

# The Sabbath



# *Ordained Servant Online*

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**CURRENT ISSUE: THE CENTRALITY OF THE SABBATH**

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### *From the Editor*

I remember years ago at a Scottish festival in Connecticut I encountered a Scottish book seller who was very bitter about the Sabbath practice that cramped his style as a young man. It was hard to hear this about a doctrine and practice that I had found liberating. But then the New England culture of my youth knew no such practices. Of course, cultural practices often become untethered from their original meaning and purpose. As sinners, however, we also rebel against God's good and holy ways. In any case a revival of sound Sabbath keeping rooted in the marvel of God's saving grace in Christ is sorely needed as an antidote to modernity with its menu of idolatries.

Retired professor Richard Gaffin reveals some surprising strands in John Calvin in "Calvin on the Sabbath: A Summary and Assessment." It is helpful to remember the discontinuity on various doctrines, such as the Sabbath and assurance of faith, among the magisterial Reformers and Post-Reformation theologians.

Andy Wilson expounds a healthy perspective on the importance of Sabbath keeping in modern society in his article, "Sabbath Keeping in a Post-Christian Culture: How Exiles Cultivate the Hope of Inheriting the Earth."

Harkening back to our own immediate tradition, D. Scott Meadows reviews Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* (1606), one of the more influential treatises on the topic in the pre-Westminster Assembly era.

We have two offerings in the history department. Celebrating Reformation 500, denominational historian John Muether offers the fourth installment of Reformed Confessions with "The French Confession of Faith (1559)," as we see Reformed orthodoxy take confessional shape. Danny Olinger presents the seventh chapter of his biography of Geerhardus Vos, "Family Life, the Kingdom of God, and the Church," in which the ordinary life of an extraordinary man is depicted during the Princeton Theological Seminary years. It goes on to explore Vos's doctrines of the kingdom and the church with an excellent summary of *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903).

I review David Sax's *The Revenge of the Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter*. This is a fascinating look at the revival of interest in analog reality in every arena of life as a necessary corrective of pervasive digital boosterism.

T. David Gordon reviews a fascinating book about the importance of reading,

especially in the community of the church and neighborhood: C. Christopher Smith, *Reading for the Common Good*.

Finally, our poem of the month is by James R. Lee, who is a member of Westminster OPC in Westminster, California and teaches English at Cypress College. He has poems forthcoming in *Christianity and Literature* and *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature and the Environment*.

The cover picture is the steeple of the 1787 meeting house in Washington, New Hampshire, the highest township in the state (1,506 ft.) and the first municipality to be named after our first president, incorporated December 13, 1776. All of the photographs on *Ordained Servant* covers are mine. This enables me to avoid copyright issues.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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*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.

# ServantLiving

## Calvin on the Sabbath: A Summary and Assessment<sup>1</sup>

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by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

Calvin's teaching on the Sabbath or Lord's Day finds its fullest expression in his treatment of the Fourth Commandment in the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Two, Chapter 8, "Explanation of the Moral Law," sections 28–34. That treatment is virtually identical to the 1539 edition,<sup>2</sup> with minor additions subsequently appearing along the way in intervening editions. The 1539 edition, in turn, is a lengthier restatement of the view found in the first 1536 edition. In other words, there is no significant development in viewpoint between the first and final editions of the *Institutes*. Relevant material is also found in the Catechisms of 1538 and 1545, as well as in commentaries and sermons on pertinent biblical passages. I would encourage reading of the sections in the final edition of the *Institutes* noted above before continuing with this article.

Calvin's view may be summarized by the following propositions:

1. The Decalogue is a transcript of God's immutable moral law and is binding on humanity in all ages.
2. The Fourth Commandment, being one element in the Decalogue, is one of God's immutable laws and binding on humanity in all ages; in that sense the Sabbath institution (though not necessarily weekly Sabbath observance) is a creation ordinance.
3. The Sabbath day required under the old dispensation by the Fourth Commandment was a type or figure of spiritual rest.
4. Spiritual rest is ceasing from our own sinful works, mortifying our old nature, so that God may perform his sanctifying work in us; it may also be defined as conforming to God's will or imitating him.
5. Observing the weekly Sabbath in the Old Testament did not simply involve ceasing from the labors of the other six days. That rest was to be used for public worship and private meditation on the promised reality such rest typified.
6. Since God was pleased to provide his people with a foretaste of the reality still only prefigured, the weekly Sabbath was a sign of an invisible grace. It was, therefore, a sacrament of regeneration.
7. At the coming of Christ, the light in whose presence all shadows disappear, spiritual rest became a full reality, consequently, the weekly Sabbath as a type and sacrament was abrogated.

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<sup>1</sup> This article adapts material from my *Calvin and the Sabbath: The Controversy of Applying the Fourth Commandment* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus/Mentor, 1998), principally from chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> There is no English translation (to my knowledge); it is only available in the Latin original (which can be reconstructed by English readers from the editorial apparatus provided in the Battles translation of the 1559 edition).

8. Although the perfection of spiritual rest will not be realized until the eschatological Last Day, that rest is now an actual possession of the believer; spiritual rest, presently enjoyed, and eternal rest are the same in substance.

9. Christians, strictly speaking, are no longer obliged to keep a weekly day of rest; the relaxation of that demand, however, should not be understood as abrogating the Fourth Commandment but as intensifying and elevating its demands.

10. For Christians, keeping the Sabbath means, in the final analysis, experiencing the spiritual rest (freedom from sin, newness of life) they have by virtue of being buried and raised with Christ.

11. Such spiritual rest cannot be limited to one day of the week but must be practiced daily, perpetually.

12. The experience of spiritual rest necessarily expresses itself in deeds of piety and Christian service, meditation upon God's works, and acts of worship. Since spiritual rest is perpetual, daily public worship is the ideal for Christians.

13. Since Christians are subject to the same sinful weakness as those under the old covenant, a practical necessity exists for certain stated times to be set aside so that believers, being released from worldly cares and distractions, might be free to meditate privately and to assemble publicly for worship.

14. The Jewish Sabbath was perfectly suited to meet that need, but because so much superstition became associated with it by the failure to see that the typical mystery had passed away with Christ, the ancient church substituted the Lord's Day for it. That substitution was particularly appropriate because it memorialized Christ's resurrection, the day on which the Old Testament figure ceased to exist.

15. Today the Lord's Day still serves the need it was designed to meet. In principle, however, those Christians cannot be condemned who may wish to set apart some other day or even to pattern their lives by some other arrangement than a weekly day of rest, as long as they keep in view the need for stated times of public worship and meditation.

16. Christians, therefore, do not keep the Lord's Day because it has some religious significance (that is, because it is a divine requirement). Rather, they observe it freely and voluntarily, solely out of a concern for harmony and order in the church.

17. The physical rest provided by the Fourth Commandment for servants and other laborers is extrinsic to the basic concerns of the precept. The rest of both Jewish Sabbath and Lord's Day is not an end in itself, but a means to the end of meditation and public worship.

18. This provision of rest does remind masters or employers that they must not inhumanly oppress those who are subject to their authority. That, however, is a consideration that, strictly speaking, belongs to the second table of the law rather than the first.

19. The core of the Fourth Commandment and the essence of the Sabbath institution is that the creature should be conformed to the Creator, and that such imitation should be marked by a life characterized by public worship and private meditation upon God's works.

### **Assessment**

Any evaluation of Calvin's view of the Sabbath and his explanation of the Fourth Commandment needs to keep in view that for him, like the other early Reformers, matters

relating to keeping the Ten Commandments, particularly the fourth, while surely important, were not an overriding concern. Forced by the massive church-historical circumstances of his day to spend his life contending for a fully gracious salvation and for the Scriptures as the sole final authority in matters of doctrine and practice, the Sabbath question, including the question of Lord's Day observance, did not receive the attention it might have otherwise. At any rate, that question did not take on the dimensions for Calvin that it did subsequently, especially in the Reformed tradition. Consequently, we should not expect from him a formulation in terms of later debates.

Appreciating Calvin in terms of his milieu, however, is not the same as ascertaining the validity of his views. How do Calvin's views on the Sabbath institution and the Fourth Commandment stand in the light of Scripture?

In addressing that question certain deficiencies emerge. It should be noted that limiting attention to those deficiencies, as I do here for the most part, does not do justice to the value of what Calvin says for the church today in the course of his treatment of the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup>

There are two primary weaknesses in Calvin's view: his failure to account adequately for the specific force of the Fourth Commandment within the Decalogue and his inadequate appreciation of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. These two weaknesses are related.

1. The heart of the Fourth Commandment, Calvin says repeatedly, is the injunction to practice spiritual rest. Spiritual rest, he likewise makes abundantly clear, is cessation from sin so that God may perform his sanctifying work in us.

It is difficult to see any real difference between this notion of spiritual rest and Jesus's summary of the whole law, including the Ten Commandments (e.g., Matt. 22:35–40). For Calvin, spiritual rest is ceasing from sin, and the positive side of such cessation is the wholehearted love of God and of neighbor as self.

The Decalogue, however, is a detailed revelation of God's law, the explicit kind of enunciation summarized by the love command. The particular elements of the Decalogue are related to the love summary as specific aspects to what integrates the whole.

Consequently, to attribute to any one of the Ten Commandments the comprehensive force that belongs to Christ's summary effectively deprives that particular commandment of its intended place in the Decalogue. That is what happens when Calvin discusses the Fourth Commandment. The notion of spiritual rest he finds there gives to it a basic force that it cannot have biblically; a part of the Decalogue receives the meaning intended for the whole. Jonathan Edwards, for one, already grasped this point. In commenting on Calvin's views, he says, "And if it [the Fourth Commandment] stands in force now only as signifying a spiritual, Christian rest, and holy behavior at all times, it doth not remain as one of the ten commands, but as a summary of all the commands."<sup>4</sup>

2. A basic error is Calvin's failure to reckon adequately with the Sabbath institution as a creation ordinance. Other deficiencies in his views stem from this fundamental defect. He did recognize that the Sabbath and, correlatively, the Fourth Commandment,

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<sup>3</sup> For a further elaboration of lines along which this critique unfolds, see my chapter, "Westminster and the Sabbath," in J. L. Duncan et al, eds., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 123–44.

<sup>4</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: 1834), 3:95; quoted in J. Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), 1:401.

are mandated at creation and are perpetually and universally binding. For instance, in his commentary on Genesis 2:3 he concludes: “. . . but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world.” But the creation Sabbath is not given sufficient attention. Its meaning does not have the controlling place it ought to have for determining a fully biblical notion of the Sabbath institution.

How substantially Calvin has missed biblical teaching about the Sabbath given at creation is clear in his notion of spiritual rest. The basic concern of the Fourth Commandment, he holds, is to cease from our own sinful works in order that God may perform his sanctifying work. Clearly, then, for Calvin the existence of sin and the consequent need for sanctification are indispensable to the basic thrust of the Fourth Commandment. In other words, the Sabbath institution has meaning only within the orbit of redemption. Considerations arising from the pre-Fall institution of the Sabbath, where sin and (the need for) redemption are necessarily absent, are effectively excluded.

Even in his commentary on Genesis 2:3, where we might reasonably expect some reference to the meaning of the Sabbath institution for Adam before the Fall, discussion instead focusses on spiritual rest and the sinful weakness that requires certain times to be set aside for worship and meditation. The meaning of the Sabbath institution prior to the Fall seems not to have crossed his mind.

This failure to reckon with the creation Sabbath explains the characteristic emphases in Calvin’s view. Since he considers the Sabbath entirely within a context where sin is endemic, he finds nothing positive in the commandment’s mention of six days of labor. The command to rest on the seventh day is cut off from any positive correlation to the six days of work; these two elements can only be related antithetically, or the days of work viewed, at best, concessively.

This construal involves Calvin in a questionable reading of the language of the commandment: the six days of labor are a given, a fact; the rest on the seventh day, a command. His understanding is fairly paraphrased as follows: “You are laboring for six days and doing all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.” In other words, he takes the first two verbs, referring to the six days of labor, as indicatives, but the third, for resting on the seventh day, as an imperative.

This reading, while there is nothing that excludes it grammatically, is unlikely; it can hardly be insisted on. The three verbs, with the same stem and tense in the Hebrew text (in both Exod. 20:9–10 and Deut. 5:13–14), are syntactically parallel. Accordingly, lacking any contrary indication in the text, all three verbs have the same force grammatically. Since the third (not working) can only be imperatival, so, too, the other two (working) are also best taken as imperatival. But that conclusion is unavailable for Calvin; it would leave him faced in effect with introducing an exhortation to sin into one of God’s commandments.

We can now see how Calvin arrived at the ideal of daily public worship. Spiritual rest finds outward expression in exercises of piety; mercy, kindness, and other acts of love of neighbor are its reflexes. Before the Lord, it expresses itself most directly in acts of worship and devotion. But such rest, by the nature of the case, is to be enjoyed (we might also say, exercised) perpetually or not at all. So, with no other positive considerations in the Fourth Commandment to qualify the notion of spiritual rest he finds there, Calvin

concludes that public worship is to be constant. As the heart of spiritual rest, it may not be confined to any one day of the week but should be practiced daily.

