

# ordained servant

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poetry

# Ordained Servant Online

## A Journal for Church Officers

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### CURRENT ISSUE: POETRY FOR PREACHING AND ENJOYMENT

June-July 2020

#### From the Editor

As warm weather comes around, I thought, especially after the year that we have endured, that a topic that would lead us away or above the present situation would be helpful. For me reading and writing poetry have provided just such mental sabbatical, brief though it usually is. It provides a respite from the pervasive electronic noise that keeps us all from meditating on important things. So, while I will focus to some degree on the value of poetry for preaching, I will also seek to open up a vista on poetry's value for every Christian. I am happy to have my friend and partner in this poetic passion, Mark Green, contribute to this issue. So, pick your favorite summer tree, grab a book of poetry, and enjoy one of God's greatest blessings. I have provided a Beginner's Poetry Bibliography for those of you who are new to poetry. It also has some advanced resources and is available [here](#).

"The Power of Poetry for Preaching and Enjoyment" is meant to help preachers improve their oral skills, but it is also a kind of primer for appreciating and simply enjoying poetry. Not only is a third of the Bible poetry, but the rest is crafted with various types of literary structures, like the chiasm. Our God designed the text of the Bible to be memorable in oral cultures. So, appreciating poetry of all kinds will help us be better Bible readers.

In "Your Personal Odyssey in Stereo" Mark Green encourages us to learn to enjoy poetry by hearing it read by the best voices. Homer, is, of course, one of the most influential poets in the Western canon. His epic journey in the *Odyssey* has stirred the imagination of generations. Life itself becomes a kind of poetry. Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiēma* (ποίημα), from which we get our word "poem."

Danny Olinger gives us the second chapter of *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: "The First Resurrection"* (1975). Kline's work is rooted in the soil of Geerhardus Vos's Reformed biblical theology.

Alan Strange continues his "Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" with chapters 18–20. When complete this will be published as a unique resource for church officers. Sessions should encourage its officers and the interns, who are under care or licensed, to pay careful attention to the exposition of our standards.

William Davis reviews the fourth edition of Gilbert Meilaender's *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, in his review article, "Medical Technology: A Blessing Not to Be Idolized." Professor Davis has used this as a textbook for many years since the first edition in 1996. The greatest value of this book is its challenge to the temptation to make an idol of medical technology. Davis assesses this with intelligent care.

Ryan McGraw reviews Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson, *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry*. This is one of the most common and sensitive issues in pastoral ministry. This book is full of biblically sage advice.

Finally, I have provided a medley of poems in the category of *Ars Poetica* for your summer

enjoyment. Ars Poetica are poems about poetry—“the art of poetry.” Of particular interest is Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18. Most people read this as a love poem, but read it aloud carefully and you will see it is about the Bard’s poetry.

The cover photo is the Cape Neddick Light in York, Maine, commonly called the Nubble Light. Constructed in 1879 it is still in use today.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

## CONTENTS

### ServantThoughts

- “The Power of Poetry for Preaching and Enjoyment”

### ServantLiterature

- Mark A. Green, “Your Personal Odyssey in Stereo”

### ServantTruth

- Danny E. Olinger, *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 2 – “The First Resurrection”* (1975)

### ServantStandards

- Alan D. Strange, “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 18–20”

### ServantReading

- William C. Davis, “Medical Technology: A Blessing Not to Be Idolized,” a review article on Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*
- Ryan M. McGraw, review Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson, *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry*

### ServantPoetry

- “Ars Poetica: A Medley”

## FROM THE ARCHIVES “POETRY”

[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-28.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-28.pdf)

- “Preaching and Poetry: Learning the Power of Speech” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 16 (2007): 17–22.
- “The Value of Daydreaming” (Gregory E. Reynolds) 21 (2012): 18–20.
- “The Rhythms of the Christian Life in Bible Reading, Prayer, and Poetry” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 22 (2013): 109–11.
- “‘Submission’: A Model for Preachers.” (Gregory E. Reynolds) 22 (2013): 13–16.
- “Beautiful Truth” (Gregory E. Reynolds) 24 (2015): 6–7.

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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.

# ServantLiterature

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## The Power of Poetry for Preaching and Enjoyment<sup>1</sup>

Gregory E. Reynolds

Novelist and poet Larry Woiwode, and Leland Ryken, professor of English and author, are always lamenting the lack of interest in literature and poetry among pastors. They are doing their best to make a difference. But why bother? Well, I'm here to tell you.

Poet Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, raised worrisome concerns about the state of literary reading in America in the 1990s. Building on an alarming trend, Gioia sounded the alarm in dramatic fashion in 2004 and 2007 with reports "Reading at Risk" and "To Read or Not to Read." He was often criticized as a doomsayer. But, because parents and educators, including the NEA, did not simply accept this as an irreversible trend, the 20 percent decline in literary reading in the youngest age group surveyed (ages 18–24) in 2002 was reversed to a dramatic 21 percent increase in 2008, as presented by Gioia in a subsequent NEA report "Reading on the Rise."<sup>2</sup> Sadly the only area of literary reading that continues to decline is poetry.

One of my favorite editorial writers recently lumped poets in with the dilettante, second-generation, trust fund rich kids. Poetry is the literature *par excellence* of daydreamers.<sup>3</sup> Walter Mitty's early twentieth-century daydreaming<sup>4</sup> was thought to be a disease we moderns should consider vaccinating out of existence. But, unlike polio, it is *not*, I would argue, a disease, but a cure for our modern dis-ease.

