an excellent introduction to the breadth and scope of Sayers's work and very much whets the appetite for more.

However, in the area of Sayers's novels, this book is at its weakest. As one who has read these novels in their entirety, I can readily say that the sections chosen by the editor are not the only parts of these novels that take on major literary and theological themes, nor are they always the best. For instance, in her novel *Clouds of Witness* (New York: Avon,1927) there is a major undercurrent on the self-isolation of people even within their own families that would be entirely missed if only an individual chapter is used. Furthermore, as most detective novelists do, Sayers is constantly taking on themes of justice and how it is administered, which are both searching and poignant, such as in the conclusion of her *Busman's Honeymoon* (217–25). This most famous passage of her detective stories is rightly included in this anthology, but disconnected from the story it seemed almost robbed of its power.

The key is to realize that this book is meant to be an introduction to Sayers and her work. Keeping this in mind, a reader can say it does that job admirably. It is to be hoped that the book serves to introduce contemporary readers to the wealth that Sayers's writings still have to offer. Ⓢ

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Synopsis of a Purer Theology

by Polyander, et al., edited by Antonius Walaeus, translated by Riemer A. Faber, volume 3

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By Ryan M. McGraw

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (*Synopsis of a Purer Theology*), by Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Thysius, and Antonius Walaeus, eds. Harm Gorris, trans. Riemer A. Faber, vol. 3 of 3. Leiden: Brill, 2020, 716 pages, $113.00.

Reading primary sources is important. Doing so helps us understand what people thought in their own times and in their own words. People in Reformed churches and ministry today can use classic texts as a sounding board for comparing and contrasting the debates of our times with past reflections on Scripture that reflected different debates from other times. Older texts can also help us reflect on our confessional tradition to understand better the context in which the authors of our confessions and catechisms wrote. This is the third and final volume in the so-called Leiden Synopsis, which represented a series of academic disputations, partly contrasting post-Synod of Dort Reformed orthodoxy with the Arminian theological system. The international team of authors sought to set forth a theological textbook that summarized a Reformed consensus against opposing viewpoints after Leiden University had dismissed all of their Arminian faculty members. Once a standard Reformed textbook, the *Synopsis* has long been inaccessible to readers without knowledge of Latin. This volume completes the translation of the *Synopsis* into English. Serving as a superb compendium of historic Reformed thinking, the Leiden Synopsis will help contemporary readers go back to the sources of the mature period of Reformed orthodoxy.

Covering the topics of the sacraments, church discipline, civil authority, and the last things, volume three of the *Synopsis* treats up-to-date theological questions from that time that remain relevant today. The substantial eighty-page introduction is a significant piece of robust historical theology in its own right, serving as an invitation to and analysis of the history and text of all three volumes of the *Synopsis*. Like the first two volumes in the series, the English translation is solid and readable. The inclusion of the Latin text, explanatory notes, a glossary of terms, and historical introduction make this volume a vital text for understanding high orthodox Reformed theology in its own context and on its own terms. Nearly half of the volume is devoted to the sacraments, which continue to serve as a litmus test of the strength or weakness of a theological system by bringing other *loci* to practical resolution. Disputations 48–50, which examine church discipline, councils, and the civil magistrate, augment and complete the material on the church and its government in the preceding volume. The author's assumptions about the necessary relationship between the civil magistrate and the church, especially church councils, will likely surprise some modern readers. This fact reveals how different the world in which we live is from the one in which the *Synopsis* appeared. Disputations 51–52 treat the last things by starting with the resurrection as the goal of all things and then concluding with the eternal states of the righteous and the wicked.

As with the preceding volumes, sometimes omissions are surprising. For instance, there is very little development of arguments in favor of infant baptism, though the authors both assert and regulate the practice in disputations 44–45. Such omissions are due partly to the fact that pressing controversies tended to dictate content. Other sections are underdeveloped as a result,

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=860.

such as Walaeus's brief treatment of the renovation of the earth in glory in which he bypasses the standard question at the time of the role that the earth would play in the eternal state (623). On the other hand, Disputation 45 on the Lord's Supper (172–253) occupies a disproportionate amount of space, offering a robust treatment of the subject from a Reformed perspective against many opposing views. Likewise, many readers will wish for more explanation of the Christological view of the beatific vision through which Christ will reveal the divine nature most fully through the instrument of his human nature (587). Though the treatment of such topics is often uneven, the general explanation of theological topics is well-proportioned and even includes interspersed practical uses of most of the doctrines examined.

The *Synopsis Purioris* is an essential text for anyone interested in classic Reformed thought. Readers with facility in the Latin language will find these volumes even more useful and enlightening. The scholastic distinctions and definitions that characterize the work make the material clear and easy to follow, with the occasional help of the editor's footnotes. This is an ideal entrance point to reading primary sources related to the historic Reformed theological system that will continue to help readers reflect well on theological topics biblically, clearly, and practically. ©

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Servant

Reading *Review Articles*

Presbyterianism's Unusual Origins

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2020[1]

by Darryl G. Hart

Hot Protestants: A History of Puritanism in England and America, Michael P. Winship. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, xiii + 351 pages, $28.00.

"Puritanism" is a word that has almost as many associations as "evangelicalism." Likewise, Presbyterians in the United States have an awkward relationship with Puritanism if only because of the institutions that grew from it in North America. Although Puritanism as a reform movement in the Church of England could take Congregational, Presbyterian, or even moderate episcopal forms, in the United States the reformist English Protestantism that took root in New England left Congregationalism and the United Church of Christ (UCC) as its denominational legacy. Once someone mentions the UCC (also known as Unitarians Considering Christ), conservative Presbyterians generally head for the doors. Indeed, ever since the 1801 Plan of Union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists to cooperate in planting churches in the Northwest Territory (which eventually became Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin), relations between the two denominations have been rocky. In 1837, Old School Presbyterians not only broke with their New School siblings, but they did so because of the infectious doctrines oozing into Presbyterian institutions thanks to New England theology taught at Yale Divinity School (for starters).

Thus, there are two roads—Presbyterian and Congregational—that American descendants of British Protestantism have traveled since the United States' founding. Michael Winship's brilliant and original book *Hot Protestants* shows that from 1540 to 1700 relations between Presbyterians and Congregationalists were anything but smooth or straightforward.

Although contemporary conservative Presbyterians tend to look to Puritan sermons and devotional literature for instruction and inspiration, they rarely do so with an eye for historical context or ecclesiastical consequences. Puritanism as a form of Protestant devotion was the English-speaking equivalent of Pietism. It featured intense spiritual experiences, from conversion to daily Bible-reading, prayer, introspection, and more. Puritanism more narrowly was an effort, sometimes better organized than others, to carry out reform of the Church of England. Originally it grew from frustration with what Queen Elizabeth and her advisors would allow. Often, the Puritan's inspiration for further reform were the Reformed churches of Geneva and Zurich. Many English and Scottish Protestants experienced this firsthand while in exile, especially during Queen Mary Tudor's reign (1553–1558) as well as that of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–1567). The Stuart monarchy after Elizabeth only frustrated Puritans more. The Stuarts' Scottish lineage gave Puritans additional political levers for pursuing ecclesiastical reformation thanks to alliances between the English and the Scots under a single crown. It was a very rough ride, and Winship's book captures in wonderful and dramatic detail the difficult road that Puritanism traveled.

His story begins with John Hooper, a Cister-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=793.

cian monk at Cleeve Abbey, who converted to Protestantism around 1540 after reading tracts written by Reformed pastors from Zurich. Under Henry VIII's reign and repression of some reformers, Hooper left England and settled in Zurich. When he returned to England, now under Edward VI, Hooper became a popular London preacher, known for his condemnation of England's national sins. He also objected to the practices of wearing vestments and kneeling for the Lord's Supper—hallmark offenses for hot Protestants. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, appointed Hooper to the bishopric of Gloucester, but the former monk refused to wear vestments for the ceremony and went to prison for his convictions. Under threat of execution, Hooper relented and became Gloucester's bishop.

About midway through the book is another episode involving the Presbyterian Christopher Love. (He was Presbyterian by conviction since the Church of England was still Episcopalian.) Love preached as a chaplain in 1645 to Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army and proclaimed the Lord's blessing on the military's recent victory in a battle against Charles I's soldiers. But Cromwell's military success proved costly for Presbyterians like Love. The New Model Army was home to Baptists, Independents, and Congregationalists. It reflected the sort of religious diversity that prevailed during the Commonwealth era (1649–60), a pluralism that Presbyterians opposed. As Cromwell gained more power, Presbyterians lost their standing and were forced to meet surreptitiously. After the execution of the king, Cromwell's government imprisoned Love for maintaining ties with Scots and seeking to hold England to the Solemn League and Covenant. For these treasonous acts, Love was beheaded.

These stories capture the flavor of Winship's book—a series of episodes that reveal larger historical developments—and Love's experience, in particular, underscores the inability of British Protestants to agree. All Puritans sought a reform of the Church of England that resembled the Reformed churches of Switzerland, not because John Calvin or Heinrich Bullinger were international Protestant celebrities but because the Swiss had done the most to remove Roman Catholic elements from church practices. Even more, through Presbyterian polity they had implemented oversight of church members that encouraged holiness. The Swiss Reformation represented the reform of both institutions and individuals. But the best path to implementing those ideals in England and Scotland was by no means clear. Presbyterians favored church polity that removed power from bishops and dispersed it to pastors and elders, who could oversee congregational life according to biblical norms. Presbyterians also favored a national church. Congregationalists, in contrast, favored covenanted congregations, comprised of believers who could give evidence of their conversion experience. They also opposed a national church and favored religious freedom, which explains the religious diversity in Cromwell's army.

From the beginning to the end of the seventeenth century, Presbyterians and Congregationalists usually found themselves at loggerheads not only about church reform, but also about national politics. For Presbyterians, the Scots' condition for joining the English parliament against Charles I, the Solemn League and Covenant, was the proverbial North Star. They hoped the Stuart monarchs would uphold their earlier vows to maintain and defend the true religion, first in Scotland and then in the Three Kingdoms (England, Scotland, and Ireland). As such, Presbyterians tended to be royalists while Congregationalists could wander into republicanism. New England's state churches were another variation on Puritan religious and political policy. One of the great strengths of Winship's book is to tell the story of Puritanism on both sides of the Atlantic.

Hot Protestants also excels for putting British church-state relations into the context of early modern Britain's tumultuous relations between crown and parliament. As much as contemporary Presbyterians debate two kingdoms, theonomy, or transformationalism, Protestants in the seventeenth century had access to political power and needed to make difficult choices for accomplishing reformation. Here the differences between Scotland

and England are important since the Church of Scotland had achieved a measure of reformation, even back to the reign of James VI (then James I of England). The Second Book of Discipline (1578) gave the Scottish church many of the features of Presbyterian government. This was not true for England until Parliament, with the assistance of the Westminster Assembly, began to consider forming a Presbyterian Church of England. The political alliance with the Scots and the ratification of the Solemn League and Covenant gave additional appeal to Presbyterianism. But because of the diversity of English Puritans, and the appeal of Congregationalism and Independency to many, Presbyterianism never bore fruit in the form of an English national church.

In fact, the Civil War of the 1640s, the emergence of Oliver Cromwell, and the creation of the Commonwealth, insured that Presbyterianism in England remained a minority position. Meanwhile, from 1650 until the Glorious Revolution (1688–1689), which relieved England and Scotland of the Stuarts and placed William and Mary on the throne, Presbyterians and Congregationalists vied for influence with kings, Parliament, and even bishops. Those political battles even took a toll on New England Puritanism, such that the royal charter (1692) that Massachusetts received from William and Mary, according to Winship, signaled the death of Puritan hopes for a godly commonwealth where church and magistrate closely cooperated. (Winship observes that Puritanism's defeat was also a factor in the witch trials that afflicted Massachusetts towns in the 1690s.) The result of almost 150 years of hopes for and attempts at reform left Puritans far from what they had once envisioned. Presbyterianism prevailed in Scotland but lacked the vigor that earlier reformers had wanted.

How these alliances, controversies, and political schemes played out in the North American colonies and eventually in the United States are well beyond Winship's account. At the same time, Winship's book is essential reading for any Presbyterian curious about British antecedents to the rise and development of the church polity that American Presbyterians take for granted and that was implemented in America without any of the fanfare of civil war or regicide. Even better, *Hot Protestants* is a book that readers will not be able to put down. ©

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Divine Justice, Sinful Humanity, and Eschatological Judgment: Considering David Bentley Hart's Argument against Hell

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant February 2020[1]

by David VanDrunen

That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation, by David Bentley Hart. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019, 232 pages, $26.00.

Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved* is not the kind of book a person can read lightly, or soon forget. In part, this is due to the book's thesis that all human beings who have ever lived will in fact be saved, and thus that there is no everlasting punishment in hell. But it is also due to the stridency with which

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=800.

Hart argues his case: he claims repeatedly that the traditional Christian doctrine of hell is absurd and repulsive. And it is partly due Hart's flamboyant writing style and his penchant for insulting those who disagree with him. Many books fail to get their readers' attention; this is not one of them.

The book is organized simply. Part 1 frames the book's question and casts doubt on the answers provided by proponents of the traditional doctrine. Part II consists of four "Meditations" in which Hart lays out his arguments for universalism. Part III provides a brief conclusion.

Hart does not advance a single argument that develops linearly through the book. Thus, I will not provide a chapter-by-chapter description of what he claims and then move on to evaluate his case. I think it best, instead, to identify three kinds of argument he uses and to offer some analysis along the way.

The Argument from Intuition

The first kind of argument is one of intuition, or perhaps, disgust. Hart begins Part I by recounting his experience as a fourteen-year-old when he read an old legend about hell and shortly thereafter, by coincidence, heard a sermon that referred to this legend. His initial reaction to the story was "a slight shiver of distaste" (12), and he says he has never really wavered from that intuition. He later describes himself as an "instinctive universalist" (65) and writes: "The whole question of hell is one whose answer should be immediately obvious to a properly functioning moral intelligence" (29).

Technically, I suppose, this is not an "argument." But it plays a role in Hart's case. Hart is convinced that the idea of an everlasting hell does not and should not sit well with a normal person. Revulsion is the natural and proper gut-reaction to the traditional doctrine of hell.

I am not so sure that every normal person feels such instinctive revulsion. I suspect that those who have suffered terrible wrongs in this life may have rather different instincts from those of us who enjoy relatively comfortable lives. Nevertheless, Hart has a point. Most serious Christians probably have, on some occasions, been troubled by the thought of an everlasting hell, perhaps when contemplating a loved one who died without professing Christ. Every autumn, I teach a course in which I lecture on hell on the last day of the semester. I never relish getting to this topic. It is my least favorite part of Christian doctrine to teach.

