

Youth Ministry

Ordained Servant
November 2013



Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: YOUTH MINISTRY

November 2013

From the Editor

The concept of “teenager” is an innovation in American culture since World War II. The youth culture that this demographic concept represents has become a dominant force in American society and thus, the church. Its presence has stimulated a variety of responses by the American church that are mixed in quality, which is to say varied in their faithfulness to biblical truth. Some of the serious negatives of youth culture in general have been uncritically incorporated in church youth ministries in mainline, evangelical, and even Reformed Protestant, as well as Roman Catholic, communions; and so unwittingly undermined these churches’ missions. Nathan Lambert, a licentiate who is the director of youth ministry at Pilgrim Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Bangor, Maine, describes a healthy OPC youth ministry in “A Portrait of Youth Ministry.” In keeping with this theme, I offer a review, “The Apotheosis of Adolescence,” on Thomas Bergler’s ground-breaking work, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*.

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

Don’t miss the second of a three-part series by Robert Letham, “The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World.” The concluding piece will appear next month.

One warm, sunny morning this summer I was happily surprised to see a very favorable review of Darryl Hart’s new book, *Calvinism: A History*, reviewed in the Wall Street Journal. John Fesko reviews it for OS this month.

David Booth reviews Robert Kolb’s latest offering, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*.

John Muether reviews Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*. I hope this will help convince readers that being quiet is a personality type, not a disease.

This month’s poem is a secular poem by an Elizabethan master who excelled in both secular and sacred poetry—Robert Herrick. (His *The White Island* would be among his finest sacred poems.) On the topic of the fleeting glories of youth, this month’s poem is a beautifully rendered reminder of the brevity of youth and our mortality. The cover

painting “Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May” is by John William Waterhouse, and is based on Herrick’s poem.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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- “John Bunyan as a Youth Pastor.” (Robert J. McKelvey) 20 (2011): 56–60.
- “Soul Searching: Religion among the Teens.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 16 (2007): 136–39.

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Work

A Portrait of Youth Ministry

by Nathan D. Lambert

What I desire to achieve in this article is to walk a tight-rope between principle and application. Of course, you will have to be the judge of whether or not it is a success. I hope to show you what youth ministry looks like, at least one model of it, not merely the proper theology that should undergird and shape it.

Thus, perhaps to your disappointment, it is beyond the scope of this article to defend the concept of youth ministry as such, a ministry that some may argue is an oxymoron and has no place in a Reformed and Presbyterian church. Neither is it my intention to offer a thorough critique of the American evangelical model of youth ministry that has existed over the last sixty years or so, though that is somewhat present to the discerning reader, at least by implication. However, it is my prayer that our Lord will encourage your hearts as you continue to read that a vibrant “means-of-grace”¹ youth ministry is not only possible, but can actually be a program that our Lord is pleased to bless with abiding fruitfulness in the hearts and lives of our covenant youth as one aspect of covenant nurture.²

Reformed and Presbyterian Youth Ministry: Toward a Definition

It is only fair that I begin with a general definition, or work toward one. A “Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry” is an individual church’s intentional program or ministry that primarily serves the covenant youth as an aid to their parents, and secondarily serves other students who may attend. The group I have in mind is made up of teenagers, a label that is here to stay whether we like it or not. However, that is not to say that we gladly or uncritically embrace all of the freight that term carries, especially the many cultural assumptions, presuppositions, and idolatries that are often involved.³

¹ This term should not sound all that peculiar to any of us, and I am using it here somewhat synonymously with Reformed and Presbyterian. For an understanding of one author’s view of how the means of grace relate to youth ministry in one church in the PCA, see Brian H. Cosby, *Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012).

² I am indebted to Susan Hunt for seeing it this way, at least in part. We have worked out the details differently at Pilgrim where we have both a Christian education committee and a youth committee. For further information see Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant: Leaving a Legacy of Faith for the Next Generation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998).

³ Let me mention three excellent resources that are available for this study. On the more popular level, a book I have worked through with many teenagers is *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), by Alex and Brett Harris. On a scholarly level, see Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

At Pilgrim,⁴ we have designated seventh grade, or twelve years old, as our starting point. This is a general rule. There are covenant youth and other students who are ready and happy to join us earlier and some not until later. The opposite can be said for the older teenagers. I don't kick anyone out of the youth ministry programs once they graduate from high school. In fact, having college students participate in youth ministry is a big help and encourages maturity in the younger teenagers. Thus, a typical youth group meeting is made up of junior and senior high students together, sometimes with one or two college-aged “kids.” These meetings are separate from Sunday school, and never meet on the Lord's Day so that they neither compete with corporate worship, nor with families who desire to spend time together on this critical day of rest.

Reformed and Presbyterian youth ministry is just that, Reformed and Presbyterian! It is an intentional ministry to the next generation of the church where Reformed dogma is the drama, if I might add to Dorothy Sayers's line.⁵ It teaches historic Presbyterianism as the biblical understanding of church polity, from its government to its worship and discipline. As Orthodox Presbyterians, this means that youth ministry should take place within the framework of our secondary and tertiary standards, like every other ministry of the local church.

At Pilgrim, we have a six-year curriculum plan so that each “class” of teenagers is receiving the same content and emphasis. I very carefully use a variety of DVD series put out by *Desiring God* and taught by John Piper.⁶ These series usually take about two-thirds of each school year which leaves about one-third each year to devote to a theology of service and missions, especially preparation for our annual trip to the Boardwalk Chapel in Wildwood, New Jersey.

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

The Goal of Youth Ministry

The most important question to ask about youth ministry is, why does it exist?⁷ Another way to put the question is, what should be the goal of youth ministry, the aim of everything done in a youth ministry? To put the question more personally, what should teenagers (and for that matter adults!) be living for?

⁴ Pilgrim Presbyterian Church (OPC), Bangor, Maine.

⁵ What Dorothy Sayers said was, “The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma *is* the drama.” *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1949), 3. Emphasis hers.

⁶ Obviously, Piper is not a minister in the OPC. However, he is a gifted teacher and teenagers connect with him very well. It also gives me many natural opportunities to delve into theological matters that either complement his teaching, or provide counterpoint, even a contrast to it. For those of you who are curious, I use John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2010), DVD; *Battling Unbelief* (Colorado Spring: Multnomah, 2006), DVD; *When I don't Desire God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), DVD; *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), DVD; *Let the Nations be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), DVD; *What's the Difference?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), DVD; *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), DVD. This last one is the trickiest in my opinion.

⁷ Again, not indulging the question of should it exist, nor a critique of its roots.

This is one of the many places where belonging to a confessional church is not only healthy, but extremely helpful. We all know what the chief end of man is according to the Scripture and as summarized in our secondary standards.⁸ This is also the chief end of youth ministry in general, and the chief end of youth directors, leaders, volunteers, and individual teenagers. Youth ministry exists “to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.”⁹

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

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

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

Youth ministry should encourage and equip teenagers not merely to glorify God in all things, but also to enjoy God in all things as he meets all their true needs.¹⁰ Youth ministry should encourage and equip teenagers not merely to glorify and enjoy God in the life to come, but also to glorify and enjoy God now. This is the issue of the teenagers’ heart. They may know that they ought to glorify God in thought, word, and deed, but they often have no idea what to do with how unhappy and how unsatisfied they are as they try to do it. And what is more tragic, they often do not know what to do with their failure to glorify God.