3. My criticism to this point rests on the assumption that the Sabbath institution is a specific creation ordinance whose essence is reflected in the Fourth Commandment. In other words, the commandment embodies a principle intended to govern human life and conduct both before and after the Fall. Further, this principle is specific; within the Decalogue it is coordinate with the other nine commandments, and so subordinate, not identical, to the love summary of the law.

A further observation about Calvin's view serves a brief validation of this assumption here. One factor influencing his view of the Fourth Commandment is the belief that all types are redemptive in their significance; they postdate the Fall and so have been abolished by the earthly ministry of Christ, a point that he emphasizes repeatedly. Consequently, he plainly has difficulty in accepting the Fourth Commandment, without qualification, as binding for all times and places. The precept has been modified since it contains a typical element that has been abrogated with the advent of Christ. That conclusion, coupled with the neglected significance of the creation Sabbath, influenced his thinking toward the idea of spiritual rest as the basic concern of the commandment.

Undoubtedly, under the Old Testament economy, particularly for Israel as a theocracy, a body of types and symbols prefigured the earthly ministry of Christ and so was abrogated by that ministry. The writer of Hebrews, for one, is emphatically clear on that point (e.g., 9:1–10:18). But what about typical elements in special revelation prior to the Fall? Calvin's mind on that question is difficult to know, since, as far as I can tell, he does not address it directly. But from those places where he maintains that Christ has abolished all types by his coming (e.g., *Institutes* 2.9.3; 2.11.2–6; 4.18.4), it seems likely that he would include all types, pre-Fall, pre-redemptive, if any, as well as redemptive.

Two New Testament passages preeminently point to typology before the Fall and specifically to the pre-Fall weekly Sabbath as a type. In 1 Corinthians 15:44b–46, based on Genesis 2:7 Paul argues from the original, “natural,” order of the creation instanced in (pre-Fall) Adam to its eschatological, “spiritual,” order, the order of the Spirit, inaugurated by Christ, as the last Adam become the “life-giving Spirit” at his resurrection. Similarly and with a more explicit bearing on the Sabbath, in Hebrews 4:4–10, the writer connects the seventh day rest of the creation week with eschatological Sabbath-rest (vv. 4 and 9).<sup>5</sup>

The teaching of these passages yields the following four considerations: 1) Creation was from the beginning and continues to be oriented toward eschatology; by its very constitution (“natural”) it anticipates the eschatological (the “spiritual”). 2) Since the original creation thus implies the eventual emergence of the new creation, typology is inherent in the original creation and therefore antedates the Fall; the natural is typical, prefiguring and anticipating the spiritual. 3) Given the Fall, redemption becomes the essential means for the natural order to come to its full realization in the spiritual order; redemption, made necessary only because of the Fall, leaves its imprint on the eschatological state. 4) The weekly Sabbath is a type; it points to the rest that marks the eschatological order as a whole. Calvin in his own way recognizes this eschatological

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<sup>5</sup> *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 150–53 provides detailed exegesis of the 1 Corinthians passage; for Hebrews see note 6 below.

significance in quoting Isaiah 66:23 to show that the Sabbath will not be fully celebrated until the Last Day.

The typology inherent in the original creation and the eschatological reference of the Sabbath give the following picture of the pre-Fall Sabbath. Genesis 2:2–3, together with the commentary on them in the Fourth Commandment, show that the weekly Sabbath given to Adam served a function in the creaturely realm similar to the seventh day of the creation week for the Creator. As God rested from his completed work of creation, so man would enter into his rest after completing his God-given tasks as vicegerent over the creation. This analogy between Creator and image-bearing creature, however, involves an important difference. The creating work of God had been completed and his rest begun (Heb. 4:3b–4). The task entrusted to Adam/man had yet to be performed; his rest lay in the future. Eschatological Sabbath-rest was a still future goal (cf. Heb. 4:9).

The weekly Sabbath served as a continual reminder to Adam that history is not a ceaseless repetition of days; his toil was meaningful and would result in rest. At the beginning of each week he could look forward to the rest of the seventh day. That weekly cycle was to impress on him that he, together with the created order as a whole, was moving toward a goal, nothing less than an eschatological culmination. The rest of each week was a type that prefigured the ultimate goal of the whole created order and, at the same time, emphasized its present state of pre-eschatological incompleteness. As a weekly day of rest was instituted to remind him of the purposefulness of his work, it also provided rhythmic refreshment, periodic psycho-physical rest appropriate to him in the integrity of his “natural,” pre-eschatological existence.

This conclusion prompts the following observations. The language of the Fourth Commandment does not suggest anything but a positive correlation between the six days of labor and the seventh day of rest. In fact, that latter is unintelligible without the former and vice versa; the day of rest gives meaning to and, in turn, receives its meaning from the six days of labor. The seven-day week is a divinely ordained whole; it implies a philosophy of history that even the most unreflective mind can intuit.

As already noted, a basic weakness in Calvin’s view is the failure to see this positive correlation. Even were it to be granted that the Fourth Commandment only applies in the context of redemption, it remains puzzling how he finds a contrast between our sinful works and the rest that God commands (or, at best, a concessive relationship between our work and the rest commanded). Since the Fall sinners are in themselves no more capable of rest acceptable to God than they are of performing acceptable works.

In light of the significance of the Sabbath instituted at creation, we should appreciate that the primary concern of the Fourth Commandment is not pragmatic—to provide time for public and private worship and religious instruction. Rather, the original concern of the weekly Sabbath continues. It is for restful reflection on our lives, before God, in view of the ultimate outcome of history—when the present pre-eschatological order will be transformed into the eschatological order—and for reviewing our cultural calling and activities of the past six days in light of that future consummation.

This is not at all to imply that cultic elements do not have a proper, even integral, place on the Sabbath. Indeed, such worship is crucial and ought to be prominent, especially in the post-Fall Sabbath, when believers must focus attention on Christ, rather than themselves, as the one who for them has fulfilled the command for six days of labor and in whom, based on his fulfillment and by the power of his Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9–10),

they are obeying that command (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 14:13; 19:7–8). Where the Sabbath institution is properly appreciated and functions as it should, cultural concerns and avocations, on the one hand, and cultic activities, on the other, are neither confused nor polarized.

Vos is worth quoting at length here:

From what has been said about the typical, sacramental meaning of the Sabbath it follows that it would be a mistake to base its observance primarily on the ground of utility. The Sabbath is not the outcome of an abnormal state of affairs in which it is impossible, apart from the appointment of a fixed day, to devote sufficient care to the religious interests of life. On such a view it might be maintained that for one sufficiently at leisure to give all his time to the cultivation of religion the keeping of the Sabbath would no longer be obligatory. Some of the continental Reformers, out of reaction to the Romish system of holy days, reasoned after this fashion. But they reasoned wrongly. The Sabbath is not in the first place a means of advancing religion. It has its main significance apart from that, in pointing forward to the eternal issues of life and history. Even the most advanced religious spirit cannot absolve itself from partaking in that. It is a serious question whether the modern church has not too much lost sight of this by making the day well-nigh exclusively an instrument of religious propaganda, at the expense of its eternity-typifying value. Of course it goes without saying that a day devoted to the remembrance of man's eternal destiny cannot be properly observed without the positive cultivation of those religious concerns which are so intimately joined to the final issue of his lot. But, even where this is conceded, the fact remains that it is possible to crowd too much into the day that is merely subservient to religious propaganda, and to void it too much of the static, God-ward and heavenly-ward directed occupation of piety.<sup>6</sup>

A critique of Calvin's views, as one among "the continental Reformers," seems likely.

4. We may now consider further the effects of the Fall upon the Sabbath institution, i.e., the relation of the creation Sabbath to the redemptive Sabbath. Above all, the Fall does not abrogate either the creation Sabbath or its typical function. The present creation still anticipates the new creation, albeit with the need for the removal of the added burden of sin and its corrupting consequences (Rom. 8:19–22). Sinners are not capable of living up to the demands of the Fourth Commandment (work and rest). The task of bringing the original creation to its eschatological fulfillment has been taken from them and given to the better and more worthy Servant. The Father has begun, through the work of the Son, to bring history to its Spirit-transformed and -complexioned climax (1 Cor. 15:46). The last Adam achieves the task forfeited by the first Adam.

The impact of the history of redemption on the Sabbath institution is apparent in the theocracy, an impact that Calvin readily saw. What is not so apparent in analyzing the Mosaic Sabbath, however, is the distinction between the Fourth Commandment as it reflects a universally binding creation ordinance and what in the commandment was peculiar to its old covenant administration. That distinction, it appears, Calvin did not observe, particularly when he argues that the typical element in the Fourth Commandment has been abrogated.

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<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 157.

There is validity, of course, in Calvin's idea that the Jewish Sabbath typified the spiritual rest brought by Christ. That is so because all the forms and rituals of Old Testament religion, instituted after the Fall and especially at Sinai, anticipated the work of Christ "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). On the other hand, it is less than biblical for Calvin to construe the specific concern of the Fourth Commandment as spiritual rest that is equivalent generically to freedom from sin and love of God and neighbor.

Spiritual rest, typified under the Mosaic economy by the Sabbath and fulfilled by Christ, has its sense in terms specific to the Fourth Commandment. The spiritual, redemptive rest already brought by Christ assures believers of the eventual future realization of the eschatological rest typified by the creation Sabbath. It does so by granting them to share by imputation in union with Christ in his perfect righteousness, on which basis the Spirit is now at work in them, preparing them for the consummate enjoyment of all the blessings of that rest. Present spiritual rest in Christ is a firstfruits foretaste of the eschatological blessings subsequently to be enjoyed in their fullness (Rom. 8:23).

Accordingly, we may properly speak of the abolition of the *Jewish Sabbath* at the coming of Christ—as Paul does in Galatians 4:10–11 and Colossians 2:16–17—in the sense that the *typical* element that had become associated with it under the old covenant has been abrogated. Present spiritual rest, as it has already become a reality in Christ, is no longer typified by the weekly Sabbath. But the weekly Sabbath, instituted at creation as a type of eschatological rest, points to that rest in its perfect finality. It therefore continues to serve that typical function until the eschatological consummation it prefigures is realized. That consummation, as 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear, will not be until the resurrection of the body (vv. 42–49).

Certainly, believers have already received the Spirit as an actual deposit on their eschatological inheritance (Eph. 1:14). But to conclude that the Sabbath institution has been abrogated because blessings of the eschatological order are presently realized in the New Testament church is to fail to see that the weekly Sabbath now points to the still future consummate glory of the blessings of the new heavens and new earth and will continue to serve as the type of that still future perfection until it becomes reality.

The old covenant Sabbath was not, strictly speaking, the Sabbath institution expressed in the Fourth Commandment, but the expression that creation ordinance took in redemptive history from the Fall until Christ. Since the particular redemptive considerations which that old covenant Sabbath typified have been fulfilled in Christ, it is no longer in force. That fulfillment, however, has left an indelible imprint on the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. Confirmed redemptive rest, achieved by Christ for believers, is their guarantee of the full realization of the eschatological rest in view already in the creation Sabbath.

These considerations provide the most satisfying rationale for the change of the weekly Sabbath from the seventh day to the first. The guaranteed realization of the eschatological Sabbath by Christ's fulfillment of the redemptive Sabbath in its old covenant typical form marks the eschatologically momentous arrival of the new creation within history (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ the ultimate goal of history in its unfolding, typified by the creation Sabbath, is assured; the probationary element for obtaining that goal has been sustained by him and is no longer in force.

Specifically, Christ's resurrection is the signal event of this achieved certainty, so that the day of the week on which it occurred is now appropriately the day of rest. The rest day pointing to that still future consummate state is now enjoyed at the beginning of the week rather than at the end, an indication that the goal of creation is now certain and no longer a matter of unresolved probation.

To say that New Testament Christians are still bound to keep this type—a widely held view among many evangelicals—is not to compromise the freedom brought by Christ. Rather, observing the Lord's Day is an expression of that freedom. The weekly rest day, faithfully kept by the church, is a concrete witness to a watching world that believers are not enslaved in the turmoil of an impersonal, meaningless historical process but look with confidence to sharing in the consummation of God's purposes for the creation; Sabbath keeping is a witness that there does indeed remain an eschatological Sabbath-rest for the people of God (Heb. 4:9).<sup>i</sup>

The Sabbath is there each week as a constant reminder to the church that the new heavens and earth to come will arrive with a splendor and glory beyond our present comprehension. The weekly Sabbath is there to remind us that the rich and manifold blessings we now enjoy in Christ will, by comparison, be far transcended by those we will possess “when he appears, [and] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). About that comparison Calvin would surely agree.