### 1. Poetry Is a Thoroughly Biblical Medium of Communication

I always begin my lectures on media ecology by asking if anyone in the audience likes poetry. Invariably only a few say "Yes." Then I tell them that I'm certain that they do like poetry, because they like the Bible—God's Word is over one third poetry.

Poetry's place in the Bible should inspire us to give it prominence in the preparation and practice of preaching. Would a prophet write a poem to communicate God's truth? Jacob, David, and countless others biblical writers did. One third of the Bible is poetry.

We must admit that our tendency—were we writing Scripture—would be to write a journal article or a lecture. Perhaps we even secretly wonder if the literary forms in which the Bible was written are the best modes of communicating. This is because we are mostly "silent" readers. But the original audience of both testaments would not even have had the

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is adapted from a presentation entitled "Pastors and Poets: The Value of Poetry for Pastors," given at Westminster Seminary in California, on January 29, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Dana Gioia, "Reading on the Rise," <http://www.nea.gov/research/readingonrise.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory E. Reynolds, "The Value of Daydreaming" *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 18–20.

<sup>4</sup> James Thurber, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," *The New Yorker*, March 18, 1939, 19–20. This was made into a movie in 1947.

luxury of owning manuscripts unless they were very wealthy—the average cost of a book would have been equivalent to a working man’s annual income. The Bereans in Acts 17 would have had to go to the synagogue in order to search the Scriptures. Ordinarily through all of the millennia of Bible history the primary access to God’s Word among God’s people was through hearing the Scriptures read and preached.<sup>5</sup> Thus the patterns of sound in the structure of the text would need to be memorable—and so they are. A large portion of the Bible is written in poetry and poetic structures like the chiasm. But how often do we take advantage of this in the preparation and delivery of sermons?

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says that “we are his *workmanship*, ποίημα, (poetry, literally *poiēma*, emphasis mine), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

## 2. Poetry Fosters the Creative Pleasure and Discovery that Serendipity Allows

Poetry affords the preacher the cultivation of meditation and daydreaming. Since it takes time to understand, it slows us down.

I believe one of the reasons poetry is generally out of favor is that we have very little time for day dreaming in our electrified lives. Thus, we have little chance for the creative pleasure and discovery that serendipity allows. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines serendipity:

the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way: a fortunate stroke of serendipity | a series of small serendipities. . . . coined by Horace Walpole, suggested by *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the title of a fairy tale in which the heroes “were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.”<sup>6</sup>

The difficulty of understanding poetry inhibits its ascendancy in our culture because such understanding takes meditation time and concentration. Of course, poetry slams have appeared in venues throughout America. Although this gives a glimmer of hope, it does not usually represent the kind of appreciation that grows out of a deep reading of the best poetry in the English language. I have even encountered disdain among slammers for the forms and discipline of the greatest poets. But this is not to say they are not onto something important. They read or recite their poetry in small public settings. This is a good thing.

## 3. Poetry Helps Foster a Love of Words, the Basic Material of Preaching

In poetry every word counts. The density and intensity of poetic words make poetry especially helpful for the preacher.

Poetry teaches us to love words—their sounds and their meanings. The preacher must cultivate a love for the English language, especially the spoken word. Ransack the best dictionaries. Above all *read aloud*. Choose the best poetry and prose and read it aloud. Read

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<sup>5</sup> This point is made over and over again by Hughes Oliphant Old in his monumental multi-volume series *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* in 6 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998-2007). This is a rich historical resource with excellent commentary and extensive bibliography and indexes. And it is more than a history of preaching, loaded with biblical and historical wisdom for the preacher.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the Psalms, George Herbert, Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare, the essays and stories of G. K. Chesterton, Hillaire Belloc, Stephen Leacock, Christopher Morley—*aloud!*

How poorly we ministers often are at reading Scripture in public. Many seek to overcome the monotone by over-reading. The proper expression should be a heightened form of our ordinary speech—each word weighted according to its position and meaning. The *King James Version* is best suited to the practice of reading Scripture aloud, not because it is a perfect or even the best translation—I am not recommending it for public worship, only for practice—but because it was produced in a golden age of orality. One thing is certain: the Authorized Version was translated to be read aloud in churches. The Authorized title says: “appointed to be read in churches.” This certainly did not mean silent, private reading. Reading aloud—even to yourself—impresses the beauty and power of the richest language in history into your oral memory. Words are your tools. Labor to be a wordsmith. As McLuhan said, “language itself is the principal channel and view-maker of experience for men everywhere.”<sup>7</sup> “The spoken word involves all the senses dramatically.”<sup>8</sup> The preached Word is the most powerful “view-maker” of all, as it corrects the idolatrous “view-making” propagated by our fallen world, especially by the electronic media. The preached Word inculcates the redemptive “view-making” of the heavenly reality of the incarnate Logos.

Poet Paul Engle:

Poetry is ordinary language  
raised to the Nth power.  
Poetry is boned with ideas,  
nerved and blooded with emotions,  
all held together by the delicate,  
tough skin of words.

A poem is words patterned to impress. This is the genius of hymnody. Poetry and song—the music of the human voice—are very closely related. Not every poem would make a hymn, since hymns must be accessible as well as good poetry. Hymns also need a metrical structure such that each verse is the same length. One could hardly make hymns of most of T. S. Eliot’s religious poems, whereas many of Christina Rossetti’s poems were specifically written to be sung in worship.