And yet we always need to test our intuitions. Sometimes our gut reactions are profoundly correct, but we sinners dare not trust them. And a moment's thought reminds us why our gut reactions about hell might be particularly suspect: why *wouldn't* a sinner feel revulsion at the claim that sinners deserve everlasting punishment? Wouldn't a chain-smoker experience "a slight shiver of distaste" upon hearing that cigarettes cause emphysema? Learning that something we love has profoundly bad consequences is never likely to make us comfortable.

Hart would surely not disagree that our instincts need to be tested, and he offers arguments meant to confirm our allegedly normal intuitions. Let us now consider them.

The Metaphysical Argument

What I call Hart's "metaphysical argument" is the core of his case. As explained below, this argument is much more important to Hart than his argument from Scripture. He spends his greatest effort explaining and defending a metaphysics (i.e., a philosophical theory of existence, causation, the good, and the divine). In this metaphysics, it is simply incredible—that is, not able to be believed—that God would punish anyone in an everlasting hell.

"The actual question," according to Hart, is whether it is possible to love a God who has made a world in which everlasting hell is even a possibility (12–13). The "primary question" concerns whether the God who could create such a world "can in fact be the infinitely good God of love that Christianity says he is" (17). Hart answers a resounding no to both questions. "If Christianity taken as a whole is indeed an entirely coherent and credible system of belief, then the universalist

understanding of its message is the only one possible" (3).

One line of his metaphysical argument, found primarily in his First Meditation, concerns the nature of God. Hart argues that if we say God created all things *ex nihilo*, then at the end of history every created thing must be reconciled to God in perfect blessedness and nothing can be left behind. Were this not the case, evil would be part of God's intentions and dispositions, in which case God would not be the good as such. It is metaphysically impossible, in other words, to believe in an everlasting hell once we affirm (with traditional Christianity) that God is both the good itself and creator *ex nihilo*. According to Hart, this also implies that God does not condemn people to hell "solely as a demonstration of his power to do as he wishes," as proponents of double predestination claim, such as classical Thomists and (most consistently) Calvin (47–48).

A second line of Hart's metaphysical argument, contained primarily in his Third Meditation, focuses on what it means to be a human person. He appeals especially to the Eastern church father Gregory of Nyssa. Hart concludes that we cannot be saved as persons unless we are saved with all other persons. All must be saved, or no one is saved. Hart appeals to the continuity between our identity in this life and our identity in the life to come. If we have loved people in this world, we cannot simply forget about them in the next world, and thus we cannot be truly blessed if we know that some of them are in hell. In fact, to know that any other human person is in hell would leave us unsatisfied with heaven.

A third and final line of Hart's metaphysical argument, enshrined especially in his Fourth Meditation, concerns the rational will. Hart claims that every rational will *must* eventually exhaust the possibilities of rebellion against God and choose him as its ultimate good. According to Hart, this answers today's most popular (and benevolent) argument for an everlasting hell, namely, that God respects the rational freedom of his creatures so much that he allows them to resist him permanently. In such a scenario, everlasting hell is what rational creatures themselves freely choose. For Hart, "there could scarcely be a worse defense" of everlasting hell. "It makes no sense whatsoever" (34).

Why does it make no sense? Hart agrees that God made rational creatures to love him freely, but he denies that rational creatures who are *truly* free could reject God. People reject God here and now, indeed, but they do so because of ignorance, bad influences, or some other hindrance. There is no true freedom in this life. Mitigating circumstances always exist. And if those who reject God in this life do so without true freedom, then God would be unjust to punish them everlastingly. The punishment would be disproportionate to the wrong. Without unlimited freedom, there is no unlimited guilt. Conversely, a person is only truly free when he chooses well and thus chooses the good for which he was created. Jesus himself was a truly free person and was unable not to choose the good. For Hart, evil is nothing but the privation of the good, and thus has no power or substance to attract the free, rational person. Even if it takes countless ages after their death, all rational persons eventually must recognize God as the good and give up all attraction to evil.

One other aspect of Hart's metaphysical discussions is worth mentioning. He notes that many Christians, when trying to explain how a perfectly good and omnipotent God could create a universe that contains hell, appeal to the inevitable limitations of human knowledge when contemplating a transcendent and incomprehensible God. Hart dismisses such appeals as "a dissembling euphemism for the unresolved logical contradictions in their own systems of belief" (56). Affirming universalism is the only logically coherent route.

What to make of Hart's metaphysical claims? One remarkable thing is how utterly confident he is in his conclusions. He says he is just following standard Christian metaphysical ideas, and in a sense this is true. To the extent there is a Christian metaphysics, it must acknowledge God as the good itself, as the omnipotent first cause, and the like. And yet, with very few exceptions, no Christian theologian has thought that these ideas

make the reality of everlasting hell *impossible*. Hart finds allies in Origin (!), Gregory of Nyssa, and a handful of obscure Eastern Orthodox theologians, while defying the diverse host of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox theologians who have professed the absolute goodness of God while also affirming everlasting hell as a necessary Christian doctrine. If universalism is as perfectly clear and logically compelling as Hart indicates, it is amazing that so very few have recognized it.

How did this happen? Hart suggests that Christians embraced illogical notions and composed bad arguments for hell because this is the sort of thing that happens when people think they have to believe something that's false and then try to justify it. Hart has his finger on something important here. Christians have indeed felt obligated to believe in an everlasting hell, due to what Scripture teaches and the church confesses about it. This in turn has provoked some Christians to offer intellectual rationales (some better, some worse) seeking to explain how a perfectly good and sovereign God could will such a hell. It has also inspired many Christians to recognize the limits of their finite knowledge and to acknowledge that we may not be able to construct a philosophically comprehensive solution to the problem of evil.

The order of thought is important: Christians have believed in an everlasting hell because of the testimony of divine revelation and then have tried to explain it metaphysically as best as they can. In contrast, Hart believes there is no fully satisfying metaphysical explanation for an everlasting hell, and *therefore* he rejects the traditional Christian doctrine. For Hart, the metaphysics comes first. The Christian faith he professes depends upon that.

Perhaps that sounds unfair, but Hart confirms such suspicions in the book's remarkable final paragraph. He notes that people ask him whether he would reject Christianity if he became convinced that Christianity required him to believe in an everlasting hell. Without hesitation, he says yes, that is the case. He will not "assent to a picture of reality that I regard as morally corrupt, contrary to justice, perverse, inexcusably cruel, deeply irrational, and essentially wicked" (208). He concludes by stating: "In the end, we must love the Good" (209). The *Good*, not the Christian God. He does think he loves the Christian God, but only because this God fits his metaphysical conception of the good.

The Biblical Argument

Hart gives some attention to Scripture, especially in his Second Meditation. As he says, somewhat humorously (at least to me), he is not "so recklessly speculative as to imagine that Christians are allowed to make any theological pronouncements in total abstraction from or contradiction of scripture" (92). He seems to know that he is recklessly speculative, but not *that* much.

Even so, Hart's view of biblical authority is rather weak. He does not think "the testimony of the Bible on doctrinal and theological matters must be wholly internally consistent" (92). Later, he says that Scripture is not a "system" of truth. Its texts "defy synthesis in a canon of exact doctrines" (161). How then does one know what parts of Scripture to heed? The answer, apparently, is that he grants "a certain presumptive authority . . . to whatever kind of language the Bible uses most preponderantly" (93).

One notices up front, therefore, that Hart has left himself some significant leeway. Even if *some* biblical texts teach the existence of an everlasting hell, it would not disprove his case. As long as he has a preponderance of biblical evidence on his side, his claims are secure. But despite this room to maneuver, Hart does not concede a single text to his opponents. Instead, he claims to recover the thought-world of Scripture and early Christianity, which has been "corrupted by centuries of theology written in entirely different spiritual and intellectual environments, and in alien tongues" (2). Readers familiar with the classical liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) may sense a resemblance between Hart's quest and Harnack's program of recovering the kernel of Jesus's teaching by stripping away the husk of centuries of theological accretions.

Early on, Hart summarizes "the story of salvation" as he understands it, as taught by "the earliest and greatest of the church fathers." We were all born corrupted, mortal, and in bondage to Satan, although "not guilty and damnable," and Christ came "to set us free, to buy us out of slavery, to heal us, to restore us to our true estate," but not to shed his "innocent blood . . . to assuage God's indignation" (26–27). These are familiar themes in Eastern Orthodox theology. Elsewhere, Hart summarizes his understanding of New Testament eschatology, which he draws especially from Origin and Gregory of Nyssa: The New Testament speaks of both the punishment of the ungodly and the final reconciliation of all, but these are not "two antithetical possibilities tantalizingly or menacingly dangled before us, but rather two different moments within a seamless narrative, two distinct eschatological horizons, one enclosed within the other." In short, God's (corrective) punishment of the ungodly occurs within the "immanent course of history" while the reconciliation of all occurs at the "final horizon of all horizons" (102–103). For Hart, the "course of history" continues (at least for many) far beyond death. They may require a long duration of chastisement and persuasion. But in the end, all will be saved. What about texts that seem to describe an everlasting hell? Hart says that all of them use metaphorical images and should not be taken as "exact documentary portraits of some final reality" (94–95).

To make his case, Hart follows a twofold strategy. First, he simply quotes one New Testament text after another that speaks about the salvation of "all" or "the world," but without actually exegeting the texts (95–102). (Later, he does comment on Romans 9–11 at some length, arguing that Paul clearly teaches universalism and only considers individual election and reprobation as a bleak hypothesis that he rejects [132–138].) He claims that those who qualify any of these "all" texts are explaining away the obvious.

Then, second, Hart discusses a number of New Testament texts that seem to speak about hell or everlasting punishment and explains why they do not teach this. He basically dismisses evidence from Revelation, which he does not think is a book about eschatology, but rather "a manifesto written in figurative code by a Jewish Christian who believed in keeping the Law of Moses" and who predicted "the inauguration of a new historical epoch in which Rome will have fallen, Jerusalem will have been restored, and the Messiah will have been given power 'to rule the gentiles with a rod of iron.'" Revelation "is all a religious and political fable" (107–8). Well, so much for that. Hart takes evidence from the Gospels more seriously. But New Testament language about "the fate of the derelict . . . could scarcely be more evocatively vague" (112). The Gospels use various terms commonly translated "hell," yet we cannot be certain what any of them really meant to convey. And the Greek term usually translated "everlasting" or "eternal" (*aiṓnios* αἰώνιος) probably does not mean either one. To whatever extent Scripture does teach some sort of judgment by fire, it refers only to the purgatorial correction of the wicked, to lead them toward their final reconciliation with God.

It is difficult to believe that Hart's biblical arguments will persuade many people. He heaps up quotations of texts saying that God will save "all," but those texts are not news to anybody. As Reformed writers especially have long noted, every affirmation of "all" comes in a context. If we read texts with even a little care, we recognize that "all" often does not mean every person who ever lived, but "all" those in a certain group or class. Just this morning, I happened to be reading Daniel 2. Daniel says that God had given into Nebuchadnezzar's hand "the children of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them *all*" (2:38). The Babylonian empire was impressive, but Nebuchadnezzar did not rule over every single person, animal, and bird who ever lived, or even over all those that lived in his own day. We have to read each "all" statement in its own context. Piling up quotations proves nothing. It is interesting that Hart excoriates those who change the meaning of "all" within a single verse, Romans 5:18. Yet he does virtually the same thing with the verse from which he derives his book's title, 1 Timothy 2:4. Just before Paul states that God

desires "all" people to be saved, he commands Christians to pray for "all" people (2:1)—clearly not a command to pray for each and every person who has ever lived. Competent Reformed writers have dealt with all the texts that Hart quotes, and I will say nothing more about them here.

There are a great many other things one might say in response to Hart's treatment of Scripture. We may grant that *aiōnios* (αἰώνιος or the Hebrew *olam* עוֹלָם) does not always mean "everlasting," and yet the biblical writers use the same terms to describe *both* the blessedness of the righteous *and* the desolation of the wicked (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46). Hart's theory demands the ultimate redemption of Satan, yet Revelation says God will throw him into the lake of fire "for ever and ever" (or, "unto the ages of the ages," as Hart might prefer, but it hardly changes the meaning) (20:10). And all human beings whose names are not written in the book of life will join Satan there (20:15). Are the names of some people who will eventually be saved really absent from the book of life?

And as for texts Hart does not consider at all, we might think of Jesus's response to the question whether few will be saved: he urges them to enter through the narrow door, since many will seek to do so and be unable, but be cast out of his kingdom (Luke 13:22–30). Jesus also said that it would have been better for Judas not to have been born (Matt. 26:24), which makes no sense if Judas will one day enjoy eschatological blessedness. Or we might think of the urgency of the gospel call. In 2 Corinthians 6:1–2, Paul *implores* his readers to be reconciled to God because *now* is the day of salvation. For Hart, the day of salvation will go on for as long as necessary for everyone to repent. But of course, Hart's vision of repentance through countless ages after death is totally absent from Scripture. For Scripture, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

The Justice of God

Despite Hart's protests, therefore, Christians are obligated to believe in an everlasting hell. But this review does not seem complete without offering a brief word in response to Hart's metaphysical arguments. I cannot address all of his claims, so I focus on one of the most important: Is God unjust to punish people in an everlasting hell? Another way to put the question is whether sins committed within our present history truly deserve an eschatological penalty.

If they do, our sins must be utterly heinous. A few of Hart's comments indicate that he does not think this is true of many sins, at least. For instance, he embraces the view that Adam and Eve sinned in "childlike ignorance" (43) and later refers to "the most trivial peccadillo, the pettiest lapse of plain morality" (132). Yet what seems trivial to us is ultimately an offense against *God*. Hart lambastes the argument that we should measure the seriousness of sin not according to our own finiteness but according to God's infinite character. However, this argument cannot be dismissed so easily. Surely, we all recognize that a particular sinful action is more wicked when committed against a person of greater honor (as recognized in Westminster Larger Catechism 151). It is more heinous for a child to insult his parents than to insult his playmates. But to offend God (as all our sins do) is infinitely more heinous, since God's honor is infinitely greater than that of the most honorable human being. This implies that the just penalty for our sins is literally beyond our ability to measure. And if so, it is difficult to see how everlasting punishment is disproportionate.

We might supplement this argument with another consideration. What if God, from the beginning, held out eschatological blessedness as the goal for his human creation, as Scripture indicates (e.g., Heb 2:5–10) and as so many Reformed and other Christians have believed? Then, too, an everlasting penalty for our first parents' sin seems fitting. What could be more proportionate to rejecting eschatological blessedness than receiving an eschatological curse?