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# ServantLiving

## Sabbath Keeping in a Post-Christian Culture: How Exiles Cultivate the Hope of Inheriting the Earth

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by Andy Wilson

As we face the challenge of living in a culture that is increasingly apathetic and antagonistic toward the Christian faith, it is becoming easier for us to identify with the biblical description of Christians as “sojourners” and “exiles” whose true citizenship is in heaven (see Phil. 1:27; 3:20; Heb. 11:13; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11). We feel like exiles when we practice our faith in a society that marginalizes biblical Christianity for being so out of step with mainstream attitudes. This is difficult for us, and it makes us susceptible to the temptations of cultural accommodation and assimilation. If we are going to resist these temptations, we need to engage in communal habits and rhythms that distinguish us from the culture in which we must simultaneously live as salt and light. We need to be regularly reminded that we are characters in a story that is markedly different than the stories imagined and lived out by the people around us. In short, if we are not being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will inevitably be conformed to this present evil age.

### The Habit of Sabbath Keeping

In several recent books, James K.A. Smith has made a compelling case for the formative power of habitual practices that he describes as “pedagogies of desire.”<sup>7</sup> In Smith’s words, “if the heart is like a compass . . . we need to (regularly) calibrate our hearts, tuning them to be directed to the Creator, our magnetic north.”<sup>8</sup> An emphasis on the shaping power of Christian practices is also a significant element in Rod Dreher’s much-discussed “Benedict Option,” which says that Christians need to look to the traditions of their distinctive communions for the cultivation of Christian identity if we are going to be able to set forth a genuine alternative in our witness-bearing.<sup>9</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to a characteristic tendency in American Christianity: the tendency to think that the way to reach our culture with the gospel is to develop ministry strategies

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<sup>7</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016), 21–22. While Smith’s critical analysis of the contemporary church and his argument for the shaping power of historically-rooted worship are helpful, it should be noted that many of his examples of “pedagogies of desire” are at odds with historic Reformed worship and piety.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 20.

<sup>9</sup> See “Benedict Option as Meanness?” Rod Dreher, accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-meanness/>.

and practices that will appeal to those who are outside the church. The problem with this approach is that when the church's ministry is shaped by the culture and its concerns, the culture ends up shaping the church and those who belong to it. We need to pay careful attention to the fact that the way we practice and promulgate our faith plays an important role in shaping what we believe and who we are. Think of a swimmer using training drills to imprint the elements of a particular swimming stroke into his muscle memory. Through disciplined repetition, motions that are at first unnatural become second nature. But this will only result in a better swimming stroke if the drills are in continuity with the whole stroke. In the same way, our practices will best calibrate our hearts to God and his truth when they are in continuity with the tradition that we believe to be the best embodiment of biblical Christianity.

One practice from the Reformed tradition that can be of great help in the cultivation of Christian identity is Sabbath keeping. The Sabbath is about much more than taking one day off from work each week. God instituted the Sabbath as a sign pointing to the completion of his purpose for the world. The Sabbath essentially functions as a sign of the gospel. John Calvin expresses as much when he says that the Sabbath is a day when "believers are required to rest from their own works so as to allow God to do his work in them."<sup>10</sup> The Sabbath calls us to stop trusting in our own performance so that we can receive God's gracious provision of spiritual rest in the gospel of his Son.

When God tells us to "*remember* the Sabbath day" (Ex. 20:8), he is not just talking about mental recollection. In Scripture, the word "remember" often has to do with being faithful to one's covenant commitments. Remembering the Sabbath is about letting it shape us as those whom God has set apart to be his holy people (see Exod. 34:13). In the words of Meredith Kline, "Observance of the Sabbath by man is thus a confession that Yahweh is his Lord and Lord of all lords. Sabbath keeping expresses man's commitment to the service of his Lord."<sup>11</sup> In other words, the Sabbath helps reorient us by reminding us that we live in this world as pilgrims whose ultimate allegiance is to another King and kingdom. As such, we strive to enter the final Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God (see Heb. 4:9–11).

As the residual influence of the Christian view of Sunday continues to fade in our post-Christian culture, the habit of Sabbath keeping will be increasingly disruptive to the work and activities that we do alongside non-Christians in the common sphere. This will sometimes raise questions about various aspects of our cultural involvement, and Christians who are committed to observing the Sabbath may not always agree about how to answer all of these questions. Nevertheless, we should never grow weary of the disruption that the Sabbath brings to our this-worldly pursuits. The habit of Sabbath keeping helps us remember that we belong to a kingdom that is infinitely more valuable than anything that this world can offer.

## **The Historical Development, Diminishment, and Recovery of the Lord's Day**

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<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 ed., trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 39.

The Sabbath is an important overarching theme in biblical theology. David VanDrunen points out its prominence in the creation account when he writes: Genesis 1:1–2:3 presents God as working toward and attaining an eschatological goal. The text is permeated with a sense of historical movement that is capped by a scene of arrival. This sense is produced most prominently by the sabbatical pattern that frames the narrative . . . patterns of sevens or multiples of sevens absolutely pervade Genesis 1:1–2:3.<sup>12</sup>

Everything in the creation account is oriented toward day seven, when the Lord of the Sabbath sits down to reign over his creation-kingdom. The Sabbath is also a key theme in the Gospels, where Jesus's Sabbath activity announces the arrival of the reality that the day signifies (see Matt. 12:1–21; Luke 4:16–21) and where Jesus invites people to come to him and find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:28–30). Another New Testament book that makes significant use of the Sabbath theme is the epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of striving to enter God's rest and living as sojourners until we receive the unshakeable kingdom (see Heb. 4:1–11; 11:10, 13, 16, 38; 12:18–29). This is especially significant when we remember that the main theme of Hebrews is to demonstrate how the new covenant is the fruition and fulfillment of the old covenant. Lastly, the sabbatical pattern also figures significantly in the book of Revelation. The book's structure and message rely heavily on the symbolic use of the number seven, and the saints are exhorted to persevere in faith until they enter into the rest that will characterize the new creation (see Rev. 6:11; 14:12–13).

Taken together, these and other texts demonstrate that the Sabbath was established as a sign of the end-times rest that is the goal of history. Just as God did his work of creating the world and then entered into his well-deserved rest as Lord over all creation, man was called to complete his assigned tasks of filling and subduing the earth, serving and guarding the garden-sanctuary, and not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in order that he might enter into God's rest. Tragically, Adam's fall made it impossible for us to merit God's rest by our performance, but Jesus has secured that rest for his people in his office as the last Adam. Through faith in him, we gain access to the eternal Sabbath of the new creation.

This explains why the Sabbath moved from the last day of the week to the first day of the week under the new covenant. Christ's resurrection on a Sunday was the epochal event that marked the beginning of the new creation. This caused the New Testament church to gather for worship on Sundays instead of Saturdays (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), and by the end of the first century the phrase "the Lord's day" had become a technical term for the Christian Sabbath (see Rev. 1:10). While the Saturday Sabbath was terminated because of Christ's finished work of redemption, there was a recognition among God's people that a Sabbath sign was still needed in this present age because we have not yet entered into the consummation of God's Sabbath rest (see Heb. 4:1, 9).

The practice of Sunday Sabbath observance was well established by the end of the apostolic period, as we see in this statement from the second-century apologist Justin Martyr: "We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Saviour

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<sup>12</sup> David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 70–71.

rose from the dead on the same day.”<sup>13</sup> In the early fourth century, the conversion of Constantine and the outward Christianization of the Greco-Roman world resulted in the official declaration of Sunday as a public holiday and day of rest. Unfortunately, it also resulted in the church making various concessions to the pagan mind. One such concession was the adaptation of pagan festivals and holidays for Christian purposes. This marked the beginning of the medieval church’s development of its elaborate liturgical calendar of holy days, fast days, and days recognizing various saints. As increasing emphasis was placed upon these days, particularly upon the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent, the Christian Sabbath was overshadowed.<sup>14</sup>

In light of this situation, the Protestant Reformers set their sights on the recovery of the Lord’s Day. One of the most important contributions in this area came from the Strasbourg Reformer Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541), a colleague of Martin Bucer. Hughes Oliphant Old summarizes Capito’s argument as follows:

With an appeal to the fourth chapter of Hebrews, Capito claimed that the old Sabbath was a sign of the rest and salvation that would begin with the resurrection of Christ. The old Sabbath was a promise of a day of rest that the Jews under the law had not yet experienced (Heb. 4:8). While that day of rest was the final day of consummation at the end of history, it is, even in this life, already experienced in the Lord’s Day, the day of resurrection, which clearly, according to the Gospels, is the first day of the week.<sup>15</sup>

Through the efforts of Capito and other Reformers, the focus of the church calendar in Reformed churches shifted back to the weekly observance of the Lord’s Day. Furthermore, the Puritans’ success in promoting Sabbath observance in seventeenth-century England resulted in most of the English-speaking world being Sabbatarian up until the middle of the twentieth century.

## No Place for Fun?

Many Christians have an allergic reaction to the notion of Sabbath keeping because they think of it as something dour and joyless that is epitomized by a long list of activities that are prohibited on Sundays. There are probably instances when overly scrupulous Christians do things that contribute to this impression. More likely, an aversion to Sabbath keeping stems from being immersed in a culture that has an insatiable demand for distraction and entertainment. Living in such a context, we need to realize the danger of what Neil Postman famously described as “amusing ourselves to death.” In fact, if we are not careful, our use of entertainment media may not be the harmless diversion that we think it is. Consider the role that has been played by popular culture and social media in bringing about our society’s widespread acceptance of LGBT ideology. Most people have not embraced this way of thinking because they have been persuaded by any rational

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<sup>13</sup> “First Apology of Justin, the Martyr,” § 67, ed. Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 287.

<sup>14</sup> See Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 1998), 14–20; Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship that Is Reformed according to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 34–35.

<sup>15</sup> Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition*, 35–36.

argument but because of the emotional argumentation that is embedded in the media that they regularly consume. As Alan Jacobs explains:

The dominant media of our technological society are powerful forces for socializing people into modes of thought and action that are often inconsistent with, if not absolutely hostile to, Christian faith and practice. In America today, churches . . . have access to comparatively little mindspace. . . . If we are to form strong Christians, people with robust commitment to and robust understanding of the Christian life, then we need to shift the balance of ideological power towards Christian formation.<sup>16</sup>

This should make us more thoughtful and more careful when it comes to the role that our culture's information, entertainment, and social media complex plays in our lives. It also gives us good reason to consider taking a break from such things on the Lord's Day.

Sabbath observance clearly requires a cessation from activities that would interfere with our gathering together with God's people in covenant assembly for public worship. (see Lev. 23:3; Heb. 10:25) One matter that has been debated within the Reformed tradition is the question of whether or not any kind of recreational activity should be permitted on the Sabbath. This disagreement stretches back to the formative period of our tradition, with the Synod of Dort (1618–19) and the Westminster Assembly (1643–49) providing slightly different answers to the question. While Dort said that recreation was permitted as long as it did not interfere with public worship,<sup>17</sup> Westminster said that we must abstain from recreation so that we can use the whole day for the exercises of public and private worship.<sup>18</sup>

Many church officers in confessional Presbyterian churches disagree with the Westminster Confession on this point because we think that it goes beyond the teaching of Scripture. The only passage that could potentially support a prohibition of all recreation on the Sabbath is the following text from Isaiah 58:

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 58:13–14)

Is this a rebuke for failing to devote the entire Sabbath day to the exercises of public and private worship? While the Westminster divines thought so, the problem with this interpretation is that it is difficult to see how earlier generations of Israelites could have known of such a requirement, since there is no mention of it in the Mosaic law. For this reason, Isaiah 58:13–14 is best interpreted as a rebuke for conducting business and oppressing workers on the Sabbath, which is consistent with the way the term "pleasure" is used earlier in the same chapter (see Isa. 58:3). That being the case, there is no biblical

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<sup>16</sup> "Questions for the Critics of the Benedict Option," Alan Jacobs, accessed October 9, 2016, <http://blog.ayjay.org/uncategorized/questions-for-the-critics-of-the-benedict-option/>.

<sup>17</sup> "The Synod of Dort on Sabbath Observance," R. Scott Clark, accessed October 9, 2016, <http://rscottclark.org/2012/08/the-synod-of-dort-on-sabbath-observance/>.

<sup>18</sup> See WCF 21.8.

warrant for a prohibition against recreation on the Sabbath and we are free to engage in enjoyable and relaxing activities on Sundays as long as they do not interfere with public worship. Of course, we should also remember that reverent participation in public worship involves preparation beforehand and reflection afterward, a consideration that should give shape to our overall focus each Lord's Day.

Another factor that relates to the contemporary application of the fourth commandment has to do with the difference between theocratic and non-theocratic contexts in redemptive history. Israel's situation under the Sinai covenant was theocratic, which meant that all of that nation's cultural activities were marked out as sacred. The situation for God's people today is non-theocratic, which means our cultural activities belong to the sphere of God's common grace. While we are called to do all things to the glory of God, our common cultural activities are not holy in an institutional sense but are part of the structure that God uses to uphold the world until he brings his plan of redemption to its appointed end. This leads Meredith Kline to the following conclusion about contemporary Sabbath keeping:

Since the Sabbath is a sign of sanctification marking that which receives its imprint as belonging to God's holy kingdom with promise of consummation, the Sabbath will have relevance and application at any given epoch of redemptive history only in the holy dimension(s) of the life of the covenant people. Thus, after the Fall, not only will the Sabbath pertain exclusively to the covenant community as a holy people called out of the profane world, but even for them the Sabbath will find expression, in a nontheocratic situation, only where they are convoked in covenant assembly, as the *ekklesia*-extension of the heavenly assembly of God's Sabbath enthronement. That is, Sabbath-observance will have to do only with their holy cultic (but not their common cultural) activity.<sup>19</sup>

In short, Kline is saying that in the church age the fourth commandment relates only to the gathering together of God's people for public worship on the Lord's Day. While the entire day should be ordered in a manner that supports our participation in the church's corporate gatherings, the entire day is not strictly bound by the Sabbath command. If this is correct, then debates about what can and cannot be done on Sundays boil down to whether or not an activity hinders our participation in the public worship services to which we are called by the church's elders.