Love Came Down at Christmas  
Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894)

Love came down at Christmas,  
love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas;  
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, Love divine;

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<sup>7</sup> Marshall McLuhan, “Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters,” in *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, edited by Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szlerek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 77–78.

worship we our Jesus,  
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token;  
love be yours and love be mine;  
love to God and others,  
love for plea and gift and sign.

Frost's definition of poetry "the sound of sense" gets at the essence of poetry. But the reverse does, too. W. H. Auden had this to say about what makes good poetry and poets, A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with the language. . . . [I]t is certainly the sign by which one recognizes whether a young man is potentially a poet or not. "Why do you want to write poetry?" If the young man answers: "I have important things to say," then he is not a poet. If he answers: "I like hanging around words listening to what they say," then maybe he is going to be a poet.<sup>9</sup>

Preachers should love "hanging around words," they are the raw material of his preaching, and preaching is primarily an oral, not a written, discipline, although the two are clearly closely related.

### Nothing Gold Can Stay (a secular poem)

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.

Qoheleth, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, informs us about the powerful beauty of words,

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (Eccles. 12:9–12)

In the age of bits and bytes we are told that science alone gives us truth. Thus, we are suspicious of poetry. Many Christians believe that all talk of literary structures undermines our confidence in God's Word. The creation debates in our own circles often yield such ideas.

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<sup>9</sup> W. H. Auden, "Squares and Oblongs," in *Poets at Work* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 171.

Poetry enshrined the Exodus event in many Psalms. They are no less historical or true for being poetry. Poetry in the Bible presents truth in memorable form.

The words of the sage in this text are carefully crafted divine wisdom, “arranging many proverbs with great care.” This is wisdom for living in a fallen world, especially to leave the mystery of the injustice of the vain, i.e. “wacky” world, in the hands of God. We are called to recognize our limits. To communicate this, we are reminded that God’s Word is crafted with care “weighing and studying and arranging.” It is divinely designed with a purpose. So, artfully wrought truth is communicated. Good design in architecture involves three dimensions: firmness, commodity, and delight. A good building must be well-made, useful, and beautiful. So Scripture is all of these.

In verse 10 we see that Qoheleth sought to use “words of delight” (*khopets* חֵפֶץ). The basic meaning is to feel great favor towards something. The Author of beauty gave literary skill to the human authors of Scripture in order to memorably communicate “words of truth” (*emet* אֱמֶת)—correct or orthodox words. Truth and beauty go hand in hand. The medium is entirely suited to the message. The medium and the message are perfectly complimentary as they teach us the beauty of God’s grace. This should give us confidence in our task of communicating God’s Word.

One of the best aids in this discipline is poetry read aloud, one of our God’s favorite literary forms, as we learn from Scripture. Read the best English poetry from Chaucer to Frost aloud, with special attention to the Psalms. The *King James Version* is, as I have said, best suited to this. Prayer, according to the Psalmist is oral: “I cry out to the LORD with my voice . . .” (Ps. 142:1). Note the rhythmic cadences of Psalm 100:

### Psalm 100 A Psalm of praise

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.  
Serve the LORD with gladness:  
    come before his presence with singing.  
Know ye that the LORD he *is* God:  
    *it is he that* hath made us, and not we ourselves;  
    *we are* his people, and the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,  
    *and* into his courts with praise:  
    be thankful unto him, *and* bless his name.  
For the LORD *is* good;  
    his mercy *is* everlasting;  
    and his truth *endureth* to all generations.

So you must have a love affair with words. The preacher must cultivate a love for the English language, especially the spoken word. Winston Churchill, one of the greatest orators of all time, wrote his speeches in verse form.

## 4. Reading and Memorizing Poetry Trains Us to Meditate Deeply on Texts

I also think the decline of poetry is due to a lack of reading aloud, especially hearing poetry well read or recited. What I have discovered in my “memory walks” is that by memorizing poetry, through regular oral repetition, the meaning becomes clearer with time.

Memory muscles are exercised along with the physical. The sound of the words begins to sink in. But few of us have patience to repeat poems aloud until it is etched in our memories. That is why I have learned to combine it with my daily two-mile walk.

Reading and memorizing poetry trains us to meditate deeply on texts. The compression of language in good poetry forces the reader to pay attention to the details of grammar and punctuation. It thus tends to make us better oral communicators, speaking in memorable sentences, and—a near miracle for Reformed preachers—making our preaching more concise. I have often finished leading worship before noon since engaging in this exercise. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was a little over two minutes long (280 words), while the forgotten Oration by famed orator Edward Everett was over two hours long (13,508 words). The next day Everett wrote to Lincoln, “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”<sup>10</sup>

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

### Submission (a sacred poem)

George Herbert (1593–1633)

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>10</sup> Bob Green, “The Forgotten Gettysburg Addresser,” *The Wall Street Journal* (June 22–23, 2013): A15.

Poetry, also, as all good literature, gives us insight into the human condition, and in the case of sacred poets like George Herbert, insight into God and his Word.

## 5. Poetry Helps Cultivate the Color and Cadence of Pulpit Speech

As we learn the rhythms and cadences of the spoken word in reading, so the entire sermon should be varied in intensity, rich in linguistic diversity and acoustic texture. Poetry can teach us this. The verbal economy of poetry makes every word tell. Poetry can help us cultivate more concise speech patterns in our preaching.

“The Pulley” by George Herbert (1593-1633)

When God at first made man,  
Having a glasse of blessings standing by,  
‘Let us,’ said he, ‘poure on him all we can;  
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,  
Contract into a span.’