The Heart of Youth Ministry

If glorifying and enjoying God is the chief end of youth ministry, and of all those who participate in it, what is to be done with the failure to glorify and enjoy God? For that

⁸ WLC 1; WSC 1.

⁹ WLC 1. This includes having fun together! Personally, I don’t think one can be too serious about God. I do think one can be too serious too much of the time. This is why I have serious and rigorous times of Bible study with the youth group, and also have fun with them doing a variety of monthly activities.

¹⁰ For those who may be wondering at this point, I have no interest in changing “and” to “by” in the catechism’s first question and answer, as John Piper has suggested. I do greatly appreciate his point, however, that joy in God does in fact glorify God, and that God’s glory and God’s being glorified should bring joy to us.

matter, why could—and why would—the gracious power to glorify and enjoy God even come to us?

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

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

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

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

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

Youth ministry, then, is primarily focused on maturity in Christ, because being conformed to the image of Christ is not only what true believers are predestined for (Rom. 8:29), but it is also what enables a disciple of Jesus Christ to increasingly glorify and enjoy God, now and forever. Teenagers who are in Christ can bring all their failures to the throne of grace, confessing their sin, asking and receiving forgiveness, reveling afresh in Christ’s finished work of atonement. Teenagers who are in Christ can also have the right and privilege as children of the living God to cry out to him, pleading for all the gracious power they need to glorify and enjoy him more and more, knowing that he “is able to make all grace abound to [them], so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, [they] may abound in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). Why? Because they are “his

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [they] should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

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

The Schedule of Youth Ministry at Pilgrim

Now that we have considered what is the heart and soul of youth ministry in a Reformed and Presbyterian church, a fuller portrait of youth ministry at Pilgrim may now be painted. As mentioned above, we have regular youth group on Saturday nights throughout the school year. This meeting is from 6:00–8:30 p.m., meets at the church, and is for both junior and senior high students together and may sometimes be attended by college “kids.”¹¹ I lead these meetings and do all the teaching, other than the DVD segments when we have them.

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

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

Throughout the school year, there are also monthly service and fellowship activities. On the second Sunday of the month, the youth group and I eat lunch together at the church and then serve together in an afternoon worship service at a local retirement community. There are also many ways the youth are incorporated into the ministry of the church from teaching and helping in Sunday school, to helping set up for fellowship events, to helping people move. In fact, this is one way we raise money for our annual

¹¹ Parents and other adults are always welcome at our youth group meetings. However, I do not think it is necessary or essential for them to be there. Some would say that this puts Pilgrim's youth ministry at odds with the family-based youth ministry model as found in books such as Mark DeVries's *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) and Jim Burns's and Mike DeVries's *Partnering with Parents in Youth Ministry* (Gospel Light, 2003). I am not convinced that it does, for the spirit of these books is definitely present in our ministry at Pilgrim. The youth have many other activities in which to connect with older generations of the church, and are incorporated in to the worship, life, and ministry of the church as a whole.

summer mission trip. I call it “Rent Some Youth” and we do every odd job imaginable, which also helps us get to know many people in the congregation, young and old.

We also have a variety of fun activities that include everything from bowling and Christmas parties, to worldview movie and pizza nights, to outdoor activities like hiking and swimming. In fact, the summer is entirely activity-based and is punctuated by three very important events: Deerwander Bible Conference, our annual church family camping trip, and our mission trip. It is hard to say which event each teenager enjoys most. By all accounts and by our annual reports to the congregation, our week long service at the Boardwalk Chapel seems to be the highlight of the year, in addition to being a time of significant spiritual growth. The teenagers say that this is due to the successful blending of intense personal and group devotions coupled with evangelistic endeavors both on the chapel stage and on the boardwalk. I think this overall balance is important. We study rigorously together. We serve together. We have fun and laugh together. We go on missions together, all in the “strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified in Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:11).

Concluding Thoughts

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

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Servant Tribute

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

Alan D. Strange

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

Arthur W. Kuschke Jr. was born on September 18, 1913, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and lived a full life, dying July 1, 2010, at the age of ninety-six. He received his undergraduate degree from Wheaton in 1936 (the year that the OPC was formed), earning a divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary three years later and a Master of Theology in 1940. In that same year, he was ordained in the Presbytery of Philadelphia (May 21, 1940), in which he served all of his life, and became assistant to the field secretary at Westminster Theological Seminary for four years. In 1946, he became the librarian (succeeding Leslie Sloat), serving in that post until 1979, and thus laboring for almost forty years at Westminster. Over the course of the years, he wrote numerous essays and articles, particularly for the *Presbyterian Guardian*. He married Charlotte Milling in 1951, and they had three children (David, John, and Margaret) and five grandchildren.

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

Mr. Kuschke’s deep humility might conceal that he was a “valiant for truth,” though not to anyone who knew him at the seminary, in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, or as a commissioner or committee member in service at the general assembly. To those of us who knew him, it was evident that nothing pained him more than having to enter the

ranks of theological controversy, but he did it willingly and joyfully because he believed, as did Paul, that contending for the gospel—the gospel in all its fullness and purity—was a worthy battle. Over the years, he was involved in many of the great controversies that have marked the OPC in her history: the Gordon Clark matter, the Peniel case, the Shepherd controversy, and more. Mr. Kuschke was a staunch Presbyterian who believed that God worked through the judicatories of the church, and he engaged in these battles as they took place at the level of presbytery and general assembly.

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

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

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

Mr. Kuschke liked walking and was quite a nature enthusiast, enjoying the Morris Arboretum and strolls along the Wissahickon Creek. He could identify trees of every variety and birds not only by sight but by also by song. Summers were enjoyed in Maine and he loved spending time with his children and grandchildren to whom he passed along his love of general revelation. As part of that, Mr. Kuschke also loved reading, having membership in five local libraries, with particular interest in history, biography, art,

music, birds, mountain climbing, poetry, and mysteries. He had a special interest in music, sacred and secular. With respect to the former, this manifested itself most pointedly in his fourteen years of service on the Trinity Hymnal Committee as its secretary. He loved, and was a great champion of, the Trinity Hymnal. He also loved orchestral and vocal music, having an extensive collection of old 75 RPM records. I enjoyed speaking with him about music especially and sharing some of our favorites—Bach, Brahms, Schubert, and many others. He was also a philatelist (stamp collector), something that I just recently found out and wish I had known earlier as a fellow-philatelist.

According to his wife, Mr. Kuschke was an ardent student, above all, of the Word of God; he also loved the writings of John Murray (under whom he did his ThM), Cornelius Van Til, and Martin Lloyd-Jones, all of whom he also counted as close personal friends. Family devotions were held after the evening meal. Sunday afternoon was a special time of “apple parties” about the fireplace. Mrs. Kuschke writes: “Here catechism instruction took place, interspersed with a snack of cheese and crackers and a slice of apple offered (carefully!) on the tip of a paring knife to each as he has his turn.” The children were each given in the first grade a Bible at Christmas. According to Mrs. Kuschke, speaking for herself and her husband, “It was a special joy to see our children make their profession of faith, to be thankful to the Lord for their fine Christian spouses, to welcome grandchildren and see them make professions of faith within the OPC.”