## **Making the Most of the Sabbath**

When we organize our lives around the Sabbath as the temporal symbol of the new creation, we experience a weekly rhythm that consistently points us back to the eternal heritage that is being kept for us in heaven. One of the ways we can make the most of the Sabbath is by bookending the day with morning and evening worship services, a practice that has deep roots not only among the Reformed but in the entire Christian tradition.<sup>20</sup> While this practice is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, it is noteworthy that Psalm 92, which is identified as "A Song for the Sabbath" in its title, speaks of worshipping the

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<sup>19</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> See R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 338.

Lord “in the morning” and “by night” (v. 2). Also of significance is the fact that in Israel’s regular burnt offerings a lamb was offered in the morning and another in the evening (see Num. 28:1–8). Attending morning and evening worship services each Lord’s Day helps us to order the entire day around the gathering of God’s people in covenant assembly.

The habit of regular attendance at morning and evening worship might seem like an inconvenience to some Christians, especially if they live a considerable distance away from their church. While there can be circumstances that make it too difficult to attend both services on a regular basis, we should keep in mind that there are a lot of things in life for which we are willing to be inconvenienced. Parents are often willing to go to great lengths for the sake of their children’s education and extracurricular activities. Some people commute a considerable distance just to get to work each day. We all adjust our schedules in order to accommodate the things that are important to us. Shouldn’t we be willing to organize our Sunday schedules around the public worship services to which we are called by those who have spiritual oversight? It is true that this will have an impact on what you do on Sundays. A gathering with family or friends may have to be cut short. Some activities may have to be ruled out altogether. Such decisions can be difficult, but making them helps us to set our minds on the things that are above rather than the things that are on earth. We need to remember that Christians who cease to be heavenly-minded are not far from ceasing to be Christian.

I can testify to the benefits of attending morning and evening worship each Lord’s Day. While I grew up in the church, evening worship did not become a regular habit for me until our session made the decision a number of years back to add a Sunday evening service to our weekly schedule. I doubt that I am fully aware of the extent to which this practice has been of help to me, my family, and our congregation. I can say that having to preach twice as many sermons has improved my preaching and forced me to be more disciplined with my time throughout the week. I also know that those who attend both of our Sunday services benefit from double exposure to the preached Word, something that is especially significant given the low level of biblical literacy among professing Christians in our day. Lastly, I am grateful that my children are growing up without knowing anything other than the practice of bookending the Sabbath by declaring God’s steadfast love in the morning, and his faithfulness by night.

## **Conclusion**

The Sabbath is certainly not meant to be a burden to us. On the contrary, it has been given for our benefit. That being the case, we should make good use of this gift so that we can receive its blessings in full measure. As Isaiah 58 reminds us, calling the Sabbath a delight is really about delighting in the Lord himself. And when we delight in the Lord, we take comfort in his promise that we will not remain exiles forever. In his appointed time, he will make us “ride on the heights of the earth” (Isa. 58:14).

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# ServantHistory

## Reformed Confessions:

### The French Confession of Faith (1559)

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by John R. Muether

The early years of Protestantism in France have been described as a “Reformation on the run,” as the Reformed cause in that country often experienced intense persecution. During a point of relative calm, the first National Synod of the Reformed Churches in France convened in Paris in 1559. The assembly adopted the “Confession of Faith Made by Common Agreement by the French Who Desire to Live according to the Purity of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” While the direct hand of sixty-year-old John Calvin in the composition of this confession has been much debated, no doubt he was a strong influence. For a dozen years two versions of the confession were in use, until the seventh national synod in La Rochelle (1571) adopted the longer (40 article) version as the true Confession of Faith of the Reformed Churches of France.

The basic organization of the confession (also called the Gallican Confession) follows a pattern similar to others in this period of Reformed confessionalization, but still there are some unique features to this creed. The Confession “names names,” as for example, in article 14 where it condemns the “diabolical conceits of [Michael] Servetus,” the notorious anti-trinitarian heretic executed in Geneva six years earlier. The ancient creeds (Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian) are explicitly affirmed as faithful to the Word of God (article 5).

Another distinguishing feature is a reference to natural theology in article 2: God reveals himself first in his works of creation and providence and then in his Word, a theme developed further in the Belgic and Westminster Confessions. The French Confession is also replete with proof-texts: footnotes contain citations to over three hundred Scripture texts. While some articles were responses to the Council of Trent (meeting during this time), the confession honors Calvin’s principle that Roman Catholic baptism remains valid (see excerpt below).

Several articles speak to the discipline that promotes the “sacred and inviolable” order of the church. It must be governed by ministers, elders, and deacons who are duly elected and who serve the only head of the church, Jesus Christ, with the same authority and equal power, so that “no church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other” (article 30).

The confession begins and ends on an apologetic tone. A preface, addressed to King Francis II, includes a plea for an end of the oppression of the Huguenots. The last two articles focus on the honor and reverence due to civil magistrates. Even if “they are unbelievers, they are commissioned to exercise a legitimate and holy authority.” Thus, “we detest those who reject the higher powers . . . and subvert the course of justice” (article 40). Huguenots make loyal subjects.

Ministers, elders, and deacons were all to subscribe to the confession, and subsequent synods began with the reading and ratifying of the confession. Largely superseded by later confessions written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the French Confession of 1559 still serves as a doctrinal standard for some Reformed churches in France today.

### **An Excerpt from Article 28**

[W]e condemn the papal assemblies, as the pure Word of God is banished from them, their sacraments are corrupted, or falsified, or destroyed, and all superstitions and idolatries are in them. We hold, then, that all who take part in these acts, and commune in that Church, separate and cut themselves off from the body of Christ. Nevertheless, as some trace of the Church is left in the papacy, and the virtue and substance of baptism remain, as the efficacy of the baptism does not depend on the person who administers it, we confess that those baptized in it do not need a second baptism. But, on account of its corruptions, we cannot present children to be baptized in it without incurring pollution.

### **The Sequence of Confessions**

Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli (1523)  
Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)  
First Helvetic Confession (1536)  
**French Confession of Faith (1559)**  
Scots Confession (1560)  
Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)  
Heidelberg Catechism (1563)  
Second Helvetic Confession (1566)  
Canons of the Synod of Dordt (1619)  
Westminster Confession & Catechisms (1643)

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# ServantHistory

## Geerhardus Vos: Family Life, the Kingdom of God, and the Church

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by Danny E. Olinger

After nine years of teaching at Princeton Seminary, Geerhardus Vos had settled into the rhythm of a quiet professorial life. According to Princeton historian David Calhoun, by 1902, “Dr. Vos’s fine features, slightly stooped figure, and quiet dignity were a familiar sight to his fellow Princetonians.”<sup>21</sup> Dwelling at 52 Mercer Street with his beloved wife, Catherine, he worshiped at First Presbyterian Church, taught two or three courses per semester at the seminary, took daily walks with his friend Benjamin Warfield, and wrote numerous reviews and articles. When the school year ended, Geerhardus and Catherine would return to the Grand Rapids area for the summer to be near their families.<sup>22</sup>

Change, however, was on the way in that Catherine was expecting. According to her daughter, Marianne, “My mother did not have children for the first nine years of her marriage. She then went to a surgeon in Philadelphia who diagnosed that she needed a slight change in a muscle.”<sup>23</sup> After that, the problem was alleviated.

On February 4, 1903, Catherine gave birth to a baby boy, Johannes Geerhardus. The next day the members of the senior class at the seminary presented a baby carriage to the new father and mother. According to the *New York Times*, Dr. Vos expressed his thanksgiving for the gift, and then added “that the donation might have been postponed until tomorrow with great propriety, as the subject of his lecture then would be ‘The Fatherhood and the Sonship.’”<sup>24</sup> Geerhardus and Catherine also received other gifts from their friends, most notably a silver collapsible drinking cup from Benjamin and Annie Warfield and a silver porringer from Woodrow and Ellen Wilson.<sup>25</sup>

A little over two years later, Bernardus Hendrik was born on April, 19, 1905. Marianne Catherine was born on December 7, 1906, and the last child, Geerhardus Jr., was born on March 7, 1911. As the Vos family was growing, Geerhardus and Catherine purchased a summer home in Roaring Branch, Pennsylvania, north of the city of Williamsport.

After obtaining the house in 1906, they purchased thirteen acres of land between 1908 and 1910 directly outside of Roaring Branch. Once the land was acquired, they raised the house on rollers and had it moved to the new location with its clear view of the town and the mountains in the background.

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<sup>21</sup> David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 2, *The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 210.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, Marianne Vos Radius by Charles G. Dennison, February 27, 1992, at the Raybrook Assisted Living Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> February 6, 1903, *New York Times*, in *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 43.

<sup>25</sup> Email, Raymond Vos to Danny Olinger, December 12, 2016.

After Christmas, Catherine would order the food supplies and clothes for the summer from the Sears Roebuck catalog and have them sent directly to Roaring Branch. Once the school year for the children ended, Catherine and the children would typically travel by train one hundred miles west to Roaring Branch ahead of Geerhardus. As the rest of the family unpacked and set the home up for the summer, Geerhardus would slowly make his way to Roaring Branch by car, stopping at hotels with his books in tow. He would read and write and then journey to the next town and the next hotel.<sup>26</sup>

Once the whole family was in Roaring Branch, there was a pattern to the days. A mile walk to the post office in the morning and then again in the evening to pick up any mail. Geerhardus read literature to the entire family situated on the front porch. Catherine read Scripture with a running commentary (which would in time would become the basis of her book, *The Child's Story Bible*), and then Geerhardus prayed. The family would worship on the Lord's Day at the Methodist Church, the only church in town. So beloved was this summer retreat, that when Catherine and Geerhardus Vos died, they would not be buried in Grand Rapids or Princeton, but in Griffin Cemetery in Roaring Branch.

The routine of the family when it returned to Princeton at the end of the summer was geared around the seminary. The Warfields at 74 Mercer Street lived a few houses down from the Vos's home at 52 Mercer Street. Catherine and Marianne would visit Anne Warfield for tea. Once when Marianne had a birthday party and wanted to dress up, Mrs. Warfield loaned her a beautiful shawl.<sup>27</sup>

Geerhardus and Benjamin Warfield would take a daily walk at noon.<sup>28</sup> But, it was not just Warfield who Vos walked with on Mercer Street. J. Gresham Machen, an avid walker himself, would take strolls with Vos, as would other Princeton professors. Also accompanying Vos on his walks would be one of the family dogs. His daughter, Marianne, described the scene.

He was fond of dogs. We always had a little dog and a big dog, a dog about the size of a collie, and a little dog. I often remember him walking up and down the street with Machen and some of his other colleagues at Princeton swinging a cane in one hand and a dog following his footsteps as he walked back and forth.<sup>29</sup>

Geerhardus and Catherine were also known for their hospitality, particularly to Dutch friends.<sup>30</sup> Their guests were invited to participate in the family time of Bible reading and prayer.<sup>31</sup> The learning of the Westminster Shorter Catechism in English was emphasized with the children, although there were periods of time in the Vos household when

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<sup>26</sup> Charles G. Dennison, taped comments to Vos Monday Group, Sewickley, PA, July 21, 1996, archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Marianne Radius, archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>28</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2:210.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, Marianne Radius, archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

<sup>30</sup> George Harinck, "Geerhardus Vos as an Introducer of Kuyper in America," in *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Larry J. Wagenaar (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2000), 244.

<sup>31</sup> Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2:210.

German was the dominant language spoken.<sup>32</sup> If any of the children were puzzled about anything in the Bible or in the Shorter Catechism, they would approach their father after supper in his study. He would listen patiently and attempt to explain to them the meaning of the question and answer.