So strength first made a way;  
The beautie flow’d, then wisdom, honour, pleasure;  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure,  
Rest in the bottome lay.

‘For if I should,’ said he,  
‘Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
So both should losers be.

‘Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlesnesse;  
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse  
May tosse him to my breast.’

Poetry is invaluable in teaching us the rhythms and cadences of the spoken word. One of the best ways to develop oral skill is to pay attention to how others read—to the best oral presentation. John Gielgud’s recitation of Shakespeare’s sonnets is incomparable.

Poetry is one of God’s greatest gifts to humanity, because language powerfully reflects the very essence of who God is and how he has made us in his image. So, it is no surprise that poetic structure should be found throughout the Bible. As we take time to recite and meditate upon good poetry, it shapes us and enriches our own communication, especially for preachers of God’s Word.

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# ServantLiterature

## Your Personal Odyssey in Stereo

Mark A. Green

My wife Lucy and I often recall lighthearted moments spent conversing with friends who spoke English as their second or third language. After living in different countries for twenty years, we have spent thousands of hours like this. At times we have been in the middle of a conversation with friends but utterly unable to follow their English because of unique speech patterns or heavy accents. When this happened, we continued nodding our heads to affirm the speaker, waiting until we could latch onto words that made sense to us. Then we could enter again into the joy of the conversation.

Poetry can be like that for many of us. In English there are poetic ways of using the same words that are vastly different from colloquial speech. We often give up reading mid-poem because we just cannot quite understand the flow of the poet's discourse. We might persevere for a while, because we have heard that this journey of poetry can be a fruitful one. But eventually we set the book aside, exasperated. One day, we say, we will have more time to tackle the excursion into the dense thicket of verse.

Years ago, I discovered a group of wonderful individuals who helped me interpret poetry. They are voice actors who have spent their lives bringing words to life without the aid of visual cues. A famous example would be Richard Burton's YouTube reading of "The Hound of Heaven," that magnificent poem by Francis Thompson that paints a picture of the pursuit of our heavenly Father.

Now of that long pursuit,  
Comes at hand the bruit.  
That Voice is round me like a bursting Sea:  
And is thy Earth so marred,  
Shattered in shard on shard?  
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest me.  
Strange, piteous, futile thing;  
Wherefore should any set thee love apart?  
Seeing none but I makes much of Naught (He said).  
And human love needs human meriting ---  
How hast thou merited,  
Of all Man's clotted clay, the dingiest clot.  
Alack! Thou knowest not  
How little worthy of any love thou art.  
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
Save me, save only me.

—*Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thompson

This approach—joining talented voice actors on the poetic journey—might be just the motivation we need to start our own personal journey along the poetic line. Allow me to recommend this approach with one of the foundational poems in our Western canon, *The Odyssey* by Homer.

After fighting in the Trojan War, Odysseus tries to return to his wife and son in Ithaca. We join the story with Odysseus trapped on an island, still not reunited to his wife after ten years. His wife Penelope is besieged by suitors who continually pressure her to remarry (and give up the family riches), because it seems obvious that her husband is dead. Her son, not quite of age to take over the household, simmers with rage against the suitors and longs for his father's return.

Odysseus's long journey, aided by the fickle Greek gods of old, is told in spectacular style by Homer, the legendary epic poet from ancient Greece who wrote both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. Homer's epics were foundational for key aspects of Greek civilization and form the foundation of any curriculum focused on The Great Books. The translation of these epic poems from the original Greek by Robert Fitzgerald is reputedly one of the best English translations in print.

Here is my suggestion for a rollicking great yarn, in poetry no less.

Begin with a used edition of *The Odyssey* on AbeBooks.com. For around five dollars you can have the book shipped to you at no cost. (I recommend getting a used copy of *The Iliad* at the same time for reasons I'll explain below.)

Once the book arrives, point your browser to <https://archive.org/details/hmrrio/The+Odyssey+by+Homer/Book+01+-+A+Goddess+Intervenes.mp3> where a new friend will make *The Odyssey* come to life. You may know this actor already if you, like me, loved every episode of *Downton Abbey*. Do you remember Matthew Crawley, the husband of Lady Mary, who dies unexpectedly in a car accident at the end of the third season? Matthew Crawley is played by actor Dan Stevens, a renowned Shakespearean and film actor from England.

Dan Stevens has recorded the entire Fitzgerald version of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* for free on this website. (Alternatively, you can do as I did and purchase *The Odyssey* from Macmillan.com for \$26.99, so that the artist will receive royalties.) Notice that *The Odyssey* is broken down into only twenty-four chapters (or books) averaging about twenty-five minutes of listening time each.

Having the written word in front of you with Master Stevens delivering the lines is like listening to a poem in stereo. I cannot recall when I first heard of this approach, but I have used it for Homer as well as the classic *Divine Comedy* by Dante.

Before starting your own poetry listening odyssey, take the time to read the forward to the poem in Fitzgerald's translation by D. S. Carne-Ross, a renowned critic of poetry translation. (He sets up *The Iliad* so very well and helps you get your bearings before heading out. There's even a map for those of us who yearn for more Bilbo Baggins!)

I encourage you not to hurry. Listening to Dan Stevens's lyrical recitation while writing your own notes in your already well-loved book is pure New York cheesecake. Enjoy every delicious step. I sometimes pause and just praise God for the tangible example of such beauty still existing in our fallen world.