These are weighty matters. I confess that I sometimes find it hard to affirm the justice of everlasting punishment. But I also trust that when I see the splendor of heavenly glory on the last day,

without being blinded by the least sinful inkling, I will understand the gravity of human rebellion in a way I cannot now.

Concluding Reflections

There are many more things to say, but I conclude with three brief remarks. First, readers should understand just how radically Hart condemns the traditional Christian view of hell. This view represents "communal self-deception" (19) and "collective derangement" (19). It is "intrinsically loathsome and degrading" (202) and a "horrid notion" (204). Arguments in support of it are "manifestly absurd," "*prima facie* nonsensical," and "gibberish" (202). It portrays a God of "boundless cruelty" (50) and "unalloyed spite" (21). He is "viciously vindictive" and "monstrous" (166). Toward such a God one feels "a kind of remote, vacuous loathing" (23). Thus, in the name of (a tiny minority stream of) Christianity, Hart launches a scathing critique of traditional Christianity, and in so doing he arms the open opponents of Christianity with all sorts of ammunition to attack the faith.

Second, his critique of everlasting hell entails an equally strong critique of related doctrines, including predestination, original sin (particularly imputation of Adam's guilt), and substitutionary atonement. Such doctrines are "degrading nonsense" (25), "a sickly parody of the Christianity of the New Testament" (27), "repellant," and "wicked" (75). Late Augustinian theology rests on "catastrophic misreadings of scripture" and is characterized by "sheer moral wretchedness" (200). Calvinism's doctrine of limited atonement is "nauseating" (162).

Finally, Hart is an intellectual bully. He not only tries to out-argue people but also taunts and insults them. To mention just two examples, he refers to the "manifest imbecilities" of one particular group of opponents (92) and dismisses a certain writer as one who "periodically insists on perpetrating theology, always with catastrophic results" (149). It is more than a little ironic that someone who attacks the doctrine of hell (in part) in the name of love and compassion can show such arrogance and contempt for fellow professing Christians. I wonder if Yale University Press would publish a book that engaged in such ridicule against a group other than traditional Christians. ©

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Pastors Need Care, Too

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by Charles Malcolm Wingard

The Pastor's Soul: The Call and Care of an Undershepherd, by Brian Croft and Jim Savastio. Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2018, 160 pages, $11.99, paper.

The good pastor lovingly looks after God's sheep; it's his duty, and he stands accountable to the Lord for those entrusted to his care. He finds satisfaction in his work as he becomes involved in the lives of his people. At times he rejoices with them—at other times, he weeps. He instructs the disciple, admonishes the erring, comforts the suffering, counsels the perplexed, and offers gospel hope to the despairing. Since God is for his elect people, the faithful pastor is for them, too.

But even the most faithful pastor is in trouble when he forgets that he is also a sheep—a man in need of the shepherding care of God's church. Sadly, the Christian landscape is strewn with ministers whose lives are in shambles. For many, it is

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=806.

an especially painful story because it is avoidable. Because in times of adversity, temptation, and discouragement, they chose to endure the hardship alone.

The pastor's self-care begins by remembering his need: he is a sinner. Like the people he serves, he is susceptible to temptation and falling, beset by weakness, and entirely dependent upon the grace of God in Christ. Knowing this, he takes refuge in the Great Shepherd who provides pastors to care for *all* his flock, including him.

My own personal experience has taught me the danger of being a pastor without a shepherd. Every year I read one or two books aimed at strengthening the pastor's self-care. This year, I read Brian Croft and Jim Savastio's *The Pastor's Soul*, and it was especially helpful.

Throughout this fine book, I found myself nodding my head in agreement with the authors. They stick to the basics, arranging their instruction and encouragement under four headings: "Biblical Commands Concerning a Pastor" (Savastio), "Pastoral Call of a Pastor" (Croft), "Spiritual Care of a Pastor" (Savastio), and "Physical Care of a Pastor" (Croft).

Part 1 exhorts the pastor to take heed to himself, to his doctrine, and to his flock. The stakes are high: taking heed matters to God, to the pastor's conscience, to the pastor's flock, and to the world (55–59).

Despite the strong admonition, taking heed to one's self is easily pushed aside. Why? It requires effort, strenuous spiritual effort. When a man is alone and before the Lord, no crowd is watching. It is just him and the Lord—and sadly, it is easy to try and avert his gaze.

But there is another reason why taking heed is overlooked: the busyness of ministry can be used as a way to avoid personal problems (18). It is so easy for a pastor who craves appreciation to use his congregation to fulfill that desire! His very service to the congregation becomes a form of self-gratification.

But whether the lack of spiritual energy or busyness is the culprit, the outcome is predictable: relationships erode along with the moral integrity necessary for godly ministry (36–40).

The book's applications are direct. We are warned, for example, that

> little sins, which, like the little foxes of the Song of Solomon, bring about great danger. Those little foxes like an extra lingering look, that seemingly innocent flirtation, checking a woman out on social media, that niggling bitterness or perceived slight, that anger over being unrecognized and underappreciated. (39)

Through mental gymnastics, a minister may persuade himself that these are trivial sins. But make no mistake: they will pollute his soul, defile his conscience, and ruin his life and ministry. "All those who fall publicly have left off watching privately" (47).

Taking heed to the flock requires a deep affection for them. Therefore, the pastor must ask two probing questions: "Do the people to whom you minister know that they are dear to you? Have you made that obvious to them in your public and private interactions with them?" (50).

Affection matters. So does doctrine. In a time of accelerating moral decline, the warning is timely. "The Bible does not change because your son or daughter is living a certain sin. The Bible's demands for holiness are not rescinded because you yourself are failing" (44).

Part 2 sets forth the basics of a pastoral call, beginning with a review of the qualifications for elder found in 1 Timothy 3. Pastors must find the strength to minister in Christ's all-sufficient grace. That means embracing obvious, but easily forgotten realities: pastors are imperfect and physically frail. These realities are easy to acknowledge intellectually, but accepting their implications is another matter altogether. "Pastors love to declare the sinlessness of Jesus and that only Jesus is perfect, yet these same pastors are crippled by a fear of failure. Pastors are devastated because they do not measure up to the expectations they set for themselves and others set for them" (78). With

ease, pastors slip into a crushing perfectionism, placing impossibly high demands upon themselves. Many readers will identify with the author Croft's own confession: "Perfectionism has been a strength killer for years in my life. It has been so freeing in the last several years to embrace this weakness" (79). An attractive feature throughout this book is the authors' honesty.

Part 3 explores the spiritual care of the minister. Pastors are reminded that they need a pastor and church. The author calls for self-reflection when he asks: "When was the last time you received a call from a brother or from one of your elders to see how you are doing?" (92).

Pastors who minister the Word need the ministry of the Word. The reason is simple: "Shepherds are sheep first. . . . The man of God who gives the word must also be a recipient of that word. The one who serves at the table also needs the nourishment of that communion" (94).

A pastor is blessed when he sits under the preaching of the word in his own congregation. Identify other men in your church who can preach, so that you can take your place in the congregation (94). I will add that joint evening worship services with another church in my community have provided a way for me to listen to a sermon *with* my congregation.

Like all faithful disciples, pastors must diligently attend to the public means of grace—and they must attend to private means as well. Personal Bible reading and prayer are a must. The author offers practical advice on "staying warm" before the Lord. Finding helpful devotional aids, changing Bible reading plans, confessing spiritual dryness to the Lord, and simple perseverance can all be used by the Lord to rekindle a flickering devotional life. (102–4).

Part 4 addresses the often-neglected issue of the pastor's physical care. As a runner, I have been overly ambitious at the start of a race and found my energy nearly depleted by mile twenty. Fortunately, I have finished all I have started. But along the way, I have seen many give up. Marathons must be properly paced; they are not sprints.

Pastors must properly care for their bodies if they want to serve well over the long haul. Fail to take care of your body, and your body will fail you. Chapters are devoted to eating, sleeping, exercising, and resting—all of which are indispensable to the proper care for the body.

The pastor needs both friendship and silence. Ministry can be lonely, and ministers need the support of friends, both inside and outside the church. Through the years, I have heard warnings to pastors (and their wives) not to have close friends in the church. I believe this advice is misguided. The author takes time to address both the benefits and pitfalls of friendships within the church (127–28).

At a time when pastors can wake up and connect with their congregations through email and social media, there is a strong temptation to resist silence. The author acknowledges his own discomfort. Over time, he writes,

> I learned if my emotions are the gateway to my soul, then it is silence that exposes the soul. I was not ready to face the ugly things that got exposed. But God in his amazing grace met me in a sweet, powerful way and began a healing journey that has brought a consistent peace in my soul. It was through silence in a quiet place, meditating on truth, and prayerfully asking the Lord's help that I experienced this deeper level of God's grace and presence within my soul. (131–32)

During my ministry, I have received two sabbaticals, one four months, the other two. I knew at the time how rare it was for a church's leaders to make provision for a pastor's sabbatical. In two appendices (that should be read by both pastors and elders), the author explains what a sabbatical is along with its benefits. Sabbaticals are not vacations. They allow the minister to lay aside his routine pastoral duties "to grow, learn, mature and excel all the more in his ministry upon his return" (147).

Pastor, do you desire to take good care of the souls entrusted to your care? Then you must take care of your own soul, too. *The Pastor's Soul* will provide you with compassionate encouragement

and valuable counsel as you keep a close watch over yourself. ©

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Sage Advice for the New Pastor

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by Allen C. Tomlinson

Help for the New Pastor: Practical Advice for Your First Year of Ministry, by Charles Malcolm Wingard. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018, xvii + 206 pages, $14.99.

Dr. Charles Wingard is one of the most earnest and efficient pastors I have had the privilege to know. We served in the same presbytery for several years while he pastored two churches in New England. I heard him preach on several occasions, including twice to my own congregation. I can still remember his exhortation to the presbytery on 1 Timothy 2:24–26. That was many, many years ago, and I still remember his sermon, not because I have a good memory (I don't!), but because he is such a powerful preacher of the Word of God. Dr. Wingard is perhaps the most hardworking pastor I have ever known. He spoke on "pastoral visitation" to our Granite State Reformed Ministers Fellowship during that time he lived in New England. Though I had always thought of pastoral visitation as one of my strengths, Charlie's goal and practice in this area shone through his presentation making me reevaluate how efficient a job I had been doing. I do not believe I have ever known any pastor more efficient in his use of time, more energetic or more sincerely zealous for the gospel of Christ and for the church of Christ.

So, when I picked up this new book, I was both excited, because of my admiration of God's grace in Charlie's ministerial labors, but also I felt some trepidation for the sake of the young men who might read this book. With his unusual zeal, energy, earnestness and consistency in all of the above, would these new pastors feel intimidated and develop some kind of self-esteem crisis? Or, would they try to imitate this incredibly gifted, experienced, and hardworking pastor and collapse, unable to keep pace with such an "Olympian"?

My excitement was right on target, and my trepidation was wasted energy. This is a wonderful book, which I now plan to assign to any ministerial intern I have the privilege to work with. How I could have used this book for my first year, or even my first ten years in the Gospel ministry! The experienced pastor I did have as my senior pastor the first year I was in full time ministry taught me a good number of the lessons that Wingard covers in this book. However, it would have been helpful to have a written summary of these important and practical lessons, and there are some lessons in this book which I had to learn the hard way. I believe my readers know what I mean by "the hard way." By trial and error. (Often it seemed like more error than trial!) This book could have saved me, and more importantly saved my poor charges whom I was pastoring, many mistakes on my part.

When I began as an assistant pastor back in 1976 in rural Illinois, the senior pastor told me the first day, "Don't start out working so hard that you are unable to keep up such an impossible pace. Also, the people might expect you to keep working that hard always, and you might not have

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=821.

the physical or emotional strength. Work hard, but pace yourself and remember you have other obligations such as family."

Wingard does not express it the same way, but he makes the same point very forcibly. For example,

> What is inexcusable is to permit routine ministerial duties—committee meetings, pastoral visitation, administrative work, and sermon preparation—to take you away from time with your family. Schedule time to be with family, and when you are, give them your full attention. Put away the computer and the smartphone. Focus on the folks at hand—the most important sheep in the flock—your family. (174)

Not only does the book consider the family (and personal) needs of the young minister, as far as not "overbooking" one's life, but Wingard also counsels young ministers to not put unbiblical and impossible pressure on church members.

> Also, be careful not to wrongfully bind the consciences of your congregation's members, obligating them to attack social evils. When I was a boy in the rural South, it was the anti-liquor crusade. Other issues have taken its place. I have served as vice president of a crisis pregnancy center, but I do not think any believer is obligated to work in the pro-life movement or to ameliorate any of the myriad of social evils of the day. Let your members work out their commitments in these areas as they take into account their giftings, duties, and interests. For many, caring for their family, tending to their work, and attending public worship are all they can and should handle. Don't crush them with burdens they were never intended to bear. (46–47)

That is great stuff, considering the moralism and the "practical application" sermons that are heard throughout our land today, that continually place God's people under heavy burdens of which even the first century Pharisees would have been fearful. What sound advice for young ministers of the gospel!

This book begins at the beginning: your call to the ministry and understanding what that call is biblically. That is chapter one. In chapters 2–18, we have the most important areas of pastoral ministry examined. In chapters 2–4 the topics are:

- Preparing for the pulpit (chapter 2)
- Preparing and delivering the sermon (chapter 3)
- Practical advice on preaching (chapter 4)

Chapter 4 includes: length of sermon, biblical books to preach through first, the purpose of preaching, the need to love the people and not to be impatient when they need to hear the same things again and again. There is more, and all of it very helpful. We are warned to not stir up needless political or social controversy, such as on a blog or Facebook, for, "You are a pastor, not a controversialist." The topics in chapters 5–7 are:

- Leading worship (chapter 5)
- The sacraments (chapter 6)
- Church administration (chapter 7)

In chapter 7, we are warned not to underestimate the necessity of doing efficient administration, without neglecting our higher priority of proclaiming the Word. If you neglect the necessary administrative duties, they will eventually have a negative effect on your preaching and other more directly spiritual labors.