On the Lord's Day, once Johannes was old enough to lead his siblings, the children would walk to the First Presbyterian Church for Sunday School classes. After Sunday School finished, they would then walk and meet their parents at Princeton's Miller Chapel for worship. Marianne recalled one memorable Lord's Day:

Our parents would already be seated. The students sat in the center. The faculty members had their own assigned seats on the sides. I remember the glorious day when the Stevenson twins had their feet on the pew in the front and the pew in which they and their mother were sitting tipped over.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Bible Student**

In addition to experiencing the dynamics of family life, and settling into his second decade teaching at Princeton, Vos began publishing theological articles that were more accessible to the general public. The accessibility was due mainly to the fact that he kept his analysis of critical viewpoints to a minimum and focused on the exegesis of texts. Six such articles, the majority around 2,500–3,000 words in length, appeared in the newly created *The Bible Student* from 1900–1903. Edited by William McPheeters, professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, and co-edited by Warfield, George Purves, and John Davis of Princeton Seminary, *The Bible Student* was dedicated to promoting traditional biblical doctrines. The articles not only marked a transition for Vos in style, but also signaled the themes that he would develop in his major articles and books. This was most readily seen in Vos's first two *Bible Student* articles, "The Ministry of John the Baptist"<sup>34</sup> and "The Kingdom of God."<sup>35</sup>

In both, Vos presented a redemptive-historical look at the doctrine of the kingdom of God. In examining the role of John the Baptist, Vos exegeted the meaning of Jesus's statement in Matthew 11:11 (KJV), "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Here Jesus declared that John was outside of the New Testament realization of the kingdom of heaven that had been inaugurated by Jesus himself. By this, Jesus did not mean that John was not a believer in the Old Testament sense. Rather, John did not share in far greater blessings of the new covenant. Vos explained, "He that is lesser in the kingdom of heaven, i.e., occupies a relatively lower place than John under the Old Testament, is nevertheless absolutely

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<sup>32</sup> Marianne recalled, "For two years we had German governesses, and we spoke nothing but German in the house." Interview, Marianne RADIUS. Interestingly, according to George Harinck, once Geerhardus was at Princeton, he hardly spoke Dutch anymore. Harinck, "Vos as Introducer of Kuyper, 244.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. In 1914 J. Ross Stevenson became the second president of Princeton Seminary.

<sup>34</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Ministry of John the Baptist," in *The Bible Student* 1 (1900): 26–32, reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 299–303.

<sup>35</sup> Geerhardus Vos, "The Kingdom of God," in *The Bible Student* 1 (1900): 282–89, 328–35, reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 304–16.

greater than John, because the kingdom itself is far superior to the typical stage of the theocracy.”<sup>36</sup>

Although standing outside the kingdom, John understood the great principle on which the kingdom was built, self-denial and service. John believed that “He (Jesus) must increase, I must decrease” (John 3:30). Consequently, when John was in prison and expressed doubts, Jesus took pains to defend him. Vos commented, “There is to us something unspeakably touching in this loyal gratitude to a faithful servant on the part of Him who had Himself come to serve all others.”<sup>37</sup>

In “The Ministry of John the Baptist” Vos examined the *formal* questions that accompanied the conception of the kingdom of God. He then turned in “The Kingdom of God” to answering *material* questions.<sup>38</sup> According to Vos, the content of the doctrine of the kingdom of God represented the whole sum and substance of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus taught that with his arrival the kingdom of God was both a present and future reality. As the kingdom was centered in God himself and in his glory, Jesus represented the kingdom as the highest object after which men are to strive.

Vos followed the two articles with two reviews that revealed that he was not entirely satisfied with what others were teaching on the subject of the kingdom of God. The first was a review of Wilhelm Lütgert’s *Das Reich Gottes nach den synoptischen Evangelien*.<sup>39</sup> Lütgert believed that the kingdom is entirely present. According to Vos, this one-sided insistence that the kingdom is wholly present blinded Lütgert to the fact that the kingdom of God is both a reign and a realm.

In his review of Paul Wernle’s *Die Reichsgotteshoffnung in den ältesten Christlichen dokumenten und bei Jesus*,<sup>40</sup> Vos contended that Wernle’s eschatological view of the kingdom of God erred in the other direction. Wernle altered the sayings of Jesus in order to argue against a present kingdom. He also denied that righteousness was a part of the conception of the kingdom. For Vos the result was the worst of all possibilities, a kingdom that did not consist in righteousness or communion with God prior to the last day.

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<sup>36</sup> Vos, “Ministry of John the Baptist,” in Gaffin, *Redemptive History*, 300.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>38</sup> In “The Kingdom of God,” Vos wrote, “In a previous article we endeavored to discuss some of the formal questions that cluster around the conception of the kingdom of God. We must now look for a moment at the content of the idea from a material point of view.” Vos, “The Kingdom of God,” in Gaffin, *Redemptive History*, 310.

<sup>39</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of *Das Reich Gottes nach den synoptischen Evangelien*, by W. Lütgert, *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 11, no. 41 (1900):171–74. Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1937) was professor of New Testament at Griefswald. He would move to the University of Halle in 1901 and serve there as professor of systematic theology. In 1929 he succeeded Reinhold Seeberg as the chairman of systematic theology at the University of Berlin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer would serve as Lütgert’s academic assistant at Berlin, and Lütgert as Bonhoeffer’s advisor would help Bonhoeffer publish his postdoctoral dissertation, *Act and Being*.

<sup>40</sup> Geerhardus Vos, review of *Die Reichsgotteshoffnung in den ältesten christlichen Dokumenten und bei Jesus*, by Paul Wernle, *Princeton Theological Review* 1, no. 2 (1903):298–303. Paul Wernle (1872-1939), professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Basel, was the most influential Swiss theologian of the early twentieth century. A History of Religions proponent, Wernle befriended and mentored Karl Barth for the period leading up to World War I. Richard Burnett has argued that Barth had no modern theologian more in view when writing his commentaries on Romans than Wernle. See, Richard Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 136.

It was evident from the article and the two reviews that Vos did not agree with the doctrine of the kingdom being put forth in his day. On the one hand, the immanent school (Lütgert) taught that the kingdom of God was entirely present and disregarded the supernatural work of God. On the other hand, the eschatological school (Wernle) posited that the kingdom of God was entirely future and weakened the Bible's authority in the realm of ethics. What was needed was a redemptive-historical exegesis of the Lord's doctrine of the kingdom of God without the overreach of modern theology.

### **The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church**

When Vos's 1903 book *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* appeared, it was clear that he had used his previously published material. The "Kingdom of God" article provided the outline and bulk of the content for the first five chapters of the book, the sentences slightly changed and paragraphs rearranged. The remaining chapters of the book, prior to the concluding "Recapitulation" chapter, exegetically confronted the liberal conceptions regarding the essence of the kingdom that he had challenged in the reviews.<sup>41</sup>

In the self-effacing fashion that matched his personality, Vos did not include a preface, forward, or acknowledgements in the book. The book began with Chapter 1, "Introductory," but the chapter did not partake of the nature of a typical introduction. More accurately, it should have been labelled "The Public Ministry of Jesus," for that was the topic that Vos immediately addressed from the start. Vos noted that Jesus declared the kingdom of God was at hand. The main purpose of Jesus's mission consisted in the preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God.<sup>42</sup>

Still, Vos maintained that God himself, and not the kingdom, occupied the highest place in the teaching of Jesus. All that salvation contained flowed from the nature of God and served the glory of God. This is why Jesus did not speak of the "kingdom," but spoke of the "kingdom of God" or "the kingdom of heaven."

But, in appropriating for himself the function of bringing in the kingdom and in laying claim to the Messianic dignity promised in the Old Testament, Jesus knew himself as both the goal of history and the servant of history. The entire historic movement converged upon and terminated in him.

Still, Jesus did not speak of the kingdom of God as previously existing. Vos explained, "To [Jesus's] mind [the kingdom] involved such altogether new forces and unparalleled blessings, that all relative and provisional forms previously assumed by the work of God on earth seemed by comparison unworthy of the name."<sup>43</sup> For Judaism, the divine rule was equivalent to the sovereignty of the law. Jesus did not exclude this, but he "knew of a much larger sphere in which God would through saving acts exercise his glorious prerogatives of kingship on a scale and in a manner unknown before."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Although Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics* included a section on the relationship of the kingdom of heaven and the church, he did not repeat the same line of argumentation in *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*. See, "Essence," chap. 1, and "Organization, Discipline, Offices," chap. 2, in Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5, *Ecclesiology, the Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Kim Batteau and Allan Janssen (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 3–74.

<sup>42</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1972), 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

While the Jewish habit to substitute “heaven” for “God” was meant to emphasize God’s unapproachable majesty, Vos believed such a mode of speech endangered “what must ever be the essence of religion, a true communion between God and man.”<sup>45</sup> Jesus used “kingdom of heaven” to awaken in his disciples a sense of the mysterious, supernatural character of heaven, that realm of absolute perfection and grandeur, and to teach them to value above all the new order of things. “If the king be one who concentrates in himself all the glory of heaven, what must his kingdom be?”<sup>46</sup>

Vos then laid out what the church historically had believed concerning the coming of the kingdom.

The kingdom, it was believed, comes when the gospel is spread, hearts are changed, sin and error overcome, righteousness cultivated, a living communion with God established. In this sense the kingdom began its coming when Jesus entered upon his public ministry, his work upon earth, including his death, was part of its realization, the disciples were in it, the whole subsequent history of the church is the history of its gradual extension, we ourselves can act our part in its onward movement and are members of it as a present organization.<sup>47</sup>

This view, Vos maintained, was under attack in Christendom as unhistorical. Jesus was only a man, and no man could bring in the kingdom. God would bring in the kingdom in a great world-crisis, one that Jesus expected in his lifetime.

Both views held that Jesus associated the coming of the kingdom in its final absolute sense with the end of the world. Where the views differed was whether Jesus’s spiritual labors brought about the beginning of the kingdom. How one decided this question had the gravest consequences, for it involved the question of the infallibility of Jesus’s teaching. If he expected only one coming of the kingdom to happen within his lifetime, then there is no escape from the conclusion that he was mistaken.<sup>48</sup>

According to Vos, the modern views necessitated ascribing to the Scripture an unhistorical representation of what Jesus actually taught. For those who held to the trustworthiness of the Gospel accounts, there was no doubt that Jesus’s Messianic labor ushered in the kingdom prior to the last day.

Further, as Jesus distinguished his Messianic activity on earth in humility and his Messianic activity from the throne of glory, he also distinguished two different aspects of the kingdom of God, the immanent and the eschatological. It followed that “the ancient theological distinction between a kingdom of grace and a kingdom of glory is infelicitous.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>48</sup> Vos did not name Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) directly, but it is unmistakable that he was contrasting Schweitzer’s view of the kingdom with the traditional understanding of the kingdom throughout this section. For an analysis of Schweitzer’s views, see Robert Strimple’s *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Vos, *Kingdom of God and the Church*, 39. Although Vos did not make direct reference to Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question and Answer 102, it is clear that he had this in view with this statement. Q. 102. *What do we pray for in the second petition?* A. In the second petition which is, *Thy kingdom come*, we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.

Vos also believed that the kingdom of God is not a means to an end apart from man's glorifying and enjoying God. This was seen in a proper understanding of the theocracy in the Old Covenant. The theocracy's primary purpose was "to reflect the eternal laws of religious intercourse between God and man as they will exist in the consummate life at the end."<sup>50</sup> This focus on the procuring of life and communion with God is why Jesus did not view the kingdom conflict as being Israel versus Rome. The true conflict is the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan.

Although the glory of God, not man's welfare, is the supreme concern of the kingdom, this does not mean that blessing and happiness are found apart from the kingdom. Kingdom members enjoy the blessedness of union and communion with the living God, which brings happiness and joy in this life. Such communion is both a gift from Jesus and the life to which the Christian aspires. The reward bears an organic relation to the conduct it intends to crown.

In discussing the relationship of the kingdom of God to the church, Vos exegeted Matthew 16:18–19.<sup>51</sup> The church, formed by Jesus and under his rule, is the new congregation of God as it confesses Jesus in the midst of persecution. It takes the place of the old congregation of Israel that refused to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

The church in a sense can rightly be called the kingdom. It is another question altogether whether the kingdom at all times can be identified with the church. The church is the form that the kingdom assumes because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the Messianic acts of Jesus and an influx of supernatural power, the church has within it the presence of the Spirit, which is the power of the age to come.

Jesus identified the invisible church and the kingdom. But, the kingdom-life that exists in the invisible church must find a parallel expression in the kingdom-organism of the visible church. The visible church is not the only expression of the kingdom.

Realizing that he was qualifying many things regarding the relationship of the kingdom of God to the church, Vos said that two things may be safely affirmed. On the one hand, the supremacy of God in all things is the foundation on which the Lord's doctrine of the kingdom is founded. This meant that Jesus saw every normal and legitimate province of life as intended to form part of God's kingdom. On the other hand, Jesus did not believe that all of the spheres of life should be subject to the visible church in order to achieve this result.

Vos maintained that repentance and faith are prerequisites for entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus cried out, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). This demand resulted from the nature of the kingdom. "Repentance and faith are simply the two main aspects of the kingdom, righteousness and the saving grace of God translated into terms of subjective human experience."<sup>52</sup> Repentance and righteousness do not earn the benefits of the kingdom, but they accompany the kingdom in such a way that through them the benefits of the kingdom come to believers.

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<sup>50</sup> Vos, *Kingdom of God and the Church*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 16:18–19 (KJV): "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

<sup>52</sup> Vos, *Kingdom of God and the Church*, 91.