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

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Servant Word

The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World, part 2¹

by Robert Letham

WHY IS PREACHING NECESSARY?

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

The Nature of God

The Christian doctrine of God is summed up by the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the new covenant name of God.² The revelation that God is trinitarian is the culmination of God's progressive self-revelation throughout the Old Testament. It entails that God is one indivisible being, three irreducible persons. All three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—exhaustively participate in the one being of God. Neither are any more God than the others, nor are the three together greater than any one. In keeping with this, the three mutually indwell each other, occupying the same infinite divine space.³ The eternal life of the Holy Trinity is one of indivisible union, marked by love between the three. At the heart of this is communication.

God is relational and personal. Jesus talks of the glory he shared with the Father in eternity (John 17:22–24). The Father advances his kingdom through the work of the Son, for it is his will that the Son should have pre-eminence in all things (Col. 1:19). We read of the Father's love for the Son (John 3:35, 17:23–24; Rom. 8:32). The Son brings honor to the Father (John 17:4). The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:14–15). The eternal generation of the Son by the Father tells us that God is not at all lonely even without the world and us.⁴ Apart from the generation of the Son, creation would be inconceivable.⁵ The eternal vibrance of the living Holy Trinity—an indivisible union of life communicated, received, and mutually possessed, as instanced in the relations of the three, in eternal generation and procession—grounds the free and sovereign determination of the Trinity to bring into existence what is contingent and other. God is life itself, overflowing vitality, inherently fecund.⁶

¹ Adapted from a lecture given at the International Conference of Reformed Churches, Cardiff, August 2013.

² Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 411–12.

³ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 158.

⁴ Barth, *CD*, II/1, 139–40.

⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 420.

⁶ See Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology*

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

The Incarnation

So much is evident when we consider that, while Adam was created *in* the image of God, the second Adam, the Word become flesh, *is* the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3).⁷ In the incarnation, the eternal Son took our nature into union. Consequently, in answer to the question as to the personal identity of Jesus of Nazareth (exactly *who* is Jesus Christ?), the reply given by the church is that he is the eternal Son of the Father.⁸ This Cyrilline Christology was affirmed at Chalcedon (see the repeated “the same” in its Definition) and even more emphatically at the second Council of Constantinople (553 AD).

Old is correct when he recognizes that the Pauline statement that faith comes through hearing the Word of Christ—and thus Christ speaking through his Word—follows from the doctrine of grace. God saves us because he loves us, and has spoken to us, revealing himself and opening up communion with himself.⁹ This is nowhere more evident than in the incarnation, in which our humanity has been taken into permanent, personal union by the eternal Son.

The Personal Nature of Man

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

Preaching as personal communication is located at the heart of God’s covenant. Central to the whole flow of the history of the covenant of grace is the constantly repeated promise, “I will be your God, you shall be my people” (Gen. 17:7–8; Jer. 11:4, 24:7, 30:22, 32:38, 31:33; Rev. 21:3).¹⁰ This is clearly established in the biblical record. Verbal communication was necessary even before the fall. It provided the meaning of creation and the purpose of human existence.¹¹ God, having created man, announced to

(Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2012); Robert Letham, “The Doctrine of Eternal Generation in the Church Fathers,” in a forthcoming symposium, as yet untitled, to be published by Crossway.

⁷ See Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History and Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2011), 13–14; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 281–86.

⁸ See John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: On the Unity of Christ* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995); Thomas G. Weinandy, “Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation,” in *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (London: T.&T. Clark, 2003), 23–54; Donald Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–132; J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975).

⁹ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume I*, 183.

¹⁰ See Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 285–336; Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 39–49.

¹¹ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: A Resource for Preaching in the*

him the nature of his task (Gen. 1:26–29), instructed him about his agricultural responsibilities—a function which may well have been both priestly and kingly¹²— and the outcome if he proved disobedient (Gen. 2:15–17). From the description of the aftermath of the fall, in which God was walking in the garden and calling out to Adam, it appears that such communication was a regular feature in the original setting of creation.

Thereafter, this is pervasively evident. In the Old Testament, preaching became embedded at the heart of worship. The prophets constantly engaged the community by word written or spoken. Old remarks that over the centuries preaching developed “both theological depth and literary refinement.”¹³ In the New Testament, more than thirty verbs describe it.¹⁴

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

The Suitability of Speech

Hence, speech is the normal means God uses to communicate to us. This is in marked contrast to the ideas of Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, 44, where he argues for the primacy of sense knowledge over the intellectual, of the visual in creation over words, which, he suggests, are inherently ambiguous.

All that appears, or that is conceivable in respect to us, depends on a Power who is inscrutable and sublime. This is not given in articulate speech, but by the things which are seen, and it instills into our minds the knowledge of Divine power more than if speech proclaimed it with a voice. As, then, the heavens declare, though they do not speak, and the firmament shows God's handiwork, yet requires no voice for the purpose, and the day uttereth speech, though there is no speaking, and no one can say that Holy Scripture is in error—in like manner, since both Moses and David have one and the same Teacher, I mean the Holy Spirit, who says that the fiat went before the creation, we are not told that God is the Creator of words, but of things made known to us by the signification of our words.¹⁵

Indeed, Gregory continues, visible objects are more readily comprehensible, while God needs no words to make known his mind.¹⁶ Gregory's argument has had ongoing effect in the Eastern Church, where worship is very strongly visual, with icons everywhere, the comings and goings of the priest into and out of the sanctuary symbolizing Christ coming to feed his people, the entrance into the kingdom of heaven, the opening of the gates of

Twenty-First Century (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 316.

¹² John V. Fesko, *Last Things First* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007).

¹³ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume 1*, 102.

¹⁴ Klaas Runia, “Preaching, Theology Of,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, and J.I. Packer (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 527–28.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, 44, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, ed. P. Schaff (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5:273.

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*, 45–46.

paradise, and so on.¹⁷ However, this is counter to the normal way God communicated to his people. In reference to his appearance to Israel at Sinai, it is recorded that “the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:12).

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

Speech-act theory reinforces this argument.¹⁸ Words are uniquely adaptable. Any number of illocutions—types of speech—are available. Words can promise, warn, encourage, rebuke, inform, elicit, express sorrow or thanksgiving, praise, advise, or command—and many other things. In turn, words can effect actions and bring about change; what are termed perlocutions. The urgent shout, “Fire!” will usually result in a rapid exodus from a building; an inconsiderate comment will produce anger or bitterness; a tenderly, soothing whisper, “I love you,” will sometimes accomplish the intended aim.

How Far Is There Confessional Support?

The *French Confession* (1559), in which Calvin played a central role, stresses the importance of preaching in no uncertain terms: “We detest all visionaries who would like, so far as lies in their power, to destroy this ministry and preaching of the Word and sacraments” (section 25).¹⁹

The *Scots Confession* (1560), drawn up by John Knox, asks, “Of the Notis, be the quhilk the trewe Kirk is decernit fra the false, and quha sall be judge of the doctrine,” and answers, “The notes therefore of the trew Kirk of God we beleeve, confesse, and avow to be, first, the trew preaching of the Worde of God” (Article 18).²⁰

The *Belgic Confession* (1561), agrees stating that “the marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein . . . ” (Article 29).²¹

The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) places preaching in the context of our deliverance from sin. “Question 65. Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith? A. The Holy Ghost works it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy Sacraments.”²²

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

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful (*credimus ipsum Dei verbum annunciari et a fidelibus recipi*); and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven: and

¹⁷ Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy; A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 143–62.