The next chapter deals with growing through conflict (chapter 8). The entire book is worth reading for just chapter 8! It took me some time before I realized how much I could grow spiritually and ministerially if I learned the lessons while going through conflicts. For me, and perhaps for most of us, conflict with the other leaders or members of the church is one of the most difficult experiences in the ministry. However, if such conflict is handled properly, i.e., biblically, we can actually grow closer to many of those with whom we have had conflict. In chapters 9–15 the topics are:

- Home visitation (chapter 9)
- Practicing hospitality (chapter 10)
- Counseling (chapter 11)

- Weddings (chapter 12)
- Hospital and hospice care (chapter13)
- Funerals (chapter 14)
- Denominational duties (chapter 15)

All these chapters give very important and practical advice for the minister to seize these opportunities (weddings, hospice care, and funerals) to minister Christ's love to his people. The pastor and people draw close to one another when we minister God's Word in such times, "striking while the iron is hot."

Wingard closes the book with important counsel for the minster's personal walk with God and faithfulness in gospel ministry. Chapters 16–18 speak to:

- The character and habits of effective ministry (chapter 16)
- Small things that yield big results (chapter 17)
- A long and fruitful ministry (chapter 18)

Think of the wise counsel given in the following quotations:

> Make sure you praise what is praiseworthy, encourage where you see evidences of grace, and speak words of compassion where needed. You want the number of these interactions to far exceed the number that are focused on controversy. (88)

> Your first church is the place to establish habits that will increase your effectiveness in lifelong service to Christ's church. Reflect on the disciplines you will need for the long haul, and make acquiring them a nonnegotiable priority. (174)

> . . . for a long and fruitful ministry, you must intercede for your congregation in your secret prayers. (183)

> The frequency and intensity of our prayers for ourselves and for our congregations are known only to us and to God. Yet I doubt there is any greater measure of ministerial godliness. If we attempt to carry on a ministry without earnestly praying for our congregations, then we will find ourselves on perilous ground. (184)

> . . . you must speak affectionately both to your congregation and about your congregation. (185)

Appendix 1 gives "Advice to Student Preachers." How should you dress for preaching? When should you arrive, how long ahead of the announced service? There are many other useful hints.

Appendix 2 is "Tips for Seeking a Pastoral Position." How should you engage with the search committee, write your resume and cover letter, and prepare for interviews.

There is so much sound and useful counsel in this book. Should you try to "resolve conflict by email or text"? How important is it to consult with your wife when you want to practice hospitality as the pastor? How should you organize your time?

My only divergence from the book, not really a disagreement, is that two of his suggestions just have not been needed or workable for me in my years in the ministry. First, there is the suggestion for a more direct involvement in the church budget. The charges I have had did not need financial expertise on my part, for there were godly accountants and others who really knew their stuff. My main job was to teach them what God's Word said about the church's purpose, and how that purpose affects our use of the church's monies; and to teach them about how and why we give as God's people. However, that is the kind of difference that might be found in our different circumstances. At a startup or a very small church, I can see the importance of what Wingard suggests.

Second, the author encourages the young pastor to join at least one or two community organizations for contact with outsiders. I agree that this is ideal. However, when I have tried it, especially where I have been ministering the last thirty-two years, I am unable to keep up with such commitments due to special needs at the church that continually arise. Again, varying circumstances, and I suggest (perhaps) varying personalities, might make a difference from one man to another.

This is an easy book to read and a very im-

portant book for its intended audience. And it is a great review of sound practices for those of us who have been preaching the gospel for a long time! I highly recommend this book. ☺

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How False Beliefs Spread

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant May 2020[1]

by T. David Gordon

The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread, by Cailin O'Connor and James Owen Weatherall. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, x + 266 pages, $26.00, paper.

As with many other books, the title is designed (often by the publisher) to attract readers, and the subtitle describes the actual content. Very little in this volume claims that the present age is uniquely misinformed; to the contrary, the authors frequently remind that a variety of economic and political agents have ordinarily misinformed the public in a variety of ways. The only thing new about the present circumstance is the sheer volume of information—of which some will always be misinformation—to which much of the public is now exposed. The bulk of the book is devoted to explaining "*How* False Beliefs Spread" (emphasis mine), with a special emphasis on the sociological factors.

> This is a book about belief. It is a book about truth and knowledge, science and evidence. But most of all, it is a book about *false* beliefs. How do we form beliefs—especially false ones? . . . To understand why false beliefs persist and spread, we need to understand where beliefs come from in the first place. (6, 7)

In this sense it joins a disturbingly large number of writings that I inelegantly refer to as "Stupid Studies," not because the studies themselves are stupid, but because there are serious studies of the related human phenomena of stupidity, gullibility, deceit, propaganda, etc.[2]

The authors are instructors of logic and the philosophy of science, at the University of California, Irvine, and their academic training suits them well for a task such as this. The book is well-documented[3] and includes many examples of misinformation from the fields of science, as well as from those of commerce and politics. Much of the interesting analysis attempts to explain what we ordinarily call "the sociology of knowledge" and how the senses of belonging and of sympathy (or non-belonging and antipathy) shape our senses of credibility and trustworthiness (cf. especially chapter 2, "Polarization and Conformity").

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=824.

2 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1922); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Psuedo-Events in America* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport, 1961); Peter L. Berger with Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1966); Farhad Manjoo, *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2008); Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Ori and Rom Brafman, *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010* (New York: Crown, 2013); and Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Currency, 2017).

3 The book has fifty-one pages of bibliography, and twenty-six pages of endnotes, the latter of which places the reader in the awkward position of constantly flipping back and forth through two books, just to determine whether it is necessary to do so (whether the notes are merely bibliographic or also rhetorical/argumentative). We would benefit from a serious movement among authors and publishers to end this practice and to restore all notes to the foot of the page where they belong. If non-readers find this "distracting," as they claim, we should simply invite them to watch television or YouTube instead.

> You might think that when we hold false beliefs . . . it is because of some failure to properly process the information we receive from the world . . . But to focus on individual psychology, or intelligence, is to badly misdiagnose how false beliefs persist and spread. . . . Many of our beliefs—perhaps most of them—have a more complex origin: we form them on the basis of what other people tell us. . . . Most of us get our false beliefs from the same places we get our true ones, and if we want the good stuff, we risk getting the bad as well. (7–9)

The book contains many examples of the public spread of both information and misinformation about matters such as the health effects of smoking cigarettes, vaccinations, Lyme Disease, climate change, acid rain, the Cold War, chlorofluorocarbons, and even Edgar Welch in 2016 shooting people at a Washington, D.C. pizza parlor that he thought was the front for a child prostitution ring headed by Hillary Clinton, etc.

As philosophers of science, O'Connor and Weatherall are quite knowledgeable—even candid—about misinformation that is occasionally embraced and propagated by scientists:

> We also discuss cases in which scientists have come to reject as false a belief they previously held. As we argue, scientists, just like the rest of us, are strongly influenced by their networks of social connections. (12)

> Philosophers of science, such as Larry Laudan and P. Kyle Stanford, have argued that these past failures of science should make us very cautious in accepting current scientific theories as true. (28)

> Kuhn's work raised the possibility that to understand science, we had to recognize it as a human enterprise, with a complex history and rich sociological features that could affect the ideas scientists developed and defended. Scientists, from this perspective, were members of a society, and their behaviors were determined by that society's rites and rituals. (33)

> And whether we accept what scientists tell us depends on the degree to which we trust scientists to accurately gather and report their evidence, and to responsibly update their beliefs in light of it. (44)

> Usually, when scientists behave rationally but gather uncertain data, sharing evidence helps the whole group get to the right belief, even persuading those who were initially skeptical. But sometimes this process backfires, and communication between scientists actually leads to a consensus around the false belief. (63)

> So far, we have assumed that all of the scientists in our models share real results, and that they are all motivated by the goal of establishing truth. But the history of science—and politics—reveals that this is often a bad assumption. (92)

Those who adopt a pre-Kuhnian belief in the neutrality of the various activities of scientists will be disabused of such notions by O'Conner and Weatherall, as will those who believe that various political and economic propagandists will lead us to an intellectual Promised Land. Citing the 1917–1919 Committee on Public Information, they quote unfavorably the occasionally rosy view of one of its veterans, Edward Bernays, who conceded himself that

> (T)hose who manipulate this unseen mechanism (propaganda) of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. (99, citing Bernays, *Propaganda*, Brooklyn: Ig, 1928, 9)

Nor do O'Connor and Weatherall believe that the First Amendment is any guarantee that truth will prevail: "One take away from this book is that we should stop thinking that the 'marketplace of ideas' can effectively sort fact from fiction" (179).

In the closing pages the authors propose as a

partial cure to misinformation a reimagining of democracy along lines proposed by Philip Kitcher,[4] in which we evade what Kitcher calls "vulgar democracy." Here objective truth is subjected to popular vote (what Kitcher called a "tyranny of ignorance"), by deferring to what he called "well-ordered science." However, the authors' endorsement of Kitcher is hardly ringing:

> But as Kitcher is the first to admit, there is a strong dose of utopianism here: well-ordered science is what we get in an ideal society, free of the corrupting forces of self-interest, ignorance, and manipulation. The world we live in is far from this ideal. (186)
>
> Nonetheless, they believe "We need to develop a practical and dynamic form of Kitcherism. . . . And the first step in that process is to abandon the notion of a popular vote as the proper way to adjudicate issues that require expert knowledge. (Ibid.)

This desire for some trustworthy agency to inform the public was first proposed by Walter Lippmann in 1921 (note 1, above), and the desire—while certainly noble enough—is no more practicable today than it was a century ago. The desire to be governed by elites who treasure and pursue knowledge and wisdom is as old as Plato's *Republic*, and, perhaps sadly, as unachievable today as it was two and a half millennia ago.

The authors acknowledge no particular religious orientation, so they cannot be expected to address the spiritual realities that may be fairly evident to Christian believers: humans are deceived deceivers; apart from the grace of God they are like their "father the devil," who "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). There is no human system that can save us from our desire to be deceived, whether by ourselves or by others. According to the Apostle John, the entire world lies in the power of the evil one, who is called the "deceiver of the whole world" (1 John 5:19 and Rev. 12:9), and his children "will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). At the same time, we would not be ignorant of his designs (2 Cor. 2:11), and O'Connor and Weatherall have provided a fascinating account—albeit without reference to any spiritual dimensions—of the variety of social factors that contribute to public misinformation. Church leaders will find much to ponder, and much to appreciate, in this volume. ©

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4 Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Science in a Democratic Society (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2011).

Evangelicalism's Trump Crisis

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant June-July 2020[1]

By Richard M. Gamble

Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis, by Thomas S. Kidd. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, 191 pages, $26.00, paper.

In the 2020 presidential election, American citizens face the same decision they confront every four years: they can vote for the candidate of one of the two major parties; vote for a third-party candidate, an independent, or a write-in; or not vote at all. If they choose to vote, they may support the candidate who best exemplifies the standards of character and domestic and foreign policy they favor; they may vote strategically and choose the proverbial "lesser of two evils" to throw their weight against the worse option; or they may chalk up a protest vote by going third party and having

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=830.

the satisfaction of not accepting the candidates handed to them by the political establishment and the quirky primary process.

Christians may and do disagree over which of these options is best pragmatically and even which of these options is morally and theologically defensible. For many believers voting is simply a matter of prudential judgment necessary under a representative system that depends upon popular elections to choose office holders. The principle of consent embedded in this imperfect process has been an essential part of American government since colonial times, and for four hundred years now Christians have had to exercise the rights and privileges they share with unbelievers within the constraints of the existing political system. They may hope and work for change, but they cannot engage in participatory government outside the given institutional structures of this present age. If they happen to consider voting to be part of their civic duty under the earthly powers ordained by God, then they must choose and live with the consequences of their actions.

With Donald Trump's victory in 2016 and his position as the presumptive Republican candidate in 2020, some Christians find themselves impaled on a dilemma. Ought they to vote for a man whose character repels them if, in the very act of voting against him, they help ensure the victory of someone whose character and policies they find even more objectionable? For the so-called Never-Trumpers among evangelicals, this question is more than a dilemma; it is a crisis. For some vocal critics of the president, that sense of crisis has been intensified by the ardent public support that high-profile evangelical leaders have given to Trump since 2016. These equally outspoken defenders of the president have, so the charge goes, wedded the evangelical agenda to the Trump agenda in spite of his multiple marriages, vulgarity, and reputation as a racist and bigoted champion of "America first." That fusion has led a number of evangelical pastors, scholars, editors, and pundits to try to rescue their endangered movement from a pact with the devil pursued for the sake of power and influence.

In *Who Is an Evangelical?* Baptist historian Thomas S. Kidd calls Trump's 2016 election "the most shattering experience for evangelicals since the Scopes Trial" (143). A prolific historian of American evangelicalism, the Baylor professor and blogger lays out his case against Trump in the context of a short book about the long history of the movement with which he wholeheartedly identifies himself. Kidd is scandalized by the 81 percent support rung up for Trump among white evangelicals. It is difficult if not impossible to gauge why these voters vote the way they do, and polling data is generated by questions that might say more about what the media wants to prove than the complexity that marks the amorphous group called "evangelical." Kidd finds the simplistic media label inadequate and misleading and wants to do his best to show readers a wider, deeper, and older evangelicalism—older, that is, than the current election cycle.

Kidd works hard to drive a wedge between historic evangelicalism and the most prominent leaders of what he repeatedly calls the "Republican insider evangelicals" (not a compliment), namely Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jr., John Hagee, Robert Jeffress, and others with access to a large national audience thanks to Fox News. His heroes are the #NeverTrump evangelicals Beth Moore, Albert Mohler, Russell Moore, John Piper, Marvin Olasky, such media outlets as The Gospel Coalition, and historians like John Fea, who in 2018 published his own jeremiad against Trump (*Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump*).

Kidd places his assessment of Trump at the end of the book in what he calls a "Coda," but the chapter is more than a concluding remark to his overview of American evangelicalism. What he chooses to emphasize as the movement's defining attributes keeps one eye steadily on Trump. This method may not amount to the historical sin of "presentism," but it does shape his selection and exclusion of evidence. Kidd's evangelicalism is multicultural, politically diverse, and open to a prominent role for women. He highlights the breadth and inclusiveness of evangelicalism. While he populates his story with the expected Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Dwight Moody, and

Billy Graham, he emphasizes the contributions of blacks, Latinos, and women as well.

In other words, evangelicalism's family lineage does not lead inevitably to white Republicanism.

Kidd targets his book at an audience of "journalists, pastors, people who work in politics, and more" (3). He wants to set the record straight for these shapers of public opinion. To that end, he begins by defining "evangelical." He sets out in this brief "primer" to clear up confusion about the label, especially in the media, to extend the scope of evangelicalism beyond white Republicans, and to depoliticize the evangelical identity while at the same time lamenting that black and white evangelicals are separated by such deep political differences.