The Lord's teaching on repentance engages the entire person, intellect, will and affections. It includes man's relationship to God, both religious and moral. Jesus's conception of repentance is even wide enough to include faith. No neutrality or indifference exists when it comes to repentance. There is either love or hatred for God, or love or hatred for the world. He who repents turns from love and service of the world to the love and service of God.

The total supremacy of God in one's life as a controlling principle is why Jesus requires that his disciples renounce all earthly relations and possessions that might take God's place. This does not mean, however, that the believer must abandon all relations and possessions in this life. What must be destroyed is the attachment of the soul to relations and possessions as the highest good. The demand for sacrifice presupposes that what is renounced forms an obstacle to absolute devotion to God.

Vos ended the book with a summary chapter entitled "Recapitulation." In it, he listed seven principles from Jesus's teaching on the kingdom of God and the church.<sup>53</sup>

1. There is no separation between the Old Testament work of God and Jesus's work. The two constitute a single body of supernatural revelation and redemption.

Here Vos challenged both fundamentalist and modernist interpretations concerning the kingdom. On the fundamentalist side, chiliasm did not acknowledge that old and new constitute one body of supernatural revelation and redemption. On the critical side, modernists denied that Jesus himself was conscious of the unity that existed between the Old Testament promise and his fulfillment. For Vos, the Scriptures testified and the Reformed Faith affirmed the unity between the promises of God in the Old Testament and Jesus's fulfillment of the promises in the New Testament.

2. The doctrine of the kingdom does not teach that Christianity is a mere matter of subjective ideas or experiences. Rather, it teaches that the kingdom is related to a great system of objective, supernatural facts and transactions.

With the second principle, Vos opposed the liberal theological belief that the doctrine of the kingdom illustrated that Christianity was primarily a subjective religion based on experience. Vos believed that the doctrine of the kingdom mandated that Christianity was an objective religion based on the supernatural work of God in history. There is a subjective element to Christianity, but without the objective work of God grounding it, there is no basis for faith.

3. The kingdom-conception teaches that all of life is subservient to the glory of God. This is why the kingdom-conception is the most profoundly religious of all biblical conceptions.

The third principle was Vos's acknowledgment that the Reformed faith had understood the Scriptures and the doctrine of the kingdom correctly when it confessed that man's chief end was to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. The kingdom of God is an otherworldly reign and realm in which God and his glory are all-important.

4. The message the kingdom imparts to Christianity is that salvation is by the power and grace of God. This principle is connected to the necessity of faith.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 102–3. The seven principles are summarized below.

Having affirmed the Reformed position in principle three, Vos pivoted in the fourth principle to show the errors of liberalism, Arminianism, and Roman Catholicism concerning the relationship between the kingdom and salvation. Salvation is not through the effort of man, but the work of God alone.

5. Jesus's doctrine of the kingdom upholds the primacy of the spiritual over the physical. The ultimate realities of the invisible world, to which everything else is subordinate, form the essence of the kingdom. This principle is connected to the demand for repentance.

The unseen realities of heaven constitute the essence of the kingdom of God. Liberalism tied the ethical solely to this world, which left no place for biblical faith and repentance. There is an ethical dimension to the kingdom, but it has to do with repentance from sin and faith in Christ.

6. The form which the kingdom takes in the church shows it to be inseparably related to the person and work of Jesus himself.

In the sixth principle, Vos stated without reservation or qualification that Jesus Christ stands central to the church. Without Christ's historical person and work, there is no Christianity worth proclaiming. To remove Christ as Savior from his church would be to remove the church's reason for existence because upon Christ everything depends.

7. The concept of the kingdom of God implies the subjection of the entire range of human life to the ends of religion. The kingdom reminds us of the absoluteness, the pervasiveness, the unrestricted dominion, which of right belongs to all true religion. It proclaims that religion, and religion alone, can act as the supreme unifying, centralizing factor in the life of man, as that which binds all together and perfects all by leading it to its final goal in the service of God.

The kingdom of God in Jesus's teaching informs the believer's life in total. Complete devotion to God is demanded in everything that is done. But, such a service, a giving of oneself for the living God, is the only one that gives meaning and value to life.

## Reviews

In a turn that had to be amusing to some, and perhaps an indication of Vos's quiet service at Princeton, Vos himself reviewed *The Kingdom of God and the Church* in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*. Vos-the-reviewer explained that the aim of Vos-the-author was to produce a popular and yet not too elementary discussion from the biblico-theological point of view on Jesus's doctrine of the kingdom. Vos proceeded to summarize the headings of the chapters without adding any insights other than the topics covered. He ended the review by stating that the book had an index and large type.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> In many ways Vos's statement in his *Biblical Theology* provided more of a summary of *The Kingdom of God and the Church* than his review did. Vos wrote, "The kingdom is in its intent an instrument of redemption as well as the embodiment of the blessedness of Israel. To it the Messianic expectations attach themselves. It is a serious mistake to conceive of the kingdom as something accidentally arrived at, and merely tolerated for a time at the expense of democracy. The thing was too large and deep to have aught of the unessential and dispensable about it. It touches, through the kingship of Christ, the very acme and perfection of the Biblical religion." Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1985), 185-86.

In what would be typical of the writings of Vos, later generations of Reformed theologians would rescue *The Kingdom of God and the Church* from obscurity. In particular, Vos's students at Princeton who went on to teach at Westminster Theological Seminary, John Murray, Ned B. Stonehouse, and Cornelius Van Til, each praised the book in print and in their classes. When the book was reprinted in 1951, Murray reviewed it in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.<sup>55</sup> Murray commented that it had been nearly half a century since the book was first published, but that the volume was far from obsolete. He said:

It is one of those books which have permanent value, for it is a masterful presentation of the teaching of Jesus as presented in the four Gospels. It exhibits the profound and accurate scholarship which was characteristic of all Dr. Vos's work and it is also written in a style which is not as heavy as that of some of the other volumes of Dr. Vos's pen. It is splendid to have this new edition of so notable a work.<sup>56</sup>

Murray believed, however, that Vos would be disappointed with the one change that the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company had made in republishing the book, the change of the title from *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* to *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom and the Church*.<sup>57</sup> "On one thing Dr. Vos was insistent—we not speak of the Kingdom but of the Kingdom of God. That emphasis was pivotal in Vos's thought."<sup>57</sup>

Still, Murray was thankful that the book would be receiving a new audience. He finished, "Vos provides us with a biblico-theological study which supplies us with the conceptions which must guide and govern our thinking if we are to be faithful to him who went preaching the kingdom of God."<sup>58</sup>

In the same issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Ned B. Stonehouse reviewed the Dutch edition of Herman Ridderbos's *The Coming of the Kingdom*.<sup>59</sup> In what he considered high praise, Stonehouse wrote that Ridderbos's volume "may advantageously be compared with that of Geerhardus Vos on *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*."<sup>60</sup> Stonehouse continued:

Broadly speaking the same conception of the significance and scope of the kingdom of God appears in both volumes, which is rather remarkable in view of the consideration that Vos's treatise evidently was not known to Ridderbos at the time that he wrote the work. If one takes in account, however, the fact that Ridderbos like Vos stands squarely in the stream of the Reformed tradition, sharing its convictions and insights, and is also a scholar of wide learning and rare exegetical skill, the larger measure of agreement will not appear as a bare coincidence. It is refreshing, nevertheless, to receive a new reminder that after fifty years Vos's fundamental perspectives and conclusions are by no means outdated.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> John Murray, review of *The Teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom and the Church*, by Geerhardus Vos, *Westminster Theological Journal* 14 (1952):230.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>59</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, review of *De Komst van het Koninkrijk*, by H. N. Ridderbos, *Westminster Theological Journal* 14 (1952):160.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Even when he then turned to talking about the advantages of having Ridderbos's *Coming of the Kingdom* in print, Stonehouse could not help but turn back to Vos's contribution. Stonehouse said that Ridderbos had provided a book on the kingdom of God with a far greater scope, but "brevity in the hands of a precise thinker like Vos is not necessarily a serious liability, and my impression is that his little book will long remain a classic because of its masterful analysis and formulation of various aspects of the subject."<sup>62</sup> Stonehouse's recommendation was to keep Ridderbos's volume close as a reference tool continually to be consulted, but to read Vos's book at least once a year.<sup>63</sup>

Van Til leaned heavily upon Vos when talking about the kingdom of God in his book *Christian Theistic Ethics*. In it Van Til declared the kingdom of God "is a gift of free grace to man and that therefore the *summum bonum* is a free gift to man."<sup>64</sup> According to Van Til, "Vos has worked this out beautifully in his little book, *Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church*. The kingdom of God is not realized by self-righteousness but by the righteousness of God, which must be given to men."<sup>65</sup>

In detailing how the kingdom of God was both a present reality and a goal, Van Til again turned to Vos. "The kingdom of God is a present reality. We have entered into it. But it is also that for the realization of which we daily strive. Dr. Vos has made this two-fold aspect of the kingdom abundantly clear on the basis of the teaching of Jesus."<sup>66</sup>

In explaining how righteousness, holiness, and blessedness belong together in the kingdom of God, Van Til referenced Vos's *The Kingdom of God and the Church* once more. Van Til wrote:

Dr. Vos makes plain that there is a two-fold aspect to Jesus' teaching of the kingdom. Righteousness and conversion have to do with the present aspect of the kingdom, and blessedness primarily with the future aspect of the kingdom. Apart from the fact that those who are in the kingdom are now blessed, in the sense that they know themselves to be heirs of God, their actual and complete blessedness lies in the future. They cannot be completely blessed till all of sin and all of the results of sin are done away. Hence they cannot be perfectly blessed till their own souls are perfectly and permanently cleansed from the last remnant of sin . . . In short, they cannot be fully blessed till "the regeneration of all things."<sup>67</sup>

Orthodox Presbyterian historian Charles Dennison, a student of Van Til and Gaffin at Westminster, also highly praised the book. In particular, he observed that Vos's

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., a student of Stonehouse in the late 1950s at Westminster Seminary, testifies that Stonehouse declared more than once in the classroom that every minister of the gospel should read Vos's *Kingdom of God and the Church* annually. Email to author, March 10, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 78.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 90. Richard Gaffin Jr. echoes Vos and Van Til in his article, "The Bible and the Whole Counsel of God," which honored Vos's son, Johannes. Gaffin wrote, "The kingdom of God is the fundamental and all-encompassing category. Accordingly, the gospel (of God's grace) is the gospel of the kingdom and its coming. Repentance and faith are the primary blessings of the kingdom. Worked by the grace of God, they are the way of entrance into and continuance in the kingdom of God." See, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "The Bible and the Whole Counsel of God," in *The Book of Books: Essays on the Scriptures in Honor of Johannes G. Vos*, ed. John H. White (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1978), 21.

<sup>67</sup> Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, 121.

concluding chapter, “Recapitulation,” was no summary in the ordinary sense. In summarizing Vos’s seven principles, Dennison said, “For Vos, Jesus’ theological method rises first of all from the historical reality of God’s interaction with this world. This historical reality involves the historical unity of God’s Old Testament work and Jesus’ labors recorded in the gospels.”<sup>68</sup> Dennison continued:

Indispensable to Jesus’ theology is his identity as Savior, a fact from which his church cannot separate itself and still be called the church. For Jesus to be Savior, in his theology of the kingdom, means the essential message of faith and repentance to those who would enter the kingdom.<sup>69</sup>

In Dennison’s judgment, Vos had rightly understood the essence of the kingdom. “The essence of the kingdom is understood in terms of salvation for another world, righteousness for that world, and blessedness intimately, in it.”<sup>70</sup>

Dennison questioned, however, if the book reflected an “idealism” on Vos’s part that he moved away from in his more mature writings.<sup>71</sup> Vos would declare later in his *Pauline Eschatology* that “the historical was first, then the theological.”<sup>72</sup> The coming of the kingdom of God is a great event, not an ideal.

Charles Dennison’s older brother, James T. Dennison Jr., focused on Vos’s opposition to nineteenth-century liberal views and early twentieth-century apocalyptic views of the kingdom of God. These views desupernaturalized the kingdom in contrast to Jesus’s proclamation. Dennison also noted that Vos emphasized the eschatological nature of the kingdom. He wrote,

The “now” and “not yet” (or the two ages) of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation surpass Judaism with its nationalistic, political, sensual kingdom hopes. The presence and future of the kingdom that Jesus brings contravenes classic liberalism that immanentizes the eschaton.<sup>73</sup>

Although very appreciative of Vos’s contributions as a whole, George Eldon Ladd believed that Vos had erred in his identification of the kingdom and the church when interpreting Matthew 16:18–19. Ladd wrote, “Vos presses metaphorical language too far when he insists that this identification must be made because the first part of the saying speaks of the founding of the house and the second part sees the same house complete with doors and keys.”<sup>74</sup> Ladd concluded that “Vos confidently affirms the church is the kingdom.”<sup>75</sup>

According to Ladd, a better understanding of the text is that there exists an inseparable relationship, but not an identity. The many sayings about entering into the kingdom are not the same as entering into the church.

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<sup>68</sup> Manuscript of comments made to Vos Monday Group in Sewickley, PA, September 21, 1998. See, *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology*, ed. Danny E. Olinger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004): 27.