¹⁸ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered in Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 3:374.

²⁰ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:460–61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3:419.

²² *Ibid.*, 3:328.

that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good.²³

There is here a marginal reference—*praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei* (the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God). We note the important point that the efficacy of preaching is not dependent on the minister but on the Word of God itself. Another significant stress here is on the lawful calling of the preacher. Therefore, there is a twofold check, preventing the idea that any fool standing up and spouting off about the Christian faith can say that he is preaching the Word of God. First is the comment “when this Word of God is now preached” which directs us to the content of the preaching; it must be within the boundaries of the rule of faith. Second, it is done “by preachers lawfully called,” referring to at least licensure and probably ordination, and thus church authority. In this, it is in harmony with the New Testament correlation of the Holy Spirit and the church, as in Acts 13:3–4, in which the sending of Paul and Barnabas by the church is equated with their sending by the Holy Spirit, and the comment of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:28 that “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) 1.1 refers to the propagation of the truth, later defined as through the ministry of the Word, as the revelation by the Lord which has been committed wholly to writing in the Scriptures: “It pleased the Lord . . . to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving *and propagating* of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing.” In this the preaching of the church, properly understood, is not to be seen in detachment from the Lord’s revelation of himself and his will to the church, nor from the written record of that revelation in Scripture, which in turn is wholly identified with that prior revelation.

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

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

A point Old makes repeatedly in his massive work on the reading and preaching of the Scriptures in the worship of the church is that the church’s health is directly related to the vibrancy of its preaching. In turn, the quality of the preaching is largely dependent on the level of education in society.²⁴ Referring to the Benedictines and their cultivation of learning, Old remarks, “If the Church was to worship as it always had, there needed to be a steady supply of young men who knew how to speak in public, how to use words, and how to read and understand a written text. If there was to be a ministry of the Word, then the culture of words, the arts of literature, and the preservation and distribution of books had to be cultivated.”²⁵ There is no point in pietists praying for revival if one cannot

²³ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:237, 832.

²⁴ See, *inter alia*, Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 3 The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 190.

²⁵ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 2: The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 400–401.

speak the language of the people or put together a decent sentence, let alone a thought.

Besides a lack of education, there is another barrier to preaching in our day. This is the hostility towards all forms of authority that pervades contemporary culture. Reynolds remarks that in our age, when authority of all kinds is being repudiated, the monologue is anathema. However, he adds, biblical preaching has never been acceptable to the autonomous mind.²⁶

However, preaching—as presented in Scripture—is not principally a monologue. It is dialogical because it is covenantal.²⁷ It is personal address by God that demands a response from the hearer. Hence, as Carrick sagely comments, the interrogative is as much a vital element of preaching as the indicative and imperative.²⁸ We conclude that, where preaching lacks this element, it is on the way to losing its identity.

Indeed, as face-to-face encounter, preaching is in vivid contrast to the direction of today's social media. As Reynolds observes, these are marked by an attempt to transcend space and time.²⁹ Electronic technology connects us to remote locations but is in itself disincarnational. It aims to transcend the limits of human finitude but at the expense of normal human relationships. Recent social media have encouraged connections remotely but have undermined face to face human contact. At my older daughter's wedding in the USA a few years ago, a social media event live on Twitter and Facebook (her husband a graduate in film from the University of Southern California, with his own film production company), friends remarked that at the reception no one at their table was speaking to each other; all were busy texting. In contrast, preaching is inescapably personal. We can close a book, switch off the TV or computer, exit email or Twitter, but the Word of God penetrates to our innermost being (Heb. 4:12–13).

Alan Strange remarks that the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus were very popular in the ancient world, but the apostles made no use of such a medium.³⁰ The same can be said for the Greek predilection for rhetoric and oratory.³¹ This, as part of the *trivium*, was handed down by the classical educational system. Paul makes a point of saying to the Corinthians that he gave no attention to such matters but rather preached simply and directly, relying on the Holy Spirit to give understanding (1 Cor. 1:18–2:5). There was plenty of intellectual content, but it was shorn of extraneous adornments, devoted entirely to presenting Christ in as clear and direct a manner as possible.

One of the main features of Reynolds's argument is that the medium shapes the thoughts, the actions of those exposed to it. Before the invention of the printing press, an oral culture prevailed. In New Testament times, Paul's letters would have been read to the assembled church. The medium brought people together in community. Once the printing press entered, and books were widely distributed, reading took place privately and silently, by individuals. It shaped the society and the culture.³² Hence, we might add, the proliferation of hymns such as this, by Mary A. Lathbury, 1877:

²⁶ Reynolds, *The Word*, 335.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 335–36.

²⁸ Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 56–81.

²⁹ Reynolds, *The Word*, 340.

³⁰ Alan D. Strange, "Comments on the Centrality of Preaching in the Westminster Standards," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 194 n.12.

³¹ Strange, "The Centrality of Preaching," 217 n.28.

³² Reynolds, *The Word*, 191–201, 325–35.

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

Me, me, me, me, me, my dear Lord and me. Television accentuated this individualism, and has even been shown to have a physical impact on the human brain, introducing passivity.³³ The social media and the lightning speed of technological developments today are creating very new challenges to which attention must be given.

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³³ Ibid., 248–58.

ServantReading

The Apotheosis of Adolescence

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The Juvenilization of American Christianity, by Thomas E. Bergler. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, 281 pages, \$25.00.

An evangelical church without a youth group is unthinkable. Few realize that this, along with Sunday school, are rather recent innovations in the Western church. Bergler provides us with a detailed history of the development of youth groups in American Christianity, focusing on fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal, and black Protestantism. What these all have in common is their concern for cultural decline. What Bergler fails to mention is their lack of confessional ecclesiology. Hence, the pragmatism that lies at the root of the development of youth groups ends in serious cultural compromise, which Bergler insightfully notes along the way.

Bergler is himself experienced in youth ministry. He is senior associate editor for *The Journal of Youth Ministry* and is associate professor of ministry and missions at Huntington University, Indiana. Because he is a strong advocate of youth ministry, his criticisms have extra weight.

It is critical for church officers to be aware of this history in order to understand some of the perils of evangelical youth group culture, especially the temptation to imitate secular youth culture. In our tradition, we make promises to be involved in the discipling of our young people, as reflected in the parental and congregational vows taken at infant baptism.¹

Although “juvenilization” is an awkward term, there seems to be no better single word to describe the phenomenon that Bergler is identifying. Generally, juvenilization is the result of embracing adolescence as an ideal, which is the defining force of American youth culture. In the church, it is immature versions of the faith that resemble American youth culture. Bergler observes:

They [adolescent Christians] are drawn to religious practices that produce emotional highs and sometimes assume that experiencing strong feelings is the same thing as spiritual authenticity. They may be tempted to believe that God’s main role in their lives is to help them feel better or to heal their emotional pain. Juvenilized adults agree that the main purpose of Christianity is to help them feel better about their problems.
(12)

¹ *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for the Public Worship of God II.B.1.b. (5, 8).