Evangelicalism is "the *religion of the born again*," he emphasizes (4). It adheres to the authority of the Bible, the new birth, the centrality of Christ, "a relationship with God mediated by the Holy Spirit" (17), the need for revival, transdenominational cooperation, support for foreign missions, and an active faith demonstrated through benevolence. He acknowledges some of the inconvenient facts of evangelicalism, such as Edwards and Whitefield owning slaves, but he ignores other features, such as the degree to which rabid anti-Catholicism united evangelicals in the nineteenth century.

Kidd insists that while evangelicals throughout their history have been engaged politically, such engagement did not define the movement as they fought for religious liberty and such reforms as temperance and abolition. Evangelicalism was first and foremost a spiritual movement and only secondly political, he argues. Nevertheless, he singles out for praise the kind of political activism that championed the marginalized and oppressed. Evangelicals took wrong turns whenever they attempted to impose their views as a cultural establishment, as in the effort to outlaw the teaching of evolution in public schools culminating in the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. Political activism per se is not the problem, but the kind of political activism, that is, whether it grows out of evangelical doctrinal commitments or betrays them.

A good half of the book focuses on the emergence of the link between evangelicals and the Republican Party. Kidd sees evidence of this strategic alliance already in Billy Graham's support of ardent anti-communism and the Nixon administration, but attributes the current politicization of evangelicalism to Ronald Reagan's success in mobilizing neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists with such issues as school prayer and the pro-life agenda. Jerry Falwell, Sr., and his Moral Majority proved key to this effort. Today, Kidd claims, "evangelical insiders look back nostalgically at Ronald Reagan's two terms as a golden age" (133). Even the born-again George W. Bush "proved vaguely disappointing to Republican evangelical insiders because of his lukewarm approach to key social issues" (139) and his insistence that "true Islam was a religion of peace" (137). And the Barack Obama presidency simply left them in the "wilderness" (140).

Enter Donald Trump. His candidacy had no hope of attracting black evangelicals away from Hillary Clinton, and liberal white evangelicals rejected him as well. But for Kidd, the key development came with the opposition of conservative evangelicals who otherwise would have been expected to vote Republican. This stance marked a rupture in evangelicalism. Kidd and his fellow Never-Trumpers are scandalized that so few evangelicals seem to agree with them and persist in their "obeisance to the GOP" (147). But exactly why voting for Trump amounted to a posture of submission is not clear. People vote the way they do based on a calculation of a whole range of economic, social, cultural, and foreign and domestic policy grounds. Religious affiliation is but one of these complicated factors. Voting for a candidate does not equal endorsing everything about that candidate. Evangelicals and confessional Protestants and Catholics and others may vote for Trump in spite of his character, not because of it.

The way in which, and the degree to which, some celebrity evangelicals support Trump does indeed signal a woeful politicization of Christianity in modern America. The pursuit of power and

influence always burns the Church in the end and jeopardizes theological orthodoxy in a quest for alliance-building that subordinates the faith to success in politics and victory for social activism. But surely outspoken opposition to Trump by pastors and through the agency of parachurch organizations also politicizes Christianity. Unintentionally perhaps, Thomas Kidd gives confessional churches the opportunity to think carefully at a turbulent time in American history about the need for an apolitical pulpit. ©

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Letham's Systematic Theology

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant August-September 2020[1]

by John R. Muether

Systematic Theology, by Robert Letham. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019, 1072 pages, $50.00.

Another oversized systematic theology by a Reformed author? Aren't there too many already weighing down our bookshelves? Consider what has appeared in this millennium alone: Herman Bavinck (translated into English, 2003–2008), Douglas Kelly (2008), Michael Horton (2011), John Frame (2013), and Joel Beeke (2019). In joining this crowded field, Robert Letham, Professor at Union School of Theology in Wales (and a minister at Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, Delaware from 1989 to 2006), anticipates this concern in his introduction. The rapid publication of systematic theologies today, he explains, is still not equal to the pace after the Reformation, when "they were coming off the press almost as quickly as one could say 'Martin Luther'" (38).

If you are still harboring skepticism about the value of this book, I understand, because I had similar reservations. But it would be misguided to dismiss this book as redundant. Letham approaches the topic in thirty-one chapters that fall under eight major sections: "the Triune God," "The Word of God," "The Works of God," "The Image of God," "The Covenant of God," "Christ, the Son of God," "The Spirit of God and the People of God," and finally, "The Ultimate Purposes of God." The very arrangement of the subjects suggests a distinguishing characteristic of this work. Unlike the recent authors he joins, Letham has a different starting point. Because "God precedes his revelation" (36), Letham puts the doctrine of God before the doctrine of Scripture. Moreover, he discusses the Trinity before he examines God's attributes. Here he follows through on a concern he expressed in an earlier book on the Westminster Confession's treatment of God in its second chapter: when the Westminster divines delay reference to the Trinity until article three, "the distinctly *Christian* doctrine of God is almost an afterthought."[2] Leading the chapter with the Trinity would have made the Confession more effective in confronting Islam, he suggested.[3] It is also fitting for Letham to take that approach in light of contemporary evangelical confusion about trinitarian relationships.

Letham shapes his discussion by categories suggested by Oliver Crisp, who distinguished between the creeds and confessions of the church on the one hand (two sets of *norma normata* or "ruled rules") and "theologoumena" on the other hand, which are theological opinions that are not binding upon the church (34–35). Among the doctrines he categorizes as theologoumena are the *pactum salutis* (433) and common grace (650). In

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=837.

2 Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Perspective* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 146.

3 Ibid., 147.

an appendix he commends the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's 2004 "Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation" as a "comprehensive and even-handed discussion" (912n7) that observes the distinction between confession and opinion.

His fluency with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed Confessions is evident throughout, and he cites the Council of Trent and the Catechism of the Catholic Church as well. He is also familiar with John Calvin, Augustine of Hippo, Karl Barth, Herman Bavinck, and Thomas Aquinas (in that order, the names most cited), and scores of others, especially Reformed and post-Reformation voices. Letham's expertise extends even further to the theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, also the subject of a previous study.[4] In chapter 11, he introduces the Eastern doctrine of *theōsis* in his discussion on "Humanity in Creation." The uniqueness of humanity in the image of God, beyond our commonality with other creatures, entails our compatibility with God. This compatibility prompted the incarnation and eventually leads to our glorification (which Letham sees as synonymous with deification or *theōsis*, 337). In "The Progress of the Christian Life" (chapter 26), he returns to *theōsis* as it relates to union with Christ. The chapter's conclusion, "nine thesis on *theōsis*," carefully frames the doctrine within the bounds of Reformed confessionalism (785–88).

Letham ventures into plenty of modern topics. He expresses skepticism about the current interest in Second Temple Judaism, that is, developments in the intertestamental period. He finds the term itself "about as useful as *twentieth century evangelicalism*," explaining: "Get two or three Americans together from various times within the previous century and there will doubtless be at least four or five opinions" (705). His point is that the not-so-New Perspective on Paul's assumption of the apostle's reliance on a "normative Judaism" in this period forms a flimsy basis for its ambitious claims.

In a brief discussion on the prospect of extraterrestrial intelligent beings in a universe of billions of galaxies, Letham assures readers that this is no challenge to our faith. He reminds us that Christianity has always believed in such a phenomena, calling them angels (289). He respects the restraint of Scripture on the matter, concluding "that eternity will be filled with praise and obedient faithfulness from throughout the animate and intelligent cosmos" (289).

Angels also appear in his discussion of miracles a few pages later. Letham takes the traditional approach on this subject: because redemption is accomplished, "God has spoken his final word. There is nothing more he can say. He has said it all." Thus, "signs and wonders are *theologically* superfluous" (305). Yet he cautions that the Reformed cessationists must avoid a functional deism by accounting for the ministry of angels. Operating behind the scenes, "some extraordinary accounts of protection from danger or of deliverance in times of need defy normal explanation" (305).

A theme that predominates throughout the book is the connectivity of doctrine. In the context of a discussion on the incarnation Letham observes:

> Christian theology is interrelated. New developments in one area inevitably impinge on others. If you enter a room, by opening the door, you set in motion new wind currents. Objects on the other side of the room will be disturbed or displaced by the draft. If windows are open, curtains will billow, and your favorite lamp may come crashing to the floor and smash to smithereens without your laying so much as a finger on it. (532–33)

The point is to challenge the claim that Christ's incarnation assumed a fallen human nature, which in Letham's judgment threatens the gospel itself.

A particular concern for Letham is to integrate soteriology with ecclesiology. "The doctrine of salvation," he regrets,

> has long been treated in isolation from the doctrine of the church. . . . In reality they

4 Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2007).

stand together, since outside the church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF 25.2). We are saved not merely as discrete individuals but as the one church of Jesus Christ. Consequently, I have long thought that the two should be treated together. (36–37)

This comes specially to bear in chapter 20:

In the New Testament, salvation in Christ is connected inextricably to the community of the church, in parallel with the solidarity of the race in sin in Adam. . . . The New Testament letters, for the most part, were addressed to churches rather than individuals, to be read to the assembled congregation. Individuals are addressed within these letters but in this churchly context. In Ephesians, Paul writes to the church and then talks to groups within it. In Romans, within the church, Paul focuses on both Jewish and Gentile elements. This corporate dimension is of immense significance. Without it we will not understand baptism or come to grips with the New Testament understanding of salvation. "In Christ" is a dominant theme throughout and it is located and expressed in the church. (620)

Enlightenment individualism, he explains, has severed salvation from the church, which notably finds expression in evangelicalism's relegation of the Lord's Supper as an "optional extra" (752) where the memorialist interpretation predominates (762).

The reader will encounter few surprises in the views Letham advances. He approaches with caution those topics where Scripture is not clear. One example is on the precise frequency of communion. While the church has liberty in this matter, he regrets the Presbyterian reputation for infrequency. "The degree to which the church desires communion is a reliable gauge of how eagerly it wants Christ. The key word is 'often.' The question to ask is, how far do we desire communion with Christ?" (767).

Similarly, Letham is careful in discussing the "sleep" that characterizes the soul of the believer in the intermediate state. While he questions how characterizing that state as unconsciousness can be harmonized with biblical teaching, he presses his case with gentle humor: "As for me, I am in no rush to find out whether this is so; besides, once I do find out, I will be unable to inform you. It is more than sufficient to know that we will be 'with Christ'" (830).

On the *ordo salutis* and union with Christ, Letham offers a clarifying perspective on recent discussions. The two are complementary and do not compete against each other, and thus order and priority among the benefits of Christ must be maintained. One of his conclusions bears pondering: in describing the *ordo* "it is debatable whether we are to follow slavishly the same pattern as Paul did. He was not the only biblical author" (616).

Letham devotes attention to the primacy of the Word. Lying at the heart of covenant theology, this should yield among Reformed Christians a confidence in the Word (626) with especially high expectations from the preached Word (634). Here again, Letham does not strike new ground, but his argument is particularly forceful. At the same time, he reminds the reader that matter can communicate God's grace, through the visible signs of his appointment (639), which leads into his discussion of the sacraments.

Every systematic theology has its idiosyncrasies, and Letham's is no exception. But it is refreshingly devoid of American obsessions. In his illustrations, we learn a few things about cricket (297, 869) and the Elizabethan rose (302). Among the many pastoral asides in the text, there is a touching anecdote about the death of his ninety-year-old father, who found assurance in Christ amid weakness of faith (677).

This is an Orthodox Presbyterian systematic theology—though not in a sectarian sense. Letham interacts extensively with many colleagues in his former denomination. On one page, I counted engagement with three OPC voices, and his survey of the literature of the Reformed landscape extends to the pages of *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant*. Letham's *Systematic Theology* is Reformed, catholic, and confessional, and not beset by the

burden to be creative. OPC officers may wish to spare themselves the expense and the shelf space for yet another thick systematic theology. But they would be depriving themselves of an edifying read and a helpful resource. ©

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Imago Hominis: Our Brave New World

Originally published electronically in Ordained Servant October 2020[1]

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship, by Jacob Shatzer. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, viii + 184 pages, $22.00, paper.

I called to ask a question that the website of a particular company would not be able to answer. The artificial intelligence answering service asked, "How may I help you?" Unfortunately for me the reason for my call can only be understood by a person, not a machine. There is no "I" there, only a sophisticated computer known as artificial intelligence, and inadvertently diminishing the exceedingly complex idea of intelligence.

Jacob Shatzer's book gives us an accurate analysis of the amalgam of transhumanism and technology, and forms the basis for an alarming description and penetrating critique of that complex movement, along with a useful roadmap for navigating it faithfully as Christians.

The introduction shows that Shatzer understands technologies in a McLuhanesque way, as extensions of man with the tendency to transform their creators, often in almost undetectable ways (2). This is not a new perspective. But Christians generally did not understand this until recently.[2] I began researching and writing on this topic over two decades ago. It is heartening to see many scholars are now writing from this deep critical perspective. Our inventions alter the way we perceive and thus experience the world.

Shatzer contends that "modern technology tends toward a transhuman future—a future created by the next stage of evolution (the posthuman), moving beyond what it currently means to be human" (10). The continuous and pervasive involvement with technology cultivates a mindset that assumes that humans are constantly upgrading (11). Transhumanism is the technological mechanism or technique that transforms humans into the next stage of humanity—the posthuman (12, 16).

In chapter 1, "Technology and Moral Formation," Shatzer contends that because each tool has a governing logic, our technologies tend to shape us according to that logic (16–17). Technology, particularly electronic technology, changes not only our minds, but also our brains at the "neurological level" (19). Shatzer demonstrates the discipling power of communication technology due to "the speed of access and the immersion many experience" (21). The addictive, attention commanding genius of our digital devices alters behavior in significant ways. Shatzer tackles a very important question: "What is it about humans that makes us 'formable'?" He answers the question by referring to James K. A. Smith's concept of "cultural liturgies." Thus, he uses Smith's metaphor, "liturgies of control," throughout the book. Smith contends that we follow our loves in an effort to live out our perception of the good life.

I think that Smith tends to diminish the importance of thinking in relationship to desire. In highlighting the biblical emphasis on love, Smith

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=846.

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

at times comes close to eclipsing the important place of knowledge. But the point that proves valuable in cultural criticism is that love or desire is a habit that involves formation through the patterns or liturgies of life that orient and cultivate our desires.[3] Smith's most compelling example is the mall; it "reflects what matters and shapes what matters." It promises the good life achieved by consumption (27–28).