"But you, brave and adept from this day on . . . there's hope that you will reach your goal . . . the journey that stirs you now is not far off" (Book 2, *The Odyssey*).

**Mark A. Green** is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the President and CEO of White Horse Inn in San Diego, California.

# Servant Truth

## *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 2 – “The First Resurrection”* (1975)

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by Danny E. Olinger

It would be nearly thirty years after his 1946 student paper, “A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John,” before Meredith Kline turned his full attention back to the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> After his graduation from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1947, he received a call to Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Ringoes, New Jersey, approximately ten miles from Princeton. On March 5, 1948, he was ordained and installed as the pastor of Calvary Church.<sup>2</sup>

As pastor of the ninety-two-member congregation at Ringoes, Kline kept busy. He preached two sermons a Lord’s Day, conducted a Wednesday night prayer meeting, and visited the members. Still, he retained a connection to the academic world and to Westminster Seminary. His undeniable exegetical gifts had been noticed by the faculty of Westminster, which was seeking help for Edward J. Young in the Old Testament department. Kline began teaching two Old Testament courses a week in fall 1948. Then, in 1950, he accepted a full-time position at the school in the Old Testament department.

Once teaching at Westminster, Kline’s days were packed. He taught a full load of courses, began work on a PhD at Dropsie University, and even wrote Sunday school lessons for the OPC’s Great Commission Publications. This heavy load of teaching, studying, and writing for publication was all with a growing family as Kline and his wife, Grace, were blessed with three sons born between 1945 and 1950, Meredith, Sterling, and Calvin.<sup>3</sup>

In 1955, he finished his doctoral dissertation at Dropsie, *The Ha-BI-ru: Kin or Foe of Israel?* The extra time that Kline now had allowed him to publish at an accelerated rate compared to his first few years at Westminster. During the period from 1956 to 1959, Kline published eight book reviews and seven articles, including three in the periodical *Christianity Today*. His publications caught the attention of Calvin Theological Seminary, and the school invited him to join its faculty in both 1958 and 1959. He also

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Meredith M. Kline for his research in ascertaining the correct date of his father’s ThM thesis at Westminster Seminary. Meredith G. Kline took Ned B. Stonehouse’s class on Revelation in the fall of 1945. Kline completed the final exam in early January 1946 and began research for the paper. He completed the paper on April 12, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> A little over two months later on May 13–18, Kline attended the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church held at Calvary Church in Wildwood, New Jersey.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the Kline and Young families during the 1950s and early 1960s lived in homes in the Philadelphia suburb of Willow Grove that were next to each other with their yards connecting.

received an invitation in 1958 from Gordon Divinity School (later renamed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary). He declined the offers from both schools, but, according to his son Meredith, he was unhappy with his teaching load and class assignments at Westminster.<sup>4</sup> When Gordon made another offer to him seven years later with the promise to oversee its Old Testament department, Kline accepted.

During his first decade at Gordon, he remained active in writing. His published works from 1966 to 1975 included eight reviews, nine articles, one minor commentary on Genesis, and his books *By Oath Consigned* in 1968 and *The Structure of Biblical Authority* in 1972. These writings, much like his writings during his fifteen-year tenure at Westminster, were predominantly Old Testament studies.

That changed in 1975. Two articles in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, one in 1973, James Hughes's "Revelation 20:4–6 and the Question of the Millennium"<sup>5</sup> and one in 1974, Norman Shepherd's "The Resurrections of Revelation 20"<sup>6</sup> had piqued Kline's interest. Both articles had attempted to refute the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. Although Kline agreed with the authors that the "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20 is not a bodily resurrection, he also believed that the exegetical argumentation could have been stronger. Stating that the issue in Revelation 20 has "a quite decisive bearing on the whole millennial issue," he responded with the article "The First Resurrection."<sup>7</sup>

### **"The First Resurrection"**

In the opening sentence of the article, Kline declared, "One of the critical points in the exegesis of Rev 20 is the interpretation of *prōtos* in the phrase, "the first resurrection" (v. 5). Premillennarians understand *prōtos* in the purely sequential sense of first in a series of items of the same kind. Consequently, premillennarians interpret "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5 as a bodily resurrection, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."<sup>8</sup> They also interpret the resurrection event described in Revelation 20:12–13 as a bodily resurrection, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

Kline opposed such a reading of the first resurrection on exegetical grounds. He argued that the contextual usage of *prōtos* ("first") in Revelation 20 does not support a sequential understanding as premillennialists put forth. Rather, the exegesis "points compellingly to an interpretation of 'the first resurrection' found in (so-called)

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<sup>4</sup> Meredith M. Kline, "Meredith G. Kline: A Biographical Sketch," in *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2017), xxi.

<sup>5</sup> James A. Hughes, "Revelation 20:4–6 and the Question of the Millennium," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 281–302.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Shepherd, "The Resurrections of Revelation 20." *Westminster Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (Fall 1974): 34–43.

<sup>7</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "The First Resurrection." *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 3 (Spring 1975): 366–75.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture citations in this article are to the King James Version.

amillennial exegesis.”<sup>9</sup> In making his argument, Kline turned to the usage of “first” in the immediate context of Revelation 21 to explain the correct understanding of the usage of “first” in Revelation 20.

### **“First,” “New,” and “Second”**

In Revelation 21 John employs “first” as the opposite of “new.” At the consummation, God will usher in a “new heaven and a new earth” and a “new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:1–2); he will make “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). When this takes place, when God makes all things new, “the first things” pass away—tears, death, sorrow, pain (Rev. 21:4 ASV). Here “first” means to belong to the order of the present world, which is passing away. That which is “new” supersedes that which is “first.”