<sup>69</sup> Olinger, *Vos Anthology*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Charles Dennison, comments made on December 15, 1997, at the Vos Monday Group, Sewickley, PA.

<sup>72</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 41.

<sup>73</sup> Dennison, “The Life of Geerhardus Vos,” in *Letters*, 55.

<sup>74</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 263–64. Ladd repeats the same statement verbatim in *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 112.

<sup>75</sup> Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 264, and *A Theology of the New Testament*, 112.

A closer reading of the context from which Ladd pulled the quote indicates that Vos's affirmation was more carefully nuanced than Ladd reported. Vos argued that when Jesus declared that Peter had been given the keys of the kingdom to bind and loose on earth, that declaration must be understood in light of the earlier declaration regarding Peter as the foundation rock. Vos said, "First the house is represented as in process of building, Peter as the foundation, then the same house appears as completed and Peter as invested with the keys for administering its affairs."<sup>76</sup> This is followed by the statement that Ladd quoted and the statement that he paraphrased, "It is plainly excluded that the house should mean one thing in the first statement and another in the second. It must be possible, this much we may confidently affirm, to call the church the kingdom."<sup>77</sup> What Ladd does not add is Vos's next statement, "It is another question, to which we shall presently revert, whether the kingdom can under all circumstances be identified with the church."<sup>78</sup>

For Vos, the church was in possession of the powers of the world to come. The kingdom-life which existed in the invisible sphere found expression in the kingdom-organism of the visible church. But, it did not necessarily follow that the outward expression of the kingdom was found only in the visible church. He said:

While it is proper to separate between the visible church and such things as the Christian state, Christian art, Christian science, etc., these things, if they truly belong to the kingdom of God, grow up out of the regenerated life of the invisible church.<sup>79</sup>

The question would become whether Vos maintained this view of the church and culture in his more mature biblical-theological writings.

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<sup>76</sup> Vos, *Kingdom of God and the Church*, 81.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

# ServantReading

## The True Doctrine of the Sabbath *by Nicholas Bownd*

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by D. Scott Meadows

*The True Doctrine of the Sabbath—A Critical Edition with Introduction and Analysis*, by Nicholas Bownd. Dallas: Naphtali, and Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015, cx + 482 pages, \$30.00.

One could not hope to find a more venerable declaration, explanation, demonstration, fortification, and recommendation of the typical Puritan doctrine of the Sabbath, as summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith (21.7–8), than this one by Nicholas Bownd (or Bownde, or Bound, d. 1613), Doctor of Divinity (Cambridge, 1594). The first edition appeared in 1595; this reprint contains the second edition (1606), which answers a contemporary critic. Added are many significant enhancements for modern readers (e.g., modern editing standards, translation of all Latin sources referenced). The extended, descriptive title of 1606 was:

Sabbathum Veteris Et Novi Testamenti [Sabbath, Old and New Testament]: or, The True Doctrine of the Sabbath held and practiced of the church of god, both before, and under the law; and in the time of the gospel: plainly laid forth and soundly proved by testimonies both of holy scripture, and also of old and new ecclesiastical writers, fathers and councils, and laws of all sorts, both civil, canon and common.

The book begins with new material including a substantial introduction and analysis. The introduction describes the historical setting and presents a brief biography of the author, including his controversy with a certain Thomas Rogers, which arose from the book's first edition. The analysis section makes a balanced assessment of Bownd's work. The original material follows, starting with "Prefatory Epistles, 1595–1606." Bownd's treatise is divided into two major parts, roughly equating to the Sabbath's basis and its practice. Bownd uses the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8–11(KJV) as his overarching text and organizing principle: "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" (basis); "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work," etc. (practice).

Book One, "The Ancient Institution and Continuance of the Sabbath," addresses perhaps the most technically difficult aspects of the subject, such as the nature of the Fourth Commandment in particular and the complex case for its continuance. Five formidable objections to Christians keeping the Sabbath are answered admirably; some of these are still in circulation today, being offered by Dispensationalists and adherents of so-called New Covenant Theology. Bownd insists that each seventh day is moral law, while the specific day of the week to be set apart is positive law, being changed from the last day of the week for the Jews to the first day of the week for Christians, in honor of Christ's resurrection upon this day. He argues that the day's name has also been changed

to “the Lord’s Day.” Many good reasons remain for resting from our ordinary work on this day—particularly so that we might without hindrance give ourselves to the worship of God in public and in private. Keeping the Lord’s Day is a commandment for everyone, not just believers. Christians are as strictly bound by this law as were Jews, and yet the specific requirements for keeping the Lord’s Day are not as complex and burdensome. Book One concludes with a case against recreations that interfere with Sabbath sanctification.

Book Two, “The Sanctification of the Sabbath,” gives specific and practical direction for both corporate and private obedience to the precept. Precision in keeping God’s commandments is strongly urged. Public worship must have preaching as its main feature, without omitting the public reading of Scripture, weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, baptism whenever warranted, prayers, and collections for the poor. Acceptable worship necessarily involves spiritual knowledge and deep reverence behind outward conformity to God’s revealed will. A section making the case for “whole day” Sabbath keeping precedes the advocacy and elements of private worship: preparation, meditation on Scripture and God’s works, holy conference, and psalm singing. Lastly, “works of mercy” are urged not as an exception to the Sabbath but as a requirement, and superiors (heads of families and princes) are exhorted to promote Sabbath sanctification in the lives of their subjects.

Strengths of this book include its reverence for God and his Word, its comprehensiveness, appeal to previous teachers of orthodoxy (some ancient), and its exemplary exegesis joined with theological reasoning. Bownd illustrates powerfully the usefulness of that happy combination of rare intellectual gifts and academic preparation with a heart devoted to God and his glory. The author abounds in powers of ethical analysis within an atmosphere of deep spirituality. I found myself richly fed and gently convicted again and again. This sentence provoked my yearning toward further reformation:

If we do measure out the obedience of all men, we shall easily see how short they are of that perfect righteousness, which is here required; and that many shall be even then found breakers of this commandment, when they did most presume of the keeping of it, and were puffed up with a spiritual pride for it. (279–80)

As with any book of mere human composition, there are weaknesses and flaws, but in my view they are slight blemishes in comparison with the overall treasure. Bownd relates a bizarre story, probably superstitious or exaggerated, of a baby born with the face of a dog as divine punishment for a nobleman who loved his hunting dogs too much and chose hunting over church attendance. This is one example of the few instances for reasonable criticism.

Given its massive treatment and its strategic timing in the history of Protestant and Puritan Sabbath theology, this volume ought to be in every Reformed pastor’s library. Even if Bownd borrowed some ideas from previous generations, I know of nothing comparable to this trove of Christian Sabbath doctrine. It seems that all advocates of the Lord’s Day in the Reformed tradition ever since are indebted to Bownd, whether they realize it or not. *Ad fontes!*

A good dose of Bownd with God’s blessing, expressed accessibly for this generation, would go far toward recovering greater faithfulness in worship—in the church, our

families, and in society. Making the best spiritual use of our Lord's Days is both a sign and a means of evangelical and redemptive progress. Those most likely to benefit from Bownd's book must have an open mind, facility in reading older works, and a zeal to glean all that is profitable for the soul.

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# ServantReading

## Sweet Revenge: Digital Meets Reality

A Review Article

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*The Revenge of the Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter*, by David Sax. New York: Public Affairs, 2016, xix + 282 pages, \$25.99.

What is it with these kids—they're buying vinyl records, cassettes, and film. In the late nineties, when everyone was shedding their vinyl records, I was scooping them up left and right from ten cents to a dollar. These were in excellent or new condition and often famous performances and/or well-known producers on the best labels, like Deutsches Gramophone and RCA's shady dog "Living Stereo." There was producer John Pfeiffer, whose RCA Red Seal productions are second to none. Then there were performances like Fritz Reiner's conducting of the Seventh Symphony of Beethoven with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (LSC 1991).

The greatest trove was a deposit of over 3,000 classical records at the local Goodwill. It took me several visits to comb carefully through this treasure trove. I would go after lunch each day with a sense of excitement I had only known in my early book collecting days. I only bought records in perfect condition and came away with several hundred, including a few in their original cellophane wrappers. Little did I know that vinyl would make a comeback.

Now lest you think I oppose technological progress, I do not wish to return to pure vinyl listening. I enjoy the variety of access I have to music on my several devices. I have an expanding collection of CDs. Of course, now even those are giving way to MP3s, where music lives on hard drives, iTunes, or in various streaming services. My problem has always been with the uncritical acceptance of every new device along with the almost religious rejection of the old device it replaces. What does it give, but also what does it take away? And how do the answers to these questions shape my navigation of this ever changing environment?

For example, look at the wood-burning fireplace. In recent years efficiency and safety have called for fake fires, and gas fire places. Placing logs on a live fire is costly in terms of human labor and natural resources. So, what is missing? The human element, the enchanting smell of burning wood. Years ago there was one room at the Woodstock Inn in North Woodstock, New Hampshire that still had a wood fireplace. The porch was stocked with wood. Assumed was willingness to transport the logs from the porch to the fireplace, and the ability to light a fire—a considerable skill learned through much experience. Efficiency is gained for commercial establishments, but a real fire is incomparable—the human engagement, the aromas, the movement of logs, and the glowing embers.

I have not been able to fully assess the warmth audiophiles attribute to the vinyl experience, but it has more to do with the analog experience of the turntable than actual audio quality, unless they are referring to the subtle crackling sounds.

Enter David Sax. The subtitle exaggerates to make a point: “Real Things and Why They Matter.” Of course, digital is real, but sometimes distorts reality and tends to distance us from space-time reality. I often see Photo-shopped pictures that have the whiff of ersatz. Sherry Turkle has reported on the danger of those who retreat into virtual reality to escape real life.

I will give the gist of each chapter in order to entice the reader to buy the book.

David Sax, a Canadian journalist, begins and ends the book with stories from his own analog and digital journey. He confesses that soon after the first iPhone was available “my wife and I were just like every other couple; our faces buried in screens at the dinner table, blind to the world around us and to each other. . . . digital’s gain was not without sacrifice” (xiii). Then a friend started using his parent’s old turntable. Sax observed that while it was less efficient “the act of playing a record seemed more involved, and ultimately more rewarding, than listening to the same music off a hard drive. . . . It all involved more of our physical senses” (xiii). Then he began to notice that things that “had been rendered ‘obsolete’ suddenly began to show new life” (xiv). This was the beginning of Sax’s exploration of a new assessment of a renewed interest in analog. To his amazement he discovered that it is often those on the cutting edge of technological progress and development that have come to real advantages of analog.

While analog experiences can provide us with the kind of real-world pleasures and rewards digital ones cannot, sometimes analog simply outperforms digital as the best solution. When it comes to the free flow of ideas, the pen remains mightier than both the keyboard and the touchscreen. And as you’ll see throughout this book, the natural constraints analog technology imposes on its users can actually increase productivity, rather than hinder it. (xvii)

It’s one thing, of course, to make such an assertion, and quite another to prove it. But Sax does first hand research through dozens of interviews and lots of reading to prove his point. Actually, his point grew out of his research by asking the question, why is analog making a comeback? He believes that the conclusion provides “a model for an emerging postdigital economy that looks toward the future of technology, without forgetting its past” (xviii).

Chapter 1, “The Revenge of Vinyl,” “begins on the factory floor at Nashville’s United Record Pressing (URP)” (3). One of the three largest record-pressing plants in the world it had reached a low point in 2010, but by 2014 it was building a second plant (4). Sales of vinyl records grew from a little under a million in 2007 to over twelve million in 2015 (10). In the sixties URP pressed records of Elvis, Johnny Cash, and even the first Beatles album pressed in the US. The director of marketing, Jay Millar, explains, “Music is just vibrations in air, . . . When a record is playing grooves in the record are duplicating those vibrations, and the needle is picking them up and amplifying those vibrations” (6). “[D]igital helped save the very analog record it nearly killed” (11). The niche market of millennials began the turnaround. As record stores closed they purchased vinyl records over the Internet. Now Whole Foods and Barnes and Noble carry new vinyl. The physical presence of turntables and records appeals to a generation that has lost the sense of

ownership with their music housed on hard drives. Listeners and performers alike are finding that the lack of editing and takes, which digital amplifies, gives them a more authentic performance (25–26). So the renaissance in vinyl production has also seen a revival of analog recording (27).

Chapter 2, “The Revenge of Paper,” tells of the most digitally sophisticated using paper products like Moleskine (pronounced mol-uh-skeen-uh) notebooks. Digital cheerleaders have been predicting a paperless world for decades. Paper was the first analog technology to be challenged and is the oldest. “The revenge of paper shows that analog technology can excel at specific tasks and uses on a very practical level, especially when compared to digital technology” (31). Moleskine is the Italian revival (1997) of the company that went out of business decades before. Matisse, Picasso, and Hemingway all sketched in these notebooks (33).