But what of ethics in particular? Here Shatzer turns to A. J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart*.[4] Conyers contrasts the Christian covenantal ideas of vocation or calling with the modern priority of power and control (30). Oddly Shatzer does not mention one of the Bible's most prominent concepts by which to understand fallen culture: idolatry. Idolatry offers a liturgy of control in rebellion against the calling of the living and true God. But Shatzer is quite correct in observing that since technology offers control it lends itself to the idea that we are evolving toward a post-human future.

Morally, technologically, especially "online communities," tend to undermine real communities.

> If we want technology to serve the community, then, it must be useful to move people toward an ultimate good not defined by technology itself. . . . True flourishing is not found in a technological worldview but in subordinating our tools to truly human ends. (35)

Shatzer concludes this seminal chapter with a brief "Theological Framework for Human Flourishing" (37–38), pointing to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1–2 and Jesus' great commandment to love God above all and your neighbor as yourself.

In chapter 2, Shatzer elaborates on transhumanism. It seeks to take control of humanity through technology moving it towards its evolutionary destiny (40). This assumes that human nature is extremely malleable.

The first enumeration of transhumanist principles in 1990, composed by the 1980 Extropy Institute, is optimistically entitled "Principles of Extropy." Its seven principles may be summed up as a continuous effort by humans to improve intellectually, ethically, and physically (43). In 1998, the World Transhumanist Association (now known as Humanity+) published "The Transhumanist Declaration," which asserted its ambitious mission:

> Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth. (48)

Transhumanism "at its root is not a notion of perfection but one of progress led by personal autonomy" (48). One of this movement's greatest weaknesses is its assumption that moral values may be derived through reason, science, and technology (51–52).

Chapter 3 deals with morphological freedom, the ability to alter our physical natures though technology. Shatzer makes the important distinction between therapy and enhancement (56). It is remarkable that he does not mention or interact with Leon Kass, whose 2003 book *Beyond Therapy* offers a penetrating ethical analysis by distinguishing between medicine's true task, therapy, and the dangerous pursuit of human enhancement, or transformation.[5] Morphological freedom is essential to achieve transhumanism's goal of self-actualization (59). Shatzer argues that this freedom lacks the true freedom of rejecting enhancement. His argument would be strengthened by observing that a Christian anthropology limits technology to therapy due to man's fallen condition as mortal.

Shatzer concludes this chapter by contending that our involvement in technology, especially virtual reality, disciples us in the concept of

3 See Gregory E. Reynolds, review of *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, by James K. A. Smith, in *Ordained Servant* 26 (2017): 107–109.

4 A. J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Dallas TX: Spence, 2006).

5 Leon R. Kass, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). Shatzer also has overlooked David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian: A Guide to Making Difficult Decisions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

morphological freedom, one of the major tenets of transhumanism (66). Social media's tools for self-presentation foster the illusion that self-transformation is possible (68). These "liturgies of control" remind us of Peter Berger's plausibility structures, those cultural assumptions that are so woven into the fabric of a culture that they sail under our perceptual radar.

Chapter 4 introduces augmented reality; eyeglasses would be a nonintrusive form of this. The intrusive is what is new. For example, a cyborg is the result of adding material technology to the biological, extending normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body. "Wearable and embeddable technology can have major effects on the experience of reality, altering behavior and adaptation patterns" (73–75). The resultant "enhanced reality," may be compared to viewing the world through rose colored glasses. Such human malleability stands against, and seeks unsuccessfully to alter, the givenness of reality itself. In his critique, Shatzer notes the danger of avoiding "difficulty and pain" in life's journey; human growth and development depend on facing these realities (84).

Having noted that the "soft self" is malleable, Shatzer could have enhanced his critique by mentioning what we might call the hard self, that aspect of the *imago Dei* that cannot be altered. Scripture teaches that God is impinging on the consciousness and conscience of humans perpetually, while they are in the cognitive business of suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18–20; 2:14–15). This among other things, like the *sensus deitatus*, is unalterable. McLuhan maintained that "no matter how many walls have fallen the citadel of individual consciousness has not fallen nor is it likely to fall. For it is not accessible to the mass media. . . . Christianity definitely supports the idea of a private, independent metaphysical substance of the self."[6]

Chapter 5 explores and critiques artificial intelligence (AI). This technological development is distinct from the biological and seeks to alter and replicate human thought (90). There are two types of AI: 1) narrow AI, focusing on specific tasks, and 2) artificial general intelligence (AGI), "functioning much like a human mind, which can learn and adapt to different scenarios" (91). While my automobile's ability to sense oncoming headlights and turn my high beams down is an excellent safety feature of AI, AGI goes far beyond this by seeking to create a synthetic intellect in order to eliminate mundane tasks, overcome human cognitive limitations, and more (96). Breathtaking is the existence of the Christian Transhumanist Association, which claims "the intentional use of technology, coupled with following Christ, will empower us to become more human" (97). Christian transhumanists, like Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, tend toward open theism and process theologies, which see God as developing. Shatzer wisely responds, "we must resist liturgies of control, not because God is open and risky but because God is in control and we are not" (97).

The belief that software minds can be created by mindfiles, a digitized database of one's life, in order to create a mind clone involves a serious misunderstanding and underestimation of human intelligence. But such is fallen man's quest for immortality apart from the Christ of Scripture (102). Shatzer's critique focuses on the danger of reducing human intelligence to digital technology. Transhumanism "and its views on artificial intelligence are built on materialist approaches on what it means to be human" (105). AGI assumes materialism and is thus doomed not only to failure but to causing much damage. To ignore the invisible or spiritual aspect of human intelligence guarantees that human intelligence can never be duplicated by AGI. Furthermore, depending on artificial intelligence, like Paro the robot companion for the elderly and Siri, will tend to disengage us from real human interaction (106).

Chapter 6 deals with determining what is real. In medicine the increasing reliance on technology distances physicians from the people they serve, treating them more like machines than human beings (110–12). Shatzer argues that the incarnation

6 Quoted in Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 169.

will provide a "better understanding of the proper place of virtual reality in the life of a disciple" (120). This section is one of the most theological in the book, calling us to embrace the reality of embodied life as central to Christianity (120–22). Our physical fallenness may lead us to think poorly of our bodies, but the resurrection should disabuse us of that misunderstanding.

Chapter 7 explores the changing notion of place. This is a fascinating chapter exploring what ought to be a truism: that cyberspace is not a place. I rarely use GPS because I like to cultivate a sense of place or location in the space-time continuum. Shatzer never mentions Joshua Meyrowitz's profound treatment of this subject, *No Sense of Place* (1985).[7] He points out that even mapping alters our perception of place. Colonial powers used maps to control people and land. Such abstractions of place tend to obscure the particularities of places (130–31).

The technologies of transportation and communication have cultivated globalization; combined with the centralized administrative state and the autonomous individual, they weaken local community (133). Virtual reality undermines locality and tradition (134). Thus, Shatzer calls for "placemaking practices" such as gardening, homemaking, and the local church, where "public worship is significant and irreplaceable" (138). Shatzer is refreshingly insistent and clear on this topic:

> There will certainly be ways of doing church using virtual technology, but to the degree that we neglect physical presence with other believers, we neglect the form of being the body of Christ that has shaped Christianity for the past two thousand years. (139)

Sadly, the present pandemic has exacerbated the church's tendency toward the virtual as it has extended and instituted practices that foster discarnate Christianity—an oxymoron for sure. Shatzer concludes this chapter with a discussion of the necessity of place in relationship to the neighbor (140–41).

Chapter 8 explores the changing relationships engendered by robotics. Shatzer relies on Sherry Turkle's germane research on this topic from her 2011 book, *Alone Together*.[8] Turkle offers a stark example in the relationship between robotics and the elderly, "We ask technology to perform what used to be 'love's labor' taking care of each other" (144).

Robotics, the virtual, and social media have one thing in common, as Michael Harris astutely observes in his 2014 book *The End of Absence*.[9] These technologies blur the boundaries between what is real and what is not. "Every technology will alienate you from some part of your life. This is its job. Your job is to notice. First notice the difference. And then, every time, choose" (145). Choosing to avoid alienation from the real also means letting go of the control with which technologies tempt us, as they enable us to distance ourselves from what we find uncomfortable or difficult. Real relationships are messy and require negotiation, cooperation, humility, and sometimes, repentance.

Returning to Turkle's next book *Reclaiming Conversation* (2015),[10] Shatzer makes a plea to reclaim solitude, self-reflection, and thus, conversation, which is irreplaceable (151). "Not only does time in the digital world take away from face-to-face social interaction, but it actually makes us worse at it" (152).

Shatzer closes this chapter with an excellent discussion of the cultures of the Lord's Supper, the table, and friendship. The Supper connects believers with the covenant people of the past as well as "the present realities that are to shape the Christian community" (153). Communion, along with dining together and developing deep friendships, forms an effective antidote to the poisons of

7 Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

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

9 Michael Harris, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We've Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

10 Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

the digital world.

The final chapter, chapter 9, discusses changing notions of the self. Shatzer traces the ways in which technologies have historically altered self-perception. Neil Postman,[11] in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, noted that Plato observed that writing shifted the means of processing communication from the ear to the eye (159); Lewis Mumford, in *Technics and Civilization*,[12] observed that printing liberated people from the "domination of the immediate and the local" (160). But whatever negatives, like the weakening of memory with writing and printing, and nationalism and individualism with print, the negatives connected with digital technology often seem to outweigh the positives.

I have observed that we are captivated by the immediate and thus tend to skim surfaces of texts, being guided by sound bites, thus undermining thoughtful public and private discourse. Our present social ferment is a tragic extreme example of this new cognitive environment. There is little place for a civil discussion of issues; due process, which demands thoughtful deliberation, is disappearing, and brief, out of context, smart phone videos lead us to immediate judgments.

On the personal level, Shatzer wisely concludes: "Virtual and social networking technologies provide the tools for constructing a self and presenting a self, both of which have consequences for how we consider ourselves and what we think identity is" (163). Such control leads us to believe that everything about ourselves is changeable (165) from our genders to our resumes. All of this supports the narrative of transhumanism. Shatzer concludes with a call to seek our true identity in Jesus Christ, the new identity which Christians have in him as he is the firstborn of a new humanity (168).

Shatzer's conclusion sums up, and adds to, the practical advice he gives throughout the book. These nine pages are well worth pondering.

Transhumanists, like the supporters of the utopianism of the Green New Deal, know there is something wrong with humanity, but without acknowledging the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, they seek to transform creation and culture through merely human, deformed means, after the image of fallen humanity—*imago hominis*. The pilgrim kingdom of the church anticipates the coming heavenly reality of a new heavens and a new earth—this is the alternative reality, the only alternative, because it deals with the way things actually are in God's world.

Shatzer's book gives profound insight into the dangerous movement of transhumanism; but more than that it penetrates the technological context in which this movement was born. Written from a sound theological and ecclesiological perspective, I highly recommend it. ©

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11 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

12 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1934).

Going Beyond Stewardship—Where Is Dominion?

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by Jan F. Dudt

Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care, by David P. Warners and Matthew K. Heun eds. Grand Rapids: Calvin College Press, 2019, xiv + 236 pages, $17.99, paper.

Since 1967 and Lynn White's essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,"[2] Christians have often been on the defensive regarding their approach to the environment. Over the years, Christians have made several attempts to address the concerns leveled against the Christian contribution to our modern environmental crises. Admittedly, Christians, including Evangelicals, have often lagged behind other voices in the culture which raised red flags over the extent of environmental degradation that our modern industrial society had spawned, even as economic progress and general human health increased. There were a number of notable attempts to correct and encourage Christian thinking on environmental matters. Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man*[3] was a clarion call in the wake of the first Earth Day. He challenged Christians to take the lead in creation care as a result of the biblical mandate to have dominion and care for the earth, as God had assigned to humans in Genesis 1 and 2. He noted that proper understanding of the implications of biblical thinking on the matter should compel Christians to be in the forefront of environmental care. As environmental awareness rose in Christian circles through the 1970s, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship sponsored research and several books, culminating in the development of the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Other evangelical efforts through the 1990s included the Evangelical Declaration of the Care of Creation,[4] whose many signatories included well-known Christians like the environmental leader Calvin DeWitt and others like Ron Sider, Rick Warren, and J.I. Packer. The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship[5] came soon after, as a result of perceived inadequacies of the earlier declaration, and was signed by a host of evangelical luminaries, including Charles Colson, James Dobson, D. James Kennedy, R.C. Sproul, as well as some prominent Jewish and Catholics leaders like Rabbi Jacob Neusner and Richard John Neuhaus.

Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care, the latest effort from the Calvin Center, attempts to take a matured environmental approach that reflects the development of thinking over the last few decades. The book draws from historical Christian perspectives on care of the creation as well as ideas from contemporary mainstream environmental thinking. This attempted synthesis highlights a tension for Christians. We desire to glean the best from mainstream environmentalism while bringing true Christian salt and light to bear on the situation. In attempting to do so, *Beyond Stewardship* challenges the reader with the authors' thinking on the topic, but which, at times, departs significantly from sound Christian doctrine.

The book is made up of fourteen chapters sandwiched between a forward, preface, and introduction, and an afterward, postlude, and appendices. Chapters 1 and 2 comprise "Part One, Rethinking: Expanding Awareness." Chapters 3

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=851.

2 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–1207.

3 Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1970).

4 "On the Care of Creation: Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" (New Freedom, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994), https://creationcare.org/what-we-do/an-evangelical-declaration-on-the-care-of-creation.html.

5 "Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship" (Ringgold, GA: Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, 2000), https://cornwallalliance.org/landmark-documents/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship/.

through 7 comprise "Part Two, Reimagining: How Things Could Be." Chapters 8 through 14 are "Part Three, Reorienting: Hopeful Ways Forward." Of the 22 contributors, 19 of them are associated with Calvin College as graduates, professors, or students. The book could be considered a cutting-edge product of thinking within the twenty-first century North American Christian and Dutch Reformed world. However, the ideas presented in *Beyond Stewardship* are also a reflection of—and a challenge to—a much broader audience.

The authors respond to perceptions of inadequate environmentalism developed by Christian thinkers over the last several decades. They acknowledge the contribution of earlier attempts while challenging the reader with the need for a more mature and sustainable environmental ethic and approach. In the preface, they echo Francis Schaeffer from decades ago with the questions, "Why isn't the broader Christian church leading the way?" (2) and "Why haven't Christians been more engaged in creation care activities?" (4). The introduction's author responds with an outline of the book and a critique of the traditional environmental term "stewardship." The term is seen as an unhelpful invention of earlier twentieth century, never found in Scripture, and too anthropocentric and consumption-oriented to develop a proper creation care approach (15, 74).