However, in Revelation 21, it is not just “new” that John uses in opposition to “first.” He also uses “second” in antithesis to “first.” The second death that belongs to the lake of fire in Revelation 21:8 does not pass away. It is the eternal counterpart to the death listed in Revelation 21:4 (ASV) that belongs to the order of “first things.” That is, the second death does not involve what we know as physical death but is the eternal perdition that the wicked experience after they have been raised in the resurrection of damnation.<sup>10</sup> Although the first death is the loss of bodily life, the second death is not the same kind of death. The second death is death in a metaphorical sense, not a literal sense.

In John’s terminology, then, “first” describes the present world; “second” and “new” are used in connection with the future world. Against the premillennial contention, then, Kline maintained from Revelation 21 that “first” does not merely mark the present world as the first in a series of worlds, or as the first in a series of worlds of the same kind. He said, “On the contrary it characterizes this world as different in kind from the ‘new world.’ It signifies that the present world stands in contrast to the new world order of the consummation which will abide forever.”<sup>11</sup>

### **New Testament Use of *Prōtos* in Antithetical Pairs**

Kline moved next to examine other New Testament passages where *prōtos* appears, particularly as *prōtos* appears in antithetical pairs in the book of Hebrews and in 1 Corinthians 15. In Hebrews 10:9, “He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second,” Kline noted the term “second” is used to describe the new covenant. Thus, in Hebrews 10, just as in Revelation 20 and 21, “second” is used as an alternate for “new” in contrast to “first.”

Still, Kline realized that some would interpret the use of “first” in Hebrews 8:7, “for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second,” as confirming a priority in a series. However, the author of Hebrews expressly

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<sup>9</sup> Kline, “First Resurrection,” 366.

<sup>10</sup> In his commentary upon Gen. 2:17, Kline wrote, “Surely die (v. 17). A curse balanced the covenant’s blessing, symbolized by the tree of life and Sabbath, threatening the opposite—not physical death but eternal perdition (later called ‘second death’).” In the footnote that accompanied the comments, Kline referenced pages 367, 371, and 373–374 from “The First Resurrection.” See, M. G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. Jonathan G. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 20. See also, Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (South Hamilton, MA: Meredith Kline, 1991), 63–64.

<sup>11</sup> Kline, “First Resurrection,” 367.

observes in 8:13 in speaking of a new covenant that God made the first one old or obsolete. The significance of “first” in this context is not so much priority of series but opposition to “old.” In Hebrews, as in Revelation 21, “first” is used to represent a historical stage, provisional and passing away, that stands in contrast to that which is consummative, final, and enduring.

According to Kline, Paul used *prōtos* in a similar manner in 1 Corinthians 15:45–47. In the contrast of the two Adams, the “first man Adam” in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is not the first in the sense of a series of Adams, but first in the antithetically qualitative sense of being the counterpart to the “last Adam.” There are no “Adams” between the first and last. Echoing Geerhardus Vos, Kline wrote,

The first Adam is earthy and psychical; the last Adam is heavenly and Spiritual (vv. 45, 47). Because of the federal position occupied by the two Adams, the qualities of each one also inform the life sphere at the head of which he stands (vv. 44–49). “First” is thus correlated with the preliminary, pre-consummative phase of kingdom development over against the eschatological final stage of the kingdom which bears the image of last Adam.<sup>12</sup>

Kline then observed that both 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21 use “first” in antithetical fashion in putting forth an age-spanning structure of biblical eschatology that divides universal history into stages: this world and the world to come. “First” means to be assigned a place in the present world with its transient order that is passing away. In neither passage does “first” function as a mere ordinal in the process of counting objects similar in kind. Kline concluded from the exegetical study of Hebrews, 1 Corinthians 15, and Revelation 21 that “that which is ‘first’ does not participate in the quality of consummate finality and permanence which is distinctive of the new kingdom order of the world to come.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Meaning of “The First Resurrection”**

Kline further defended his belief that “an interpretation of *prōtos* in keeping with the usage and meaning of the word found in Revelation 21 is required in Revelation 20, specifically in the expression ‘the first resurrection.’”<sup>14</sup> In addition to the proximity of Revelation 20 and 21 and the thematic continuity, he argued that there exists an interlocking pattern, first-(second) resurrection and (first)-second death, in the thousand years context. In the post-millennial resurrection for those who are not found in the book of life, the final judgment for them is “the second death, the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14 ESV). Nine verses earlier in Revelation 20:5b, 6a, Kline noted that John employs the term “second death” within the explanation of what the first resurrection is, “This is the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 368. In his *Genesis: A New Commentary*, Kline elaborated on the connection between Gen. 2:7 and 1 Cor. 15:42–49. He wrote, “The Hebrew wordplay is reflected in Paul’s commentary that the first Adam was fashioned in a natural body for earthly existence. The apostle further observed that the last Adam shared in the earthly state in order to secure for fallen man in the resurrection the spiritual body of imperishable glory (1 Cor. 15:42–49), the prospect forfeited by the first Adam” (18–19).

<sup>13</sup> Kline, “First Resurrection,” 369.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.”