Creativity and innovation are driven by imagination, and imagination withers when it is standardized, which is exactly what digital technology requires—codifying everything in 1’s and 0’s, within the accepted limits of software. The Moleskine notebook’s simple, unobtrusive design makes it feel like a natural extension of the body. It doesn’t interfere with your personal style, and because of this it allows for an undiluted physical recording of your mood. (36)

In what Joseph Pine and James Gilmore call the “experience economy”<sup>80</sup> the analog businesses that are succeeding today emphasize the authenticity of the physical object they sell (40). And surprise, it’s the digital natives that are most interested in paper (46). So letterpress printers and stationers are popping up everywhere (44). No directions necessary. Ikea came out with a brilliant parody on digital catalogs with their new catalog, “The Bookbook”—no batteries necessary.<sup>81</sup>

Chapter 3, “The Revenge of Film,” chronicles the dramatic disappearance and re-emergence of film. In 1999 800 million rolls of film were produced; by 2011 it was down to 20 million (55). Polaroid had been as big as Apple in its day. Ironically it offered both instant photography with the physical artifact of a picture you can hold in your hand (66–67). Then the “Impossible Project” was born, emphasizing “analog film’s imperfection” (69). Polaroid-like cameras began to take on new life (69–70). Kodak’s movie film division was rejuvenated when in 2014 directors like Martin Scorsese began using film again (71). Director J. J. Abrams opined that “he prefers film for its visual texture, warmth, and quality” (72).

Chapter 4, “The Revenge of Board Games,” is startling. I just reorganized the board games in our closet and thought these will never be used again. Although I am plotting to teach my grandson chess with real pieces instead of digital. So tabletop gaming centers are springing up all over the country, creating “a unique social space apart from the digital world.” Sax quotes MIT professor Sherry Turkle who explores the interaction

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<sup>80</sup> E. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> <http://time.com/3265308/ikea-catalog-2015/> “ ‘The 2015 IKEA catalog comes fully charged, and the battery is eternal,’ says an exec named Jörgen Eghammer, also known as Chief Design Guru. He explains that this catalog is not a digital book or an e-book, but a bookbook. ‘The navigation is based on tactile touch technology that you can actually feel,’ he adds.”

between people and computers, and author of *Alone Together*,<sup>82</sup> “Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone” (80). “The very need for social interaction lies at the heart of the revenge of tabletop games” (81). It’s all about being human, made in the image of God body and soul.

Chapter 5, “The Revenge of Print,” demonstrates that while the cost of print publications is significantly more than digital publication, new print publications are being created because people like to hold books and magazines in their hands. Many of these have begun online and gone to print. The periodical you are presently reading is just such a publication. When I began editing *Ordained Servant* in 2006 I could not find any journal that did this. Our decision to do both digital and analog has proved wise. Interestingly the advent of desktop publishing has enabled small publications to produce great-looking magazines (105). In fact, “For all the bravado about the death of print, most digital publications still spend more than they make” (107). Print readers are more committed than digital readers. As publishers identify niche readers they are finding that people are willing to pay for high quality print productions. One editor noted that one of the desirable features of the print edition of a weekly, like *The Economist*, was its “‘finishability’: the ability of readers to actually finish an issue” (110). The linear format of print lends itself to stories, to beginnings and endings. “there is a romance about the print product. It is tactile, beautiful, and you *smell* the ambition on the page” (113). From a commercial standpoint advertising works much better on a page. When I read my digital *Wall Street Journal* (I do it to save money) I skip right over the ads with a click.

Chapter 6, “The Revenge of Retail,” shows that the obituary for bookstores in New York city was premature. Bookstores in the American Booksellers Association (ABA) hit a low of 1,650 in 2009, down from 4,000 in the 1990s. By 2014 they had grown to 2,227 (125). Brick-and-mortar proved essential to profitability. Again, the experience economy. “What the brick-and-mortar retail store does best is deliver an experience, something online retailing struggles with . . .” (126). By offering expertise in various genres of literature and displaying books in an attractive way these bookstores attract customers. Efficiency is not attractive in comparison because online experience is disembodied. People crave human assistance. The success stories of small bookstores makes this a fascinating chapter.

Chapter 7, “The Revenge of Work,” highlights Shinola, the American luxury lifestyle brand which specializes in watches, bicycles, and leather goods among other items in downtown Detroit. The feel of a heritage brand was created for this company which was founded in 2011. Its meteoric success has demonstrated that analog jobs and products are still very important feature of the American economy (155). “The more important reason behind the digital economy’s failure to create significant jobs is that minimizing the use of human labor tends to be one of its fundamental goals” (163). Shinola teaches a range of job skills that has made a significant contribution to the revival of Detroit. The centrality of the human is again evident in this part of the story.

Chapter 8, “The Revenge of School,” compares the efficiency of online only schools with the humanity of brick-and-mortar education. The latter are part of communities that foster a sense of belonging and purpose (176–77). Sax emphasizes the boosterism connected with online education and contrast this with its overall failure.

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<sup>82</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic, 2011).

Even the best educational computer programs and games, devised with the help of the best educators, contain a tiny fraction of the outcomes of a single child equipped with a crayon and paper. A child's limitless imagination can only do what the computer allows them to do and no more. The best toys, by contrast, are really ten percent toy and ninety percent child: paint, cardboard, sand. The kid's brain does the heavy lifting, and in the process it learns. (181)

Educational technology is most effective when used appropriately, but not exclusively, as if it can do the entire job. A recent Duke University study showed that the introduction of computers into math and reading education had a persistent negative impact on test scores (183–84). Sax gives another example of a fifth grade class given a choice between using an iPad or paper and pencil—they overwhelmingly preferred the analog (187–88). A similar result proved true with MOOCs (massive open online courses), billed to change the entire educational system. Google's Sebastian Thrun was its biggest promoter. It proved to be a massive failure. The reason is teachers, a most fundamental analog reality, because education involves more than the mere transfer of data (201–203).

Chapter 9, "The Revenge of Analog, in Digital," surprises us with the fact that "The digital world values the analog more than anyone" (207). Silicon Valley has come to value the human in new ways, limiting the use of digital devices in areas like meetings and design. Digital companies like Yelp have found that real community, on-the-ground relationships make their digital presence successful (217).

These companies are not turning to analog out of some *Mad Men*-inspired nostalgia for the way business was once done, or because the people working there are afraid of change. They are the most advanced, progressive corporations in the world. They are not embracing analog because it is cool. They do it because analog proves the most efficient, productive way to conduct business. They embrace analog to give them a competitive advantage. (221)

Kevin Kelly, a techno-idealist and author of *What Technology Wants*, admitted, "We have an attraction to analog things, because we live in analog bodies" (226–27). Just so, and that's the point—our humanity is a given, a reality that cannot be contradicted without paying a heavy price.

The epilogue, "The Revenge of Summer," is a charming story of Sax's old summer camp and the challenge that digital devices has brought to the camp and how they have dealt with it. I don't want to spoil the story but the gist is what the director said he was protecting: "We look at the heart of what we do, and it is interpersonal relationships" (236).

I will confess that this book and the trend that it represents are a vindication of what I have believed since I began my doctoral studies on homiletics and electronic media in 1990. Neither digitopian nor dystopian I have always enjoyed a variety of analog realities. I have a 1965 rotary telephone in the dining room of our antique house, a turntable and vinyl records, books in every room, fountain pens and fine stationery. It is heartening to witness the revenge of the analog, not because I have sympathy with Ned Ludd, but because it renews appreciation of embodied life and helps hone the skills of navigating the digital world. It is not either digital or analog but both working in harmony. That's why I heartily recommend this book. Church officers should digest it

and consider the value of the face to face relationships and the live worship we enjoy each Lord's Day, face to face with God as it were.

I have always thought that the historical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ impinged in a palpable way on this topic. Space-time tangibles are an important part of the Christian hope. How electronic realities—which do relate to intangibles in our experience—relate to the real is yet a mystery to be considered.

The death of print, vinyl records, and other tactile things has been grossly exaggerated. Little did I know that by staying out of date I would suddenly become cutting edge. The revenge is sweet.

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# ServantReading

## Reading for the Common Good by C. Christopher Smith

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T. David Gordon

*Reading for the Common Good: How Books Help Our Churches and Neighborhoods Flourish*, by C. Christopher Smith, with foreword by Scot McKnight. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016, 176 pages, \$16.00, paper.

Reading in the West—both its growth and its decline—has itself occupied the attention of cultural observers for some time now. One could easily devote several months of reading time to reading *about* reading (and its history of cultural ebb and flow).<sup>83</sup> Much of that literature falls into the category of cultural analysis; and a small portion of it is somewhat self-consciously Christian: some medieval monasteries devoted themselves to copying manuscripts of Holy Scripture; Protestants are “people of the book” (to the point that Westminster Larger Catechism 156 says, “Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families”); and the Sunday School movement in America was largely a literacy movement.

What has not been done—at least not with the thoroughness and theological acumen that C. Christopher Smith has shown here—is to promote reading for thoroughly Christian purposes; as a practice conducive to love of God, his creation, our neighbors, and fellow believers. According to Smith, “Reading carefully and attentively is an essential part of a journey into knowledge that is rooted in love . . . Reading, as explained in this book, is essential to the health and flourishing of our churches” (19, 65). Smith is an avid reader, a published essayist and book author, and contributing editor of *The Englewood Review of Books*; and he has discovered that reading all sorts of literature—fiction, history, science, poetry, etc.—contributes profoundly to the exercise of dominion over God’s order, the journey of faithful discipleship, and the pursuit of the church’s

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<sup>83</sup> My recommendations would include Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (1990); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (2 vols. ed., 1979); Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (2000); Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (1955); Dana Gioia et al., *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (NEA, 2004); Maryanne Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, (2007); Richard Abel, *The Gutenberg Revolution: A History of Print Culture* (2012); Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, (1994); Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010); David Denby, *Great Books* (1996); Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985); Irving E. Fang, *A History of Mass Communication: Six Information Revolutions* (1997); Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977); Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (1986); Hunt, Arthur Hunt, *The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (2003); Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (2010); Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962); Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (1977); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982); David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (1996).

mission. Smith makes a compelling (and stimulating) case for this basic thesis in chapters devoted to “Slow Reading in Accelerating Times,” “Shaping the Social Imagination,” “Reading and Our Congregational Identity,” “Discerning Our Call,” “Reading with Our Neighbors,” “Deepening our Roots in Our Neighborhoods,” “Hope for Our Interconnected Creation,” “Toward Faithful Engagement in Economics and Politics,” and “Becoming a Reading Congregation.”

In the process of contending for the many significant contributions reading makes, Smith also plausibly argues that reading has benefits in precisely those areas where its opponents have often attacked it. It contributes *to* our social bonds, to our empathy with and sympathy towards others as the *solution* to our narcissism and not its cause: “Reading in communion is one way to counteract the influence of individualism” (56). It stimulates us *to* informed action in the world and in our communities, rather than cultivating passivity and idle speculation: “Without learning, our action tends to be reaction and often is superficial” (16).

One of Smith’s interesting observations regards the importance of reading in community. He insists that much of the value of reading is determined by the conversations we have with others about what we and they are reading, often together; and his discussion of monastic communities centered around conversations about holy texts is as challenging as it is encouraging. He certainly agrees with the common cultural observation of the value of reading for self-understanding. But, going beyond what is ordinarily affirmed, he insists that reading should inform our self-understanding as members of both the general human community and our particular communities:

Our quest for identity cannot evade the questions: *Where* are we? What does it mean to exist within the human culture, the flora and fauna, the landscape, the topography, the climate of this place? *When* are we? What are the spirits and the powers that define our age? How have we arrived at this particular stage of our history? (62)

The latter chapters (and sprinkled throughout) contain interesting and attainable proposals for ways of naturally encouraging and increasing the role of reading (and conversing about reading) in Christian church-life. I could not do such proposals justice in a review of this length. Not surprisingly, in a book written by the editor of a book review, the volume is filled with interesting suggestions for further reading throughout. Many readers will join this reviewer in making a good number of additions to the “to-read” list as a result of reading this one.

Many of the apologies I have read through the years for the value of reading appear to have been written/preached to the choir; and, as a member of that choir, I have enjoyed them immensely. Smith’s apology is different; he patiently and compellingly presents the case—in distinctively Christian terms—that reading should be done “for the common good,” and in order to “help our churches and neighborhoods flourish,” as the title says. My only lament is that I have no conversation-partners at this point with whom I might discuss this interesting volume, but I am making plans to address that matter already. I would be delighted if, several years from now, I encountered a nice representation of church members and officers to discuss this volume with me. In the words of Robert Frost, “You come too.”

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# ServantPoetry

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James R. Lee

## Stones

“ . . . take some large stones in your hands and hide them in mortar in the brick terrace . . . and say to them, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold I am going to send Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon, my servant, and I am going to set his throne right over these stones that I have hidden.’ ”

—Jeremiah 43: 9–10

What the people don’t want laying waste to their fidelity,  
their readiness, as it were, linked to the destruction, being  
principal parts, seeds of His wrath,

and gifted still with younger versions of themselves,  
they’ll know soon what is set in deep resistance,  
their hearts opened, rendered split. In the plainest terms of sight

He has pronounced no recess will be hidden:  
He will lift a king above the foundation. He will ready  
yet another King as surely as He raised him.

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