The authors accurately note that human sinfulness is an extreme encumbrance to realizing the divinely assigned creation mandate to care for the Garden, to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion, and to subdue the earth. However, the biblical term dominion is seldom mentioned due to perceptions that human dominion abuses have rendered the term unhelpful (8, 9). The stated objective is that humans as stewards should be replaced with humans in kinship with the rest of creation (16). Dominion and the idea of improving creation (subduing the earth) are viewed as hopelessly limited by human sin and finitude (96). Here the authors run off the biblical rails. Our finitude was part of human identity at the time of the charge and is not to be considered an encumbrance, but rather part of the created order. Sin, with its debilitating and blinding effect, is the problem. Iterations of finite environmental strategies likely would have been part of a pre-fallen human effort. The cover of the book features an expansive heartland scene of wind turbines overshadowing productive agricultural fields, an apparent improvement over the cover of an earlier book showing coal generators' cooling towers over a similar landscape (18). Certainly, the multitude of expensive, noisy, raptor swatting, eyesores cannot be the final solution to humanity's energy needs. However, the need to replace earlier technologies need not be the sole result of sin. Improvements and iterations might have been part of expanding human dominion, even if the fall had not occurred.

Lamenting negative impacts of humans that irreparably harm God's good creation is appropriate. However, the call to embrace kinship with the rest of creation apart from a biblical understanding of human dominion, flourishing, and development as a delight to God is overlooked. For example, the claim in chapter 3 "that Scripture does not call us to use and manage creation, rather it calls us to intimate kinship with it," (45) is biblically weak. Scripture clearly puts humanity in a different category than the rest of creation. While the author's claim is born out of an understanding of the incarnation's importance, he overlooks the call for humans to extend the values of the Garden to the rest of the globe, since we are charged to fill or even swarm the earth (Gen. 2 and 9).

Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, the author of chapter 3, when considering the sacraments writes, "we can give thanks to the sources" of the elements "for their participation in the holy moment" (51). This idea, unhinged from human exceptionalism as *imago Dei*, strikes frightfully close to animism or pantheism, neither of which have especially good records of environmental stewardship. The author is correct in pointing out that radical protection and preservation is part of human calling, but he fails to acknowledge that human creative development that expands the qualities of the Garden, to make God's good creation better, is part of that.

Clarence W. Joldersma, in chapter 4, notes that earth's supportiveness is not automatic, and

that life has become more precarious because recent human activities have disrupted trustworthy planetary conditions (63). However, this overlooks the idea that human dominion has made human life much less precarious than in former times. Even the animals and plants under our charge often find life much less precarious than without it. Sin abounds, to be sure. However, a farm, as an expression of human dominion, demonstrates that cows, cats, dogs, and chickens can live in peace.

Aminah Al-Attas Bradford and Steven Bouma-Prediger, in chapters 5 and 6 respectively, do a fine job of reminding us of humanity's profound and inescapable connectivity to—and dependence on—the rest of creation down to the microbes that beneficially inhabit our bodies. Truly, it is easy to overemphasize human importance and underemphasize the inherent value of the creation around us. The authors clearly emphasize Christ's incarnation, who as they claim, undoubtedly housed microorganisms as humans always have (76). They argue that overemphasis on human importance has led many to a view of stewardship that is too anthropocentric (74). However, the call to retire the term "stewardship" in favor of "earth-keeping," may miss the point. Abuses of a good term may require revisiting true biblical definitions. Merely replacing words without such definitional care would be useless. Claiming that other creatures are our brothers and sisters is unhelpful and unbiblical (53). It would be better to emphasize their inherent value as part of the creation while acknowledging that they are our charges, not our brothers.

Debra Rienstra, in chapter 8, and Matthew C. Halteman and Megan Halteman Zwart, in chapter 9, challenge us to consider our kinship with other animals as exemplified by Adam's naming of the creatures. Rienstra suggests that God is more concerned about the workload of caring for the Garden than for the fact of Adam being alone (109). While one can appreciate the desire to see animals as created beings, the emphasis is hard to insist on, considering the biblical rejoinder, "there were none suitable for him" (Gen. 2:20).

Chapter 9 examines the transformation of a city girl who finds herself on a relative's farm. She is struck by the farm family's utilitarian approach to the well-cared-for livestock. However, in the end, she desires to see them not as resources for humans, but rather as joint members of the created order. In response, she becomes vegan (127). The implication that eating less meat is the higher moral ground is not as informed by biblical perspective as it is by the modern sentimental environmental zeitgeist.

The remaining chapters make a better case for a biblical perspective as modern society attempts to address modern environmental concerns. Becky Roselius Haney, in chapter 10, shows how some societies overestimate their ability to manage ecosystems, causing Dust Bowl-like destruction, while others have been able to take a more restorative or sustainable approach. The author appreciates John Wesley Powell's desire to understand the interdependent relationship between humans and nonhuman systems that requires patience, humility, and the acceptance of limits (140). This attitude is much preferable to the hubris of a "we know best" approach to stewardship.

Gail Gunst Heffner in chapter 11 deals with "environmental racism" (150), perhaps better stated as economic elitism, which does not take the needs of less advantaged communities into proper consideration. Hence, intercity communities near industrial sites, or poor rural communities, often suffer degradation and health concerns that would not be tolerated in more privileged communities.

Mark D. Bjelland in chapter 13 shows how the concept of stewardship is somewhat rehabilitated over what was suggested in earlier chapters. Here Bjelland stresses that humans are not a weed species that the world could do without, but rather humans are a part of the created order. Human enhancement of the created order would be furthered by developing a sense of human place in a Wendell Berry sense of the term (174). The author acknowledges that humans can restore and improve God's creation. However, developing a mindset of commitment to place is difficult in our transient mobile society. Perhaps this mindset could be developed with a heightened sense of understanding our world as a gift, laden with

inherent value as David Paul Warners describes it in chapter 14.

Beyond Stewardship has many challenging ideas that can address the modern environmental crisis. However, there is a mix of true Christian thinking and modern environmentalism that smacks of sentimentalism, idealism, and unhealthy preservationism. This runs the risk of denying the importance of humans as image bearers assigned by God to take dominion and subdue the earth. Ideas of human abundance can be lost in favor of a human-denying environmentalism if Christians are not careful. Ideas of filling the earth with humans (Gen. 2) to the point of swarming (Gen 9), or filling Judea with returned diaspora until there is no room for them (Zech. 10:10) is lost on those who either do not understand what it means to be *imago Dei* or those who choose to deemphasize it. Christians must always fight the temptation to be syncretistic with their greater culture. This is as true for us today as in times past. Imagine modern environmentalism informed by biblical principles stressing the concept of human value, creativity, and ability to improve the good creation that God has made. Conversely, imagine Christians adopting secular concerns untethered from Scripture. When we read *Beyond Stewardship*, we must ask who is influencing whom? Ⓢ

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Smorgasbord Religion: The New American Spirituality

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by Danny Olinger

Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World, by Tara Isabella Burton. New York: Hachette, 2020, ix + 301 pages, $28.00.

Tara Isabella Burton's *Strange Rites* is not an easy book for a confessional Reformed Christian to read. The language is vulgar and graphic at points. She seems to have little grasp of, or interest in, an orthodox view of special revelation or why a defense of "the" Faith might be important when compared to a defense of Christian Theism. Theologically, she paints with a broad brush that minimizes the distinctions that can exist within Protestantism, much less for Presbyterians and the Reformed. As a journalist, she makes sure that the door will remain open for her to write in such places as the *New York Times*, "a publication whose relative centrism can be gleaned from the fact that left- and right-wing critics alike are constantly accusing it of extreme bias" (172). Her one mention of John Calvin is to make a joke about the mantra of wellness culture being equal parts Ayn Rand and Calvin, "you're not just allowed but in fact obligated to focus on yourself—but, no matter how much you do, it will never be good enough" (98). Building on the above, each of the book's chapters, describing the religious landscape of America, seemed more discouraging than the previous one. When I reached the last page and finished the book, I wrote in red ink, "Depressing Book!!!."

Yet, while the book is not easy to read, it is important—almost essential— reading.. Rarely, in recent years, have I underlined more passages and

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=852.

taken more notes than I did with this work. Burton's insights particularly are illuminating on why so many millennials, who have grown up in the Internet age, have abandoned institutional Christianity. Her thesis is that increasingly Americans, especially younger Americans, are not rejecting religion, but remixing it according to their own interests. They long for a sense of meaning in this world but reject authority, institution, and creed that conflicts with their own intuition, personal feelings, and experiences. The result is a "remixed" religion, a new Great Awakening where spirituality incorporates the individuality that the Internet has provided for nearly every other aspect of modern life.

The Religious Remixed: "I make my own religion"

Burton points out that in polling of Americans born after 1990, the so-called young millennials, almost forty percent say that they have no religion. These religious "Nones" are both the fastest growing religious demographic group in America and the largest, at eighty-one million people. To put that in perspective, they are now more numerous in America than Roman Catholics and Evangelicals combined.

This is not to say that the religious Nones are uninterested in spirituality. What Burton attempts to prove is that "the story of the rise of the religious Nones in America, it turns out, isn't really about Nones at all" (17). What it is about is a blending of "traditional religious practices and personal, intuitional spirituality: privileging feelings and experiences over institutions and creeds" (18).

In her judgment, this is the result of an Internet-defined generation and the self-creating power of social media where people are accustomed to finding their own sources of information and mixing it with different perspectives. This belief, that one's religious life should be customized to one's personal interests, wants and needs, has become an embedded part of the culture. She concludes, "We may not all be Remixed, but we all live in a Remixed nation" (25).

Burton explains what this means in practice for the Remixed. These young people can mix-and-match so that they can find their sense of community from one place (fandom) and their sense of meaning from another (social justice activism). They can employ rituals associated with wellness culture while seeing their calling in life as primarily political. In sum, there is a rejection of authority and institutions and the embracing of what I call "intuitional religions."

By this term, I mean that their sense of meaning is based on narratives that simultaneously reject clear-cut creedal, metaphysical doctrines and institutional hierarchies, and place the locus of authority in people's experiential emotions—or gut instinct. Society, institutions, credited authorities, experts, expectations, rules of conduct—all are treated generally as not just irrelevant, but sources of active evil (33).

Truth also gets redefined according to the Remixed. Truth claims that come from rules or doctrines are regarded with suspicion. One's emotional experience, such as a feminist's lived experience, is what functions as an authoritative account of the world. Seventy-five percent of millennials agree with the statement "Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know" (33). Demanding creative ownership of their spiritual lives, the Remixed repeatedly told Burton when they were interviewed, "I make my own religion" (33).

This freedom appeals to many who previously saw themselves as outside of organized religion. In particular, women who see organized religion as upholding an oppressive patriarchal culture, and queer people, who felt marginalized by traditional religion view, this freedom as revelatory, even necessary. But Burton asks: If the personal authenticity and experiential fulfillment of intuitional religion becomes the norm so that everyone is a high priest, then who is willing to kneel? (34).

Mainline Protestantism's Decline

Burton believes that Remixed religion is likely to stick around due to "the absence of wider demo-

graphic pressure, the power of consumer capitalism, and the rise of the Internet" (53). What she does not believe is the typical media spin that young people are necessarily put off by repressive and outmoded values of religion. "In fact," she writes, "it seems that the very un-repressive strains of mid-century Protestantism and ecumenism—the theologically unchallenging 'come for Christmas and Easter only' variants—have, for the past few decades at least, been doing significantly worse than their more conservative counterparts" (54).

Specifically, the religious Nones "have grown up seeing religion as a social or communal institution—a 'nice to have' teaching 'good values' or solidifying family bonds—but not necessarily as a core part of their meaning or purpose" (54). According to Burton, the Nones saw their parents attending church, but they were acutely aware that their parents really did not believe.

This contrasts with the young people who were raised in a Christian home where the faith mattered. Burton notes that these households were more likely to have children retain their faith. "Of born Protestants whose parents talked about religion 'a lot,' 89 percent continue to identify as Protestant, while just 8 percent call themselves unaffiliated" (54). Conversely, children of interfaith households where presumably a consistent doctrine was not advocated are more likely to leave organized religion behind. Burton concludes that the "raised religious" who are leaving the church are not primarily those whose parents found purpose and meaning in the faith. Rather, they are those raised with the sense that religion is what one does.

This trend has led to an exodus in mainline Protestant churches. In 2017 the membership of mainline Protestantism made up ten percent of the American population, but of these barely a quarter attended church. Burton projects a bleak future for mainline Protestantism, even citing Ed Stetzer's projection that "if mainline Protestantism continues to decline at its current rate, the whole community will be wiped out by 2040" (52).

Today's Great Awakening and the Birth of Remix Culture

Remixed millennials, disillusioned that their parent's religious traditions did not provide a coherent account of meaning and purpose in life, nevertheless do not embrace religious traditions that disagree with their personal stances on LGBTQ and sexuality issues. This puts them, in Burton's judgment, between a rock and a hard place: they desire moral and theological certainty, but they are repulsed by any authority that would put limits on sexual desire.

Corporations have seized upon this spirituality bubble and sought to fill the gap. Nike celebrates Colin Kaepernick's decision to take a knee, enabling the company to also promote its moral righteousness in a political manner and enhance its financial bottom line. Burton observes, "In so doing, they are creating moral universes, selling meaning as an implicit product and reframing capitalist consumption as a religious ritual—a repeated and intentional activity that connects the individual to divine purpose in a value-driven framework" (59).

Another cultural phenomenon that has filled the spiritual gap is J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Burton maintains that its popularity owes in part to the fact that it was "the first media property to go viral in the Internet sense and the first to almost exclusively harness the Internet, rather than analog media, as the medium by which its fans converged" (75).

She speculates that since sixty-one percent of Americans have seen at least one *Harry Potter* film and fifty percent of Americans could not name the four Gospels, the odds are that Americans are more likely to name the four Hogwarts' houses. More alarmingly, she also states that *Harry Potter* has displaced the Bible as a sacred text for many, though Burton also notes that Rowling has come under recent criticism for being insufficiently woke (84).

What applies to the fandom of *Harry Potter* regarding the creation of a spiritual universe also applies to earlier spiritual universes like those in the

Star Trek and *Star Wars* series. The Remixed question is why they must fit into the narrow category of organized religion with its doctrines and creeds that do not adhere to progressive values reflected in these beloved entertainments. "Why not use the language of Hogwarts' houses to talk about good and evil, alongside the rhetoric of social justice and metaphors garnered from Star Wars?" (88).