This crisscrossing pattern of connection between “first resurrection” and “second death” was decisive for Kline. He stated, “Clearly the usage of *prōtos* in the first-(second) resurrection pattern must be the same as the usage of *prōtos* in the intertwined (first)-second death pattern, which is itself part of the broader first-new things pattern of Revelation 21.”<sup>15</sup> This antithetical usage of *prōtos* reveals a great error in premillennial exegesis. Rather than using *prōtos* to indicate sequential ordering in bodily resurrections, John uses *prōtos* to indicate different kinds of resurrections. Textually, Kline argued, “If the second resurrection is a bodily resurrection, the first resurrection must be a non-bodily resurrection.”<sup>16</sup> The crisscrossing pattern then teaches that the “first resurrection” and the “second death” are metaphysical in meaning; “first death” and “second resurrection” are literal in meaning.

But, if the “first resurrection” was not a bodily resurrection, then what did John mean in using that phrase? Kline answered, “Just as the resurrection of the unjust is paradoxically identified as ‘the second death’ so the death of the Christian is paradoxically identified as the ‘first resurrection.’”<sup>17</sup> John sees the Christian dead in Revelation 20:4. The meaning of their passing from earthly life is found in the heavenly state where they as royal priests live and reign with Christ. “Hence the use of the paradoxical metaphor of ‘the first resurrection’ (vv. 5-6) for the death of the faithful believer. What for others is the first death is for the Christian a veritable resurrection!”<sup>18</sup>

Kline concluded, then, that Revelation 20 and 21 did not support the argument that the “first resurrection” is first in a series of bodily resurrections. It is not man’s bodily introduction to the permanence of the world to come, for the contextual force of “first” is descriptive of the pre-consummation stage of things.

## **The Beatitude of the Christian Dead**

Kline emphasized that there is a blessedness to Christian death. He said succinctly, “For the Christian, to die is resurrection.”<sup>19</sup> According to Kline, that this theme should pervade Revelation should be of no surprise given the book’s origin and purpose. What he endeavored at the close of his article “The First Resurrection,” was to show the parallels in concept and terminology in the book leading up to Revelation 20.

In Revelation 20:6, the first resurrection prospect takes the form of a beatitude, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” This is the fifth of seven beatitudes in Revelation, the others being found in Revelation 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 22:7, and 22:14. Kline pointed out that Christian death is also the subject of the second beatitude, Revelation 14:13, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” He believed that the promised

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 372.

sabbath rest blessing of Revelation 14:13 was very much the same as the millennial blessing of Revelation 20:5–6. Sabbath rest in the Bible includes enthronement after the completion of labor. The risen Christ’s sabbath rest is his kingly session at God’s right hand. For the believer, to live and reign with the risen Christ is to participate in his sabbath rest. This is the blessing promised to those who die in the Lord in the beatitude of Revelation 14:13, but it is also the blessing promised to those in the beatitude of Revelation 20:6 who have a part in the first resurrection.<sup>20</sup>

Kline noted that the letter to Smyrna in Revelation 2 also contains a section that closely resembles Revelation 20:4–6 in its treatment of the blessedness of the Christian dead. In listing the parallels, Kline indicated that both texts proclaim that Christian martyrs through their death will secure a crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:10, 11; 20:4, 6). Both texts reference the activity of Satan (Rev. 2:9, 10; 20:2, 7).<sup>21</sup> There is also, in Kline’s words, “the intriguing possibility” that a connection exists between the numerical symbols of the ten days of tribulation in Revelation 2:10 and the thousand years of reigning in Revelation 20:4 and 6. The intensifying of the numerical ten to a thousand and the lengthening of days to years might suggest that the momentary affliction and tribulation of this life works a far greater glory to be experienced even in the intermediate state.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in Revelation 2:10 the “crown of life” promised to the Christian dead includes the exegetical possibility that it is the nominal equivalent of the verbal “they lived and reigned” in the account of the experience that attends the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4 and following.

## The Thousand Years

Kline finished the article by arguing that the way John identifies the first resurrection in Revelation 20: 4–6 with living and reigning with Christ a thousand years has the effect of connecting the qualifying force of *prōtos* directly to “the thousand years.” According to Kline, the result is that “the millennium as such is virtually called a ‘first’ age. It falls within the days of this present passing world characterized by ‘the first things.’ The

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<sup>20</sup> Kline observed that a similar promise of rest is given to the martyrs in the opening of the fifth seal in Rev. 6:11, “And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>21</sup> In his 1986 article, “Death, Leviathan, and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1,” Kline connected Satan and the second death in a direct fashion in Rev. 20. He wrote that in Rev. 20:10 “the devil’s doom takes the form of the lake of fire, that realm is one of forever continuing torment (10b), and accordingly, the fate of Satan and others relegated to it is not absolute erasure from existence. The second death is existence on the other side of an impossible gulf from the cosmos proper. To be cast into the lake of fire is to cease to figure or function in heaven or earth as the consummated Kingdom of God. Satan slain, or banished to the second death, no longer participates in the creation proper. He no longer functions as the power of death or otherwise affects the glorified saints.” Meredith G. Kline, “Death, Leviathan, and the Martyrs: Isaiah 24:1–27:1,” in *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 228.

<sup>22</sup> Earlier Kline made clear that Rev. 20:5–6 had in view not the final state of believers, but the intermediate state. He said, “For bright as is the prospect that is opened up in the identification of dying in Christ as a resurrection to heavenly glories with exemption from the power of the second death assured (v. 6), that state is still not the ultimate glory of the Christian. It stands on this side of consummation. It is only the intermediate, not the final state.” Kline, “The First Resurrection,” 371.