Bergler traces the origin of Christian youth groups and the development of juvenilization to the Great Depression. He demonstrates that the initial motivation for this development was a response to the perceived “Crisis of Civilization,” especially presented by Communism as an ultimate threat to “Christian Civilization.” The revival of Christian youth was conceived as the best way to combat this foe. Save the world by saving youth. Entertainment was considered the only way to appeal to youth. Hence the creation of groups like Youth for Christ and Young Life and the popularity of revivalist youth ministers like Jack Wertzen and Word of Life Ministries (19–40).

The leaders of this new movement underestimated the long-term effects of accommodating American youth culture. Many young people became Christian “stars.” Old gospel music took on contemporary styles “subtly altering the gospel message” (51). Leaders embraced marketing and business methods (52).

The late 1940s witnessed the invention of the teenager. A new sub-culture of “passive consumers with poor critical thinking skills” was born (65). Mass entertainment promoted cultural conformity, which in turn dramatically reshaped American Christianity (80). But it was in the 1950s that American youth group culture was fully formed. Bergler’s title for chapter 6 nicely sums up the result, “How to Have Fun, Be Popular, and Save the World at the Same Time” (147). But, as Bergler observes, by adapting to American youth culture, “[t]he faith could become just another product to consume; a relationship with Jesus might become just another source of emotional fulfillment. . . . [This] set the stage for the widespread juvenilization of American Christianity” (148). “The evangelical youth culture had taken on a life of its own” (157).

Although some of their innovations may seem quaint today, the evangelical teenagers and youth leaders of the 1950s were engaged in a radical transformation of their religious tradition. . . . By defining the Christian life as less countercultural and more fun and fulfilling, YFC leaders harnessed the appeal of youth culture to the cart of revivalism. (157)

The new evangelical youth culture taught teenagers to see emotional states like ‘happiness and thrill’ as central to Christianity and its appeal . . . Evangelical teenagers demanded that Christian music reflect the emotionally intense, romantic spirituality they were creating in their youth groups. (162)

With the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 70s, “evangelical youth environments increasingly glorified entertainment and self-fulfillment and downplayed calls to spiritual maturity” (199). Youth groups more aggressively catered to teen styles, especially in dress and music. Informality ruled and general countercultural ideals prevailed, as evidenced in slogans such as “Get high on Jesus.” One of the leaders of the movement, Ralph Carmichael, accurately predicted “that teenagers of the sixties would bring their Christian rock music with them into the ‘adult’ worship services of the future” (201). Bergler chillingly observes that today the “Youth for Christ Model” has become the church. Bill Hybels at Willow Creek and Rick Warren at Saddleback self-consciously modeled their churches on this (208).

Aping the culture has come fully home to roost. An intensified focus on individual lifestyle places Christianity in the service of “lifestyle enhancement” (220). Formed by the juvenile mentality created by the menu of choices available in every area of popular

culture, Christian youth are trained to “pick and choose what to believe and to be suspicious of religious orthodoxies and authorities” (221). The democratization of ideas and beliefs undermines the teaching authority of the church among its youth, and seeks to make the church like the youth group.

[T]he teaching methods used often reinforce the cultural imperative toward individualized belief systems. Youth ministries pioneered group discussions and simplified, entertaining teaching styles. Many leaders idealized youth and hope to make the church in the image of youth. Some youth leaders actively criticized the adult church and taught young people to feel religiously superior to adults. In short, youth ministry activities communicated to young people that they and their opinions were all-important. (223)

Bergler acknowledges the value of sociologist Christian Smith’s analysis of the American teenager (219–20). Smith’s book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* is a unique exploration of the religious and spiritual dimensions of the lives of American teenagers. Most disturbing is Smith’s discovery of an emerging, culturally pervasive religious outlook in America that he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith perceptively relates this emerging outlook to digital communication, mass consumer capitalism, and therapeutic individualism.

While Bergler does not mention the absence of confessional consciousness, he does observe the lack of theological thinking behind the conception of evangelical youth ministries. Speaking of the evangelical youth leaders in the 1950s he says:

Rather than developing sophisticated theological criteria for evaluating popular culture and entertainment . . . They saw most pop culture forms as morally neutral and showed little awareness of the way that a change of medium can change the message it communicates. (158)

The failure to understand the relationship between cultural forms and their messages has been endemic among evangelicals. The irony of fundamentalists using the tube was not lost on liberal Harvard Divinity School professor Harvey Cox, who wrote:

This is a tension between content and form, between message and medium, that occurs when the Old Time Gospel Hour goes out on network television. . . . The move from the revivalist tent to the vacuum tube has vastly amplified the voices of defenders of tradition. At the same time it has made them more dependent on the styles and assumptions inherent in the medium itself. . . . a set of attitudes and values that are inimical to traditional morality. . . . If the devil is a modernist, the TV evangelist may have struck a deal with Lucifer himself, who always appears—so the Bible teaches—as an angel of light.²

This is one of the major themes to take away from Bergler’s research: the forms of culture communicate meaning. All embodiments of culture bear a message. When the church fails to understand this, it unwittingly adjusts itself to the plausibility structures of the culture.

² Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) 68–70.

In his final chapter, Bergler declares the juvenilization of American Christianity to be triumphant. He only spends the last three-and-a-half pages suggesting how to tame this dominant trend. Bergler's book is mostly descriptive with a taste of prescription. Here are some of his suggested themes that need extensive amplification, some of which I offer here as guidelines to those who minister to youth—hence its didactic form:

Teach Youth to Think Biblically and Live Mature Christian Lives

“Pastors and youth leaders need to teach what the Bible says about spiritual maturity, with a special emphasis on those elements that are neglected by juvenilized Christians” (226). Youth ministry must locate teaching on maturity within the larger context of the Bible's rich doctrine, teaching our young people to own the language of the Bible and the Catechism. One of the pervasive problems with the teens Smith interviewed was a lack of ability to articulate their beliefs. Rote memory is the beginning, not the end. Emphasize the particularity and exclusivity of the claims of Jesus Christ and the gospel, “its doctrine of salvation . . . the perfect and only doctrine of salvation” (first membership vow in the OPC³). Talk to them about the attributes of the Trinity, Christ's person and work, the meaning of the gospel, sin, repentance, self-denial, etc. Smith heard almost nothing of these things expressed by “conservative Protestants.”

Such environments [youth ministries] taught young people that Christianity was centered on them, and that their opinions mattered. The point of Christianity was not to get indoctrinated in a complicated set of theological beliefs, but to engage in open-ended discussions with peers that culminated in a simple gospel message. (204)

Youth Ministry Is a Ministry of the Visible Church

Youth ministry educators need to teach future youth ministers about juvenilization and equip them to serve as responsible cultural gatekeepers in the church. . . . Youth ministry educators also need to challenge youth ministers to love *both* young people *and* the church. (227)

Youth ministry must be understood and practiced as an extension of the covenantal training of the young people in the visible church, especially biblical and catechetical instruction. Youth leaders must be mature adults who submit to sessional authority. “Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’ ” (1 Pet. 5:5). The goal of the youth ministry is the formation of mature, adult thinking and character through the loving and wise nurture of mature leaders, not acting like teens.