Burton contends that if fandom provides the structure of Remixed religious culture, then wellness culture provides its implicit theology. The anthropology of wellness is that we are born good but tricked through Big Pharma, processed foods, and civilization (the toxic energy of others) into a life that is short of our best. Sin is insufficient self-care. Prior to the emergence of SoulCycle, Goop, Thrive, and WW, Orpah Winfrey articulated the "oxygen mask theory" that they all employ. That is, life is like being on an airplane where you need to put your own oxygen mask on before helping the people around you.

Doctrines for a Godless World

According to Burton, there are two *de facto* civil religions that are battling for supremacy among the Remixed. The first is social justice culture. Social justice culture, she writes, has fueled such movements as Black Lives Matter and #Me Too and led to the 2018 election of "the Squad" to Congress. This culture views America as a repressive society where progressive politics are the means to slay the Goliaths of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice. The second civil religion is the techno-utopian culture of Silicon Valley. Techno-utopian culture puts forth a libertarianism that looks to technology as that which can unleash human potential. The two civil religions share a disdain for rules, maxims, and mores of society. Traditional authority is seen as oppressive. But, in Burton's view, most importantly both groups treat earthly self-actualization as the ultimate goal. Consequently, "both groups are fundamentally eschatological yet thoroughly materialistic" (168). They seek a kingdom of heaven on earth rather than a world to come. The techno-utopians seek it through robot-fueled singularity. The social justice culture seeks this kingdom on earth through Marxist-style cultural revolution.

Burton predicts that social justice will probably win the battle to become the new civil religion in America. Considering events following the book's publication in April, her prediction has proven true. Her commentary on the movement is helpful in understanding what is happening in society. She writes that social justice activists see society as having been shaped by white and male privilege. This has led to racism and sexism that are fundamentally unjust. Government institutions like the police and border patrols are viewed "not merely as ineffectual, but as actively malevolent agents of structural inequality and the cruelty and brutality such inequality manifests" (169–70).

Burton states that compared to the national average, social justice advocates are twice as likely to say that they never pray, twice as likely to have finished college, and three times as likely to say that they are ashamed to be an American. They are suspicious of authority and look to politics as a key part in their identity. Consequently, for this group, the election of Donald Trump as president was a tragic reminder that America, despite its lofty ideals at its founding, is a country built on white supremacy, patriarchy, repression, and hatred.

Andrew Sullivan and David French are two conservative critics who have written, in Burton's judgment, pejoratively about the social justice movement. Sullivan "derisively" called the movement the "Great Awokening" and "derided" its advocates as "humorless neo-puritans," who delight in canceling the insufficiently enlightened (176–77). French, "equally skeptical," saw the social justice movement engaged in a religious war when he wrote, "Out with the Christianity that spawned American higher education, in with a ferocious new faith—a social-justice progressivism unrestrained by humility and consumed with righteous zeal" (177).

For Burton, Sullivan and French "in their knee-jerk derisions of it as a ridiculous cult" (177) fail to realize how right they are that this is a religion. Social justice has provided meaning and

purpose for the secular and reenchanted a godless world. God is not needed to create an eschatologically focused account of a meaningful existence, and yet the movement draws from traditional religion. Its success is in replicating the cornerstones (meaning, ritual, community) of traditional religion in an internally cohesive way. It takes the varied tenets of intuitionalism, the self, emotions, and identity, and threads them together into a visionary narrative of political resistance and moral renewal. It provides for a sense of community with its collective ritual catharsis of calling out problematic enemies or insufficient allies who deserve to be canceled. It provides an explanation of evil, "an unjust society that transcends any one agentic individual and, more specifically, straight white men" (178). By equating the problems of a repressive society with the egos of straight white men, social justice balances its fatalistic conception of society now with a more optimistic future. The goal is a new creation, that is, a new world full of love and compassion that will arise "from the ashes of a patriarchal, racist, homophobic, repressive, Christian society" (178).

Religion and the Modern World

In conclusion, Burton argues that the world is not a godless one but profoundly an anti-institutional one. Affluence and the proliferation of the Internet have rendered us all parishioners, high priests, and deities simultaneously. In her opinion, this has led the church into a catch-22 situation. Those communions, like Christian evangelicalism, which are stringent and theologically demanding retain a greater percentage of their members. But, they are also more likely to alienate those who are unable to conform to their identities and values. Conversely, mainline Protestantism is more capable of welcoming those on the theological margins but often fail to retain members or fill spiritual needs.

But Burton does not stop with the comparison. She asserts that once you go down the route of relaxing elements of your faith tradition, then what is to stop you from seeking a mix-and-match religious identity that fits your personal needs, identity, and situation. As an example, she asks what might stop you from combining "Episcopalianism with yoga, tarot, poly community, or seek communal and spiritual fulfillment outside of organized religion altogether?" (243–44). Ultimately, in other words, a Remixed nation is a place where an authoritative God is not needed for spiritual purpose and fulfillment. Ⓢ

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The Reading Life

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By William Edgar

The Reading Life: The Joy of Seeing New Worlds Through Others' Eyes, by C. S. Lewis, edited by David C. Downing & Michael G. Maudlin. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2019, xvi + 171, $19.99.

The question "have you read this book?" would not have interested C. S. Lewis. He would want to know, "has this book read you?" The distinction is all important. For Lewis, a good book is not one you might have read and then set aside, but one that has transported you to another world, one that should be read over and over again. He was himself, of course, a superb writer. But throughout his works, often between the lines, he reflected on the joys of reading. This anthology of such reflections was waiting to be gathered. It is not certain why this had not been done before, but here it is.

This marvelous collection of insights into reading assembles fifty-two excerpts from Lewis's *œuvre*. By rights we ought to be intimidated, not to say alienated, by someone as voracious a reader as C. S. Lewis. He apparently spent at least eight hours a day doing it. We have all met the immodest name-dropper who wants us to know how much he has read. Yet, somehow Lewis is never threatening nor snobbish about his rapacious talents. Indeed, in one of the brief essays here he decries boastful literary critics for their sense of moral superiority against such "rabble" as the common reader.

The reason that reading is good for the soul is that it takes us out of ourselves, regardless whether what is being said might be true or empirically verifiable. Literature, he argues, is *logos*, admitting us to experiences other than our own. Good literature extends our being, frees us from the narrow confines of our own experience. As such it heals our wounds without denying our individuality. In a memorable quote, Lewis tells us, "Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do" (9).

For this reason, as he argues throughout, good art should be *received*, not *analyzed*. For one to be able to receive a great work, there is no sense in discussing its greatness before just getting out of the way, surrendering and not demanding (149). If this sounds like idolatry, it is not, though it does give us insight into the seductions of the idol. Idols are not so much bald-faced lies as they are deceptive counterfeits of the real thing. But the best literature draws us in, leads us, willingly or not, into worlds that we otherwise could not conceive, and makes us the better for it.

At first, a number of these fragments may sound like the ultimate attack on the politically correct. They do occasionally take aim at the conformist and commonly held notions of the unliterary. For example, Lewis famously defends fairy tales, good ones, against the bromide "oh these are but fairy tales." Adult literature, according to the modern critic, is writing appropriate to the reader having grown up and who is now beyond childish things. For Lewis, the real grown-up is someone who can still treasure the best of childhood practices. Becoming older may involve *change*, so that we can now enjoy Leo Tolstoy or Jane Austen, but growing older should not be outgrowing good things (20). In a riff on the Pauline love passage, he confesses, "When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up" (19).

Lewis's insights will charm many and no doubt madden others. For example, he cordially dislikes Alexandre Dumas' the *Three Musketeers*. The story only puts you in "an abstract world of gallantry and adventures which has no *roots*—no connection with human nature or mother earth." Dumas cannot *show* you the cities of Paris or Lon-

1 https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=853.

don; it is as though he had never been to either (154). On the other hand, he loves *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Hobbit*, and even Beatrix Potter, for their ability to put you into another world and let you see through the eyes of the local inhabitant. He loves J.R.R. Tolkien's concept of *sub-creation*.

There is a man in our lives who my wife and I like to call Mr. Toad. He drives an expensive car and does not seem to realize the boastful countenance he exudes. He is benevolent, yet condescending, talented, yet needing an audience. Lewis muses on the choice of the toad in Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. Why not a stag, or a pigeon, or a lion? "The choice is based on the fact that the real toad's face has a grotesque resemblance to a certain kind of human face—a rather apoplectic face with a fatuous grin on it." The toad cannot stop grinning because its "grin" is not a grin at all. "Looking at the creature we thus see, isolated and fixed, an aspect of human vanity in its funniest and most pardonable form . . ." (50–51). This is pretty much the character of our friend: he is ridiculous but also vain in a quite pardonable way!

Lewis himself used talking animals in his tales. When reading *Narnia* we never pause to think, "oh, why on earth is this creature talking?" We accept the premise that once on the other side of the wardrobe, things are different: not worse or even better, but different. The trick is to suspend disbelief for the sake of something profoundly true. Lewis once said a Christian writer ought to have blood in his veins, not ink. By this I think he meant if you have a sermon, go ahead and preach it . . . from a pulpit. If you venture into literature, you ought not to have in mind a certain message. This will end up as propaganda. Instead, you must first love words and love the people who produce them. In a word, you must be human. Then, when you write, your Christian faith cannot help but show through. So, don't worry about a "dispatch"; just write.

Parts of this anthology will please the word police (of which I am one). One chapter is titled, "How to Murder Words" (81–83). These titles presumably are created by the editors, not by Lewis, but they are on the whole faithful to the content. The paragraphs here are about "verbicide," the murder of a word. The comments would please any English teacher worth his salt. One way to kill a word is inflation. *Awfully* for "very," *tremendous* for "great," etc. One of my own pet peeves is turning nouns into verbs: to prioritize, to impact, and the like. One place we can be sure to encounter verbicide is on airplanes. The flight attendant will tell passengers when to "deplane." Or the doors will close "momentarily." A friend of mine whispered, "Will they open again in mid-flight?"

Lewis notes the tendency (what would he say today?) to confuse description with approval or disapproval. For example, behaving like an *adolescent* somehow means behaving badly. In the chapter "Saving Words from the Eulogistic Abyss," we are warned against using words as an evaluation, instead of what they originally meant. For example, "he behaved like a perfect gentleman" today means the person was decent and kind, whereas the original simply meant he held property (86–7). *Abstract* once meant essential, whereas today it means vague or shadowy, or lacking substance. Christian readers will identify with Lewis's concern that in our times the term *Christian* might mean something like, decent or just good. But, he argues, it should simply mean someone truly committed to the Apostles' Creed, whether or not he is a good person.

Examples could be multiplied. To be called "inappropriate" or even "offensive" today is synonymous with being "wrong." Lewis would have said, better to be wrong and liable to punishment, than just "insensitive" or the like, which defies objective norms of transgression.

Understandably, Lewis balked at the way Hollywood could distort the true sense of fear and of romance found in the original. His comments are not simply the cranky objections of the purist. And he is not against making movies out of classics. But he worries that certain films cannot convey a world or a feeling the way a book can. He uses the example of *King Solomon's Mines* (73). In the book by H. Rider Haggard (1885), the hero awaits death inside a rock chamber full of mummies. In

the film version (he was presumably watching the 1937 version, directed by Robert Stevenson) there is plenty of excitement, even suspense, but very little fear of real danger.

Why should Christians be interested in these essays? Lewis does not discuss theological or biblical matters much. Of course, he does so elsewhere. One of the virtues of Lewis's approach is that it gets us away from a concern only with one dimension in life. Believers ought to become more open, less fearful. American believers, in particular, are so prone to individualism they tend to reduce the faith, and everything else, to propositions they may like. If so-and-so is *saved* or even *born again* we don't need any further involvement. Never mind whether the person needs more love, or the society he frequents needs reform.

Taking *The Reading Life* seriously can even help us better understand the Bible. In our defense of Scripture we often become empirical without intending to. We may even become afraid of images and metaphor. How could Noah's flood have really covered the entire earth? Are there big fish in which a man can live for several days? Can a virgin really conceive a child? In my own view these things did happen. These are legitimate issues in the face of skepticism. But to limit our apologetics to simply trying to prove that science and miracles are compatible is often to miss the heart of a story. More significantly, it may lead us to miss the primary author himself and thus prevent receiving his love. A friend of mine was interviewed for a position at Yale Divinity School. At one point, he was asked whether Genesis was theology or history. He asked the committee, "Do I have to choose?" He did get the job, but his question was a good one.

Most Bible stories have at least three characteristics: doctrinal payoff, literary structure, and theology. C. S. Lewis helps us particularly with the literary aspect of a story. To read, say, Jonah, and only be concerned with the possibility that a large fish could swallow a man is fine, but it misses the main point of the story, which is Jonah's hardness of heart. If we read chapter 2 as genuine repentance, we will be puzzled by the rest of the book which shows no real proof of Jonah's repentance. But if we pay attention to the literary nature of the book, we will see that Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish is theologically correct but lacking in all sincerity. The author of the book is quite the artist. He underscores the contrast between the downward movements and then the rising movements in the text, helping us understand the depths of Jonah's rebellion and the zenith of God's love. Some of my colleagues in the Bible department have done extensive studies on the use of plants in the prophecy.

Evangelicals rightly worry about such trends as "narratology" according to which propositional truth is suspect and every sermon must tell stories. But it is possible to overreact and deny or minimize the literary aspect of a biblical account and slouch into arid sermons. In another example, we may cull thoroughly from Job's so-called friends' remarks and legitimately find in them a mixture of truth and error. But why do we need over thirty long chapters of their dialogues with Job just to be wrong? The length is intentional. In part it helps us see their obstinacy and lack of imagination compared to the simplicity of Job's vindication. In part it shows us how tedious is unbelief. Again, why does Daniel several times enumerate the large number of the king's officers ("Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (3:3; 3:27)). Surely it is to render the pretention, the affectation of such an entourage. Or, again, why does the genealogy in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel add up to fourteen generations, when we know there were more? Matthew the Jew wanted his readers to have an easy way to remember the main links in the chain from Adam to Christ. He also wanted to highlight Jesus' paternity. He is the son of Abraham and of David (implicitly the son of Adam as well). Not only is his ancestry Jewish, but, significantly, Gentiles appear in the genealogy, and so do women: Rahab and (presumably) Bathsheba, not to mention Ruth, who chose Naomi's God over her paganism.

As an academic and a theologian, I get ex-

posed to a great deal of literature related to divinity. Much of it is good, often solidly orthodox. But occasionally what I see suffers from being dry. To put it a Lewisian way, it lacks imagination. But thankfully, I then do encounter warm, pastoral, even poetic, theology. That kind leads me to pray and worship. Every church leader and possibly every Christian believer ought to read this excellent book. It will help them transcend themselves and, in the bargain, become more themselves as God meant them to be. ©

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