Respect the Young at Their Stage of Growth

“Our vision for youth ministry should neither stigmatize adolescents nor let adults off the hook” (228). Cultivate intergenerational ministry growing out of worship, not creating separate worlds of teenage and adult life. Do not promote “alienating stereotypes” that treat teens as aliens or rebels, impossible to understand. Nor should we idealize youth as a

³ *The Book of Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Directory for the Public Worship of God IV.B.2.

goal, but rather demonstrate the desirability of growing up into mature adults. We should engage them as young adults in the making. To promote intergenerational participation in the life of the church, include adults in all activities.

Avoid Creating an Adolescent Ghetto

“Adults should not try to be teenagers, but instead need to set adult examples” (229). Avoid the dangers of becoming an adolescent ghetto. Youth groups tend to exaggerate and cultivate peer culture, developing their own dress, language, behavior, and self-orientation. Forming an identity distinct from the visible church is a problem.

Adolescent Christians expect their faith to be fun and entertaining. They want the church to make use of the latest music, technology, and cultural trends. . . . Adolescent Christians construct their religious identities through consumption of products and experiences. (14)

I recently received an email that perfectly depicts this major flaw in the long history Bergler narrates.

Want to create community in your church and excite the younger generation?

My name is Arthur. I am with a company called LocalHiro, where we help churches grow by exciting the young generation and keeping the church up to date with today. Have you been thinking of a way to get the younger kids at church involved? Today it's all about social media and tech, just two of the many things that an app offers.

There are currently more than 500 million Apple mobile devices and over 500 million Android mobile devices in use today and that number will only increase in the future. Your congregation has gone mobile. Have you been left behind?

What can a mobile app do for your church?⁴

Sing Music Commensurate with the Worship Song of the Church

They need to ask hard questions about the music they sing, the curriculum materials they use, and the ways they structure the activities of the church. Is what we are doing together reinforcing mature or immature versions of the faith. (227)

Youth leaders should be trained to be disciplers, not entertainers. Evangelical philosophies of youth ministry often unwittingly promote some of the worst aspects of American youth culture by adopting the forms of that culture. It is a matter of pedagogy—when young people are taught good worship song, they will know what is appropriate in worship. This should be encouraged, taught, and practiced in youth ministry. More informal songs, which are appropriate in more informal settings, should be identified as such. The music used in the church’s worship should be appreciated and enjoyed in youth ministry.

Youth Leaders Should Be Trained By the Session

⁴ Email received on June 12, 2013.

A training program of the session should inculcate:

1. An understanding of the Church, its doctrine, and its ministry, especially through its confessional documents. Youth leaders should love the church and its worship, and desire to pass this love on to the youth. They should also promote service in the church finding ways for the youth to help out in various activities.
2. The nature and dangers of American youth culture. Youth leaders should be alert to the ways our culture seeks to undermine a Reformed concept of the church and human life, and seek to build awareness in our teens. For example, they should discuss TV programs that portray adults as stupid, unwise, or immoral. They should avoid segregating teens into various groups; teaching teens that they are by nature rebels, not welcome in the adult world, etc. Culture forms people.

Youth leaders should teach critical skills so that our young people will discern the subtler themes of rebellion against all authority, and the worldliness in our culture and how to deal with them.

3. Good stewardship of electronic media. Youth leaders should challenge youth to discover the ways that mass media and culture allure them to conform in ways that are contrary to godliness. They should be encouraged to become servants of God and others, not selfish consumers (Smith's "instrumentalist view" of religion—it works for me). They should teach responsible uses of electronic media, especially social and mobile media—develop media wisdom and navigation skills.
4. The distinction between biblical tolerance, which is loving communication of the truth, and secular tolerance, which is silence about one's religious convictions.

Some Practical Ways to Prevent Juvenilization in Youth Ministry

1. Policies

- Have youth leaders report to the session at least annually to explain the youth group's activities and future plans, and to seek advice where needed.
- Ask youth leaders to seek approval of: all teaching topics and material; major special events, such as mission trips; proposed changes in policies or promotional material; expenses over a determined amount; a roster of the names of youth who regularly attend and their churches when some attend from other churches.
- Have youth leaders share leadership so that the group's focus will not be on one individual. One of the goals of evangelical youth leaders is to be "an 'attention getter' or 'extrovert' that 'constantly has other kids following him'" (202).
- Have a session liaison to help supervise and encourage the group and its leaders.
- Develop a training program for all new youth leaders and insure that they are committed to the doctrinal standards and Book of Church Order of the OPC; and committed to the church's philosophy of youth ministry.

2. Questions to help assess the success of youth ministry:

- Are the young people growing in love for and commitment to their local church, its worship, Christian education, and service? Do they consider worship and Sunday school “boring”? Ask what they mean. Does youth group replace church? Is it more interesting or important? If so why?
- Do the young people exhibit growing maturity in imitation of their Lord and Savior? Ask them to define Christian maturity.
- Are the young people growing in their knowledge of God’s Word and Reformed theology and piety?
- Are the young people establishing relationships with all generations in the congregation?
- Do the young people exhibit discernment of the dangers of youth culture?

Conclusion

Will we let the world call the shots, or will we take our pedagogical responsibility seriously and train the next generation in Reformed Christianity? Considering the negatives documented by Bergler, some officers may conclude that it is wisest not to have a youth group at all. Having a youth group is certainly not the only way to address the question of how the church, its families, and officers can minister youth at the critical juncture in growing up. It should be remembered that Bergler has been working with youth ministry and the training of youth leadership for his entire career. So his critique is meant to be constructive—leading to more-biblical youth ministry. Here are several reasons why youth ministry is important in our day.

1. The existence of the “Teenager,” though a recent historical phenomenon, is here to stay in American culture. Adolescence, is, of course, an important stage in human development. The problem arises when it becomes the ideal—then we have arrested development, which perpetuates immaturity and dependency. Youth culture is pervasive. Teenagers are on the threshold of adulthood. The church needs to help them make this transition.
2. The pressure to conform to youth culture needs to be specifically addressed in the church with a countercultural approach. We must pay attention to God’s curse on Israel’s idolatry: “And I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them” (Isa. 3:4).
3. Scripture does address the young specifically. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). “How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word” (Ps. 119:9). “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding . . .” (Prov. 2:1–2). So, youth ministry doesn’t have to work against a biblical whole-church, intergenerational philosophy of ministry. Properly done it should promote and enhance it.

I highly recommend this book. Every session that oversees or plans to design a youth group should read this book and use it to train potential youth leaders.

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ServantReading

Calvinism

by John V. Fesko

Calvinism: A History, by D. G. Hart. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, 339 pages, \$35.00.

One of the ailments of contemporary Christianity, Reformed or not, is the tendency to view one's place in the world as having little historical antecedent. In the broader evangelical world Christianity begins with one's profession of faith and in the Reformed church *Reformed* is typically associated with one's personal experience or upbringing. Historically, however, Reformed churches have been shaped by two chief factors: the confessions and history. The confessions (the Westminster Standards for the Presbyterians and the Three Forms of Unity for those from the Continental tradition) have typically fared better than history, whether because parents catechize their children, congregations recite their confessions and catechisms, or ministers subscribe to these doctrinal formulae. History, on the other hand, can be tedious, and to some—far worse than being heretical—history is boring. But history is as much a factor in shaping the theological convictions of a denomination as its confessions. This is not to say that history is somehow normative, but rather that it explains how and why denominations write their confessions—it provides context.

For the past generation, if Reformed Christians wanted to study a survey of their historical past, its origins, debates, and significant figures, they had to turn to John T. McNeill's *The History and Character of Calvinism*. But now, D. G. Hart has written *Calvinism: A History*, a book that will surely serve well as a replacement for McNeill's earlier volume. As tedious and boring as some histories can be, Hart writes in an engaging style and covers a lot of ground, from the Reformation's inception in Zurich with Ulrich Zwingli to the growth of the Reformed churches in South Korea. As with any survey of a large swath of several hundred years of history, Hart peers over the various events like a jet airliner at 30,000 feet. He moves briskly, noting the various contours, passes, rivers, and theological valleys of the geography. He does, however, drop down for a closer look at the landscape from time to time. Another of the book's strengths is that Hart pays attention to the complex nature of history. Far too often historians engage in hagiography—they present the Reformation as if simply preaching propelled it and no other factors had a role. As important as theology and preaching were to the Reformation, politics was an equally influential factor. In a word, history is messy, and there are seldom silver-bullet answers as to how and why things happen. Hart avoids hagiography and offers a sober and insightful analysis of the development of the Reformed tradition.

Despite the book's many strengths, there are two minor areas for further consideration. First, there are a few theological imprecisions in Hart's presentation. He claims, for instance, "Dutch Reformed Protestantism gave to Calvinism its memorable mnemonic TULIP . . . also known as Calvinism's five points" (79). Yes, the Synod of

Dordt (1618–19) responded to the five Remonstrant articles, but the acronym TULIP did not arise until the nineteenth century. Hart detects cleavage between Calvin and Beza on election, because the latter “developed the notion that God had predestined those whom he would save and those whom he would condemn before the beginning of time” (80). Whether one is an infra- or supralapsarian, both argue that God predestined before the beginning of time. He claims that the Westminster Assembly “followed Dort on the atonement” (88), yet the Standards do not mention the common sufficient-efficient distinction present in the Canons of Dort. Hart also identifies Herman Hoeksema as an infralapsarian (245), which undoubtedly will raise the hackles of the Protestant Reformed Church.

Second, my chief question concerns the title of the book, *Calvinism*. At numerous points Hart rightly recognizes that Calvin was one of the foundational theologians for the Reformed tradition, but certainly not the only one. At several points he notes how others, Bullinger and his Second Helvetic Confession (74), the Reformed *Harmony of Confessions* (75), which combined numerous Reformed and Lutheran confessions, Guy de Bray and the Belgic Confession (59), and Ursinus and Olevianus through the Heidelberg Catechism “supplanted Geneva as the leading provider of Reformed theological training” (48). There were a host of other contributors to the development of the Reformed tradition, and unlike the Lutheran tradition, which actually codified several of Luther’s personal writings into their confessional corpus, the Reformed tradition has never elevated any one theologian to the level of fountainhead status. The Reformed churches have always been defined, not by the theology of one man, but by their confessions and catechisms. Moreover, as much as some might try to label certain doctrines as “Calvin’s doctrine of man,” or his doctrine of predestination, or his doctrine of God, there was very little unique to Calvin’s formulations that could not be found in the earlier church or among his contemporaries. The whole point to Calvin’s letter to Cardinal Sadoletto was that the Reformed church was not sectarian but catholic in the best sense of the word. Hart even has a section in his book entitled “Calvinist or Reformed?” where he acknowledges that Reformed Christianity existed before Calvin became a Protestant, “So calling the churches to which he belonged Calvinist is anachronistic” (20). Nevertheless, Hart decided to title his book *Calvinism*. Why not title the book *The Reformed Churches*, or something similar? In all fairness, Hart is in good company. As noted above, McNeill’s earlier volume employs the term, as do recent volumes by Philip Benedict (*Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, Yale, 2004) and Dewey D. Wallace (*Shapers of English Calvinism*, Oxford, 2011). It may be impossible to extricate this term from the popular theological and cultural lexicon, even from academic titles. My own preference, however, would be that the term should be scuttled to reflect the theological ethos of our tradition—we are Reformed Catholics, not the disciples of one man.

These quibbles aside, Hart’s book should be required reading, not merely for seminarians but for anyone who is a member of a Reformed church. Pastors would do well to offer Sunday school instruction based upon Hart’s book. In the same way that we might trace our family history so we have a better understanding of who we are and where we are going, the same can be said about our own theological heritage and identity. Not only will it inform them about the past, but it will help people in the church understand who they are, or should be. Moreover, I believe that this book will be an

encouragement to many in our churches. In a day when Reformed Christians make up a mere fraction of the world's so-called professing Christians, the impression one might have is that the Reformed churches are all but dead. But Hart's book ends on quite a sunny note. As criticized as Hart is for his views on the doctrine of the two kingdoms and his perceived antipathy to transforming culture, he notes that the Reformed faith, despite its small beginnings, buffoonery, and hubris, has become a global phenomenon (304). Hart does not use the imagery, but in the sixteenth century one of the emblems for the Reformed faith was the burning bush of Exodus 3. Rather than signify God, sixteenth-century Christians applied the symbol to the Reformed churches—though they were engulfed in the flames of persecution and weakness, they were not consumed, because of God's faithfulness and kind providence. Hart's book is certainly this—a testimony to God's faithfulness to the Reformed churches, and a series of Ebenezers, that should give us hope that the Reformed faith will only continue to grow, even if its adherents are weak and at times persecuted. Hart's book, therefore, should be read and studied. It is definitely worth the time.

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ServantReading

Luther and the Stories of God

by David A. Booth

Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living, by Robert Kolb. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012, xx + 188 pages, \$24.00.

When two couples want to get to know each other, they don't fill out questionnaires; they tell each other the story and the stories of their lives. Because the Lord has chosen to reveal himself both through story (the main redemptive-historical plot of Scripture) and through stories (where we encounter the concrete realities of life, sin, faith, and grace), a great deal of recent scholarly attention has been focused on narrative theology. A critical insight from this research for pastors and other Bible teachers is how the stories we tell not only explain but also shape our identities. Modern scholars have come to recognize that internalizing a community's stories so that they become our own is a large part of how we become assimilated and identified with any particular group.

The retelling became a key tool in what contemporary communication theorist Charlotte Linde calls 'narrative induction': "a process of being encouraged or required to hear, understand, and use someone else's story as one's own." She defines this as "the process by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as *their own* story." (xv)

Martin Luther grasped the importance of this truth five centuries ago. Luther was not only a brilliant theologian, he was also a master of communication. Luther sought, through God's grace, to teach and proclaim God's Word in such a way that it would reform the totality of his hearers' lives. To use the expression made famous by Richard Hays, through the skillful retelling of biblical stories, Luther pressed for "the conversion of the imagination." With this thin scholarly volume, Robert Kolb reminds us that we still have a great deal to learn from Luther about how to engage Christ's people with Scripture.

Lest we romanticize the congregation that Luther preached to, we should take Kolb's words to heart:

The medieval age is often called an age of faith, but a closer glimpse at records of all kinds indicates that that was not the case. The population of medieval Europe may seem gullible and superstitious to modern eyes, as we also may appear to a later generation. But most people were hardheaded survivors, forced by the exigencies of disease, weather, and other human personalities to calculate carefully how the family and the village might survive the near future. In that day as well as in the twenty-first century, heaven could wait. (xvii)

Luther captivated congregations with his preaching. Yet, Luther wasn't interested in cultivating a personal following but in leading people into a right relationship with Jesus Christ. The stories of God from Luther's mouth and pen "cultivated the Christian way of living, providing instruction and direction for his hearers' and readers' participation in the unfolding drama of God's governance of human history" (x).

The book begins with a discussion of Luther's metanarrative, which Professor Kolb identifies as the whole life of the Christian being one of repentance. Yet, instead of focusing on this idea alone, the chapter ranges broadly over key Lutheran emphases such as the relationship of Law and Gospel, the nature of the two kingdoms, justification by faith, and Luther's understanding of the inspired Word as the power of God. The second chapter focuses on Luther's use of individual stories, including the techniques he used as a storyteller, in light of modern narrative criticism. The remaining five chapters detail Luther's use of stories to shape the Christian life from baptism until death. The chapters on "Affliction as Part of Daily Life" and "The Completion of the Christian Life" are particularly strong and will aid modern pastors in rightly preparing our congregations for these challenging realities. Professor Kolb writes:

Luther did not indulge in romantic pictures of death as a sweet escape. Death had invaded God's good creation as part of the curse upon sin. Luther frequently added death to his list of the enemies of the sinner and the believer, alongside the devil, the world, the sinful inclinations of the sinner, guilt, and other evils. Luther's refusal to mitigate death's threat may, in part at least, have been a reaction against the monastic ascetic contempt for the body he had experienced earlier in life. It was also part of Luther's affirmation of the goodness of the natural order that God has created and called good, an attitude engendered by his deepening engagement with the Old Testament, his increasing distance from Platonic ideas, and his Ockhamist tendency to see reality in earthly, created things. (170–71)

Luther's use of stories was, in part, a response to his sense of what the church of his youth had lost. "The concreteness of much of the biblical record had been placed into abstract forms shaped by Aristotle and others, who had not learned to define reality with the person of the speaking Creator God at its center. Luther strove to change that" (181). In our own age, which is torn between amusements and abstractions, Luther has a great deal to teach us about embracing and proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

Robert Kolb is one of our foremost living experts on Luther. His scholarship is impeccable. We could hardly hope for a better guide to Luther's thought. Nevertheless, the book is disappointing in a rather surprising way. Professor Kolb chose to write about *Luther and the Stories of God* in an abstract and academic manner which drains much of the life and joy out of the subject. Pastors, homiletics professors, and scholars on Luther have much to gain from this erudite work. Regretfully, those who are seeking a book that is not only "good for you" but also a pleasure to read will need to look elsewhere.

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ServantReading

Quiet: The Power of Introverts

by John R. Muether

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking, by Susan Cain. New York: Crown, 2012, 333 pages, \$26.00.

A recent internet post by a popular evangelical blogger came in the proverbial form of good news and bad news. On the plus side, “Seven Tips for Introverted Pastors” offered the assurance that it is possible to minister the gospel effectively as an introvert. On the other hand, this will happen only when the anti-social pastor is willing to face up openly and honestly with his, well, handicap. Introverts run the risk of presenting themselves as “unfriendly and uncaring.” They tend to avoid small talk, and so are disinclined to mingle with people. But if you come out of the closet, and especially if you can establish some accountability with an extrovert, your flock may be forgiving of your “more annoying habits.” All this advice comes from one who describes himself as an introvert who has managed to overcome his condition.

A more helpful resource for the introverted pastor is Susan Cain’s book, *Quiet*. Ms. Cain is not a Christian author; she is a lawyer who writes from a Jewish background. She notes that there is a great deal of debate in the psychology literature about how to understand introversion and extroversion. The former is drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling; the latter to the outer life of people and activities; the one is renewed by being alone and reducing social stimulation, the other finds that socializing “recharges the batteries.”

What is particularly striking in Cain’s research is the changing public perception of these traits. Over the course of the previous century, introversion, once considered a positive character trait, has devolved into a personality disorder. A “quiet” personality is now often associated with an inferiority complex. The introverted youngster is a “problem child,” and fear of public speaking now qualifies as a disease, “social anxiety disorder.” In contrast, the talkers become leaders. Cain notes that the triumph of personality over character as a cultural ideal weighs heavily in this transition. Early twentieth-century self-help guides, she explains, urged young people to cultivate character traits such as duty, work, honor, reputation, morals, manners, and integrity. Newer advice promotes the development of qualities with these modifiers: magnetic, fascinating, stunning, attractive, and energetic.

When Cain ventures occasionally into the Bible, she tends to over-psychologize the text. So she describes patriarchal sibling rivalry in Genesis as pitting the cerebral Jacob against the swash-buckling Esau, whereas in Exodus the retiring and stuttering Moses is perfectly complemented by the extroverted Aaron when presenting his appeal before Pharaoh. Yet episodes of eisegesis are vastly outnumbered by the common sense wisdom of her book, as in this insight: “love is essential; gregariousness is optional” (264).

What is at once most insightful and frustrating in *Quiet* is Cain’s treatment of contemporary evangelicalism, which, in her words, takes “the Extrovert Ideal to its logical extreme” (69). She

interviews a mainline Presbyterian minister, Adam McHugh, who describes his struggles as an introverted pastor: “The evangelical culture ties together faithfulness with extroversion,” because “every person you fail to meet and proselytize is another soul you might have saved.” Thus, for conservative Protestants in America, the healthy Christian life demands “participating in more and more programs and events, on meeting more and more people” (66).

What is frustrating about this insight is Cain’s failure to develop it as far as she could, so let me suggest ways of extending her argument. There is no coincidence, it seems, between the rise of the evangelical “extrovert ideal” and the collapse of classical Christian disciplines and practices, such as patience, waiting in silence, and even Sabbath-keeping. A former colleague of mine once argued that if Christians took seriously the biblical requirement to engage in acts of mercy on the Lord’s Day, it would become the busiest day of our week! This is a far cry from the Large Emden Catechism of 1551, which warned against the violation of the Sabbath when we “intentionally disquiet the day” (Q/A 45).

To be sure, the Bible does not commend idleness in the Christian life. And we are not saved by the contemplative life any more than by our works of activism. But our attachment to the extrovert ideal may tempt us to forget that in our service to God we are told, “aspire to live quietly.” Pauline emphasis on quiet may challenge the prevailing assumptions in the “missional” movement that often stresses the church’s calling to cultural activism. In contrast to that activistic impulse, one might argue that the apostle Paul expressed his preferential option for something quite different when he directed the Christian to “lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim 2:2). A recent call to cultural transformation from a prominent evangelical theologian accounted for Paul’s commands by explaining that the apostle intended to remind us that “there should be a place in the church for believers who are less energetic.” Introverts, take comfort: you will be tolerated!

In the end, quiet is important in the Christian life, not because it exalts Christian passivism, but because it underscores that our hope lies in God’s activism, not ours. He is mighty to save. He rescues us from our afflictions because he is no longer silent. He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and he is not content until he has conquered all his and our enemies. Perhaps a fitting way for us to register our confidence in the God who performs mighty acts for his people is for the church to quiet down a little bit.

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ServantPoetry

Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.