Parousia with its concomitant events of resurrection and judgment must then follow these ‘thousand years.’”<sup>23</sup>

This textual conclusion led Kline to discuss the three major millennial options regarding the understanding of the thousand years and the millennium. According to Kline, the premillennial view of Christ’s second advent is excluded since the thousand years are a first age after which the consummative events of resurrection and judgment must follow.

But, just as Kline was not shy in pointing out from a proper exegesis that the premillennial view was excluded, he also did not hesitate in declaring that the postmillennial reading of the thousand years in Revelation 20 would not do either. If the thousand years are a late concluding phrase of the interadvental age and Revelation 20 is the only place where this special kingdom development is mentioned, as postmillennarians hold, then, “it would not seem possible to discover a satisfactory explanation for the almost exclusive focus of this one and only millennial disclosure on the intermediate state.”<sup>24</sup> For postmillennarians to account plausibly for the total concentration of the intermediate state in the Revelation 20 description of the millennium, they would have to justify “the assumption that the features here assigned to it in the intermediate state were at least peculiar to the millennial phase of it. But if the millennium is restricted to a late phase of the church age, such an assumption is quite unacceptable.”<sup>25</sup>

The reason that Kline found the assumption quite unacceptable is that those who live and reign with Christ in Revelation 20:4 are the beheaded faithful. This includes the believers persecuted for the testimony of Jesus with whom John identified himself in his own day.

Kline believed the approach that fit Revelation most faithfully was the amillennial viewpoint, in which earthly developments in the church and the world for the time denoted by the “thousand years” are dealt with throughout the book. The amillennial view also does justice to Revelation’s teaching concerning the Christian dead and the intermediate state that the thousand years of Revelation 20 describes. According to the perspective of the Apocalyptic beatitudes to which Revelation 20:6 belongs, the dead in Christ have participated in the blessedness of the millennial first resurrection. They are those who enjoy the blessedness of royal rest in the intermediate state in their Savior for the voice from heaven in Revelation 14:13 said to John, “Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth.”

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 375.

# Servant Standards

## Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 18–20

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by Alan D. Strange

### Chapter XVIII Moderators

1. In the judicatories of the church there shall be a moderator chosen from among its members as presiding officer so that business may be conducted with order and dispatch.

**Comment:** Sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies elect their own moderators from among their members. We have commented elsewhere about the propriety of such being a minister, but here the only restriction is that moderators should be members of the body in which they are elected as presiding officer. This means that moderators of judicatories may be either ministers or ruling elders. In Presbyterianism, the presiding officer of the respective judicatories is styled “moderator.” The moderator is to insure that the meetings proceed with equity and efficiency or, as the FG puts it, “with order and dispatch.” Meetings are usually conducted in keeping with the current edition of *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* and whatever local by-laws or standing rules have been adopted in addition to that.<sup>1</sup>

2. The moderator is to be considered as possessing, by delegation from the whole body, all authority necessary for the preservation of order, for convening and adjourning the judicatory, and directing its operations according to the rules of the Church. The moderator of the presbytery as provided in Chapter XIV, Section 7, and the moderator of the previous general assembly as provided in Chapter XV, Section 5, of this Form of Government, shall be empowered to convene the judicatory before the ordinary time of meeting.

**Comment:** The moderator of a body presides over it with authority delegated to him by that whole body for the necessary maintenance of order within the body. He does not preside over it then according to his own whims or preferences but, acting in trust for the whole body, preserves decorum on its behalf. This is why even a younger man elected moderator can properly preside, both encouraging and correcting, as needed. He can dare to perform the duties of such an office because, though he may be young or relatively inexperienced, he acts on behalf of the whole body and not simply personally, which is to say, he acts as a moderator entrusted by his fellows to bear this rule. He acts in accordance with his office, in other words, calling meetings to order, overseeing the meetings in accordance with proper church order (both the FG and local standing rules/*Robert’s Rules*

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<sup>1</sup> Alan D. Strange, “How to Run the Session Meeting,” *Ordained Servant*, 22 (2013): 59-64; *Ordained Servant Online*, (2013), [https://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=356](https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=356), addresses not only local, but wider, moderating concerns.

*of Order*). Additionally, moderators of presbyteries and general assemblies can convene those judicatories before the ordinary meeting time as provided in FG chapters 14–15.

3. If the moderator is a member of the body over which he presides, he may vote in all decisions of that body.

**Comment:** Section 1 of this chapter notes that moderators are chosen ordinarily from among the members of the respective judicatories over which they preside. As such, moderators commonly have the right to vote, insofar as they are usually members of the body over which they preside. That moderators commonly have such a right is routinely misunderstood in our circles. Because moderators do not customarily enter debate without leaving the chair (an appropriate parliamentary convention), moderators do not usually exercise their vote in the case where it is not needed to make a difference in the outcome of the vote. Such reservation in voting on the part of the moderator commonly occurs in the voice vote (and any division of the assembly that might follow, as with a standing count). This helps maintain objectivity and the appearance of it on the part of the chair. However, moderators would regularly vote in the case of a secret ballot or a roll call vote, another indication that they do possess such a right.

Moderators in any case can always break a tie (to make the affirmative prevail), and, if they are members of the body over which they are presiding, then they may make the vote a tie (to make the negative prevail). Again, moderators always have the vote when they are a member of the body over which they are presiding, though, when not needed (to make or break a tie), they generally do not express their vote in an attempt to be and to appear to be fair and impartial in their moderatorship.

There are exceptions to this, in the cases in which moderators are not members of the bodies over which they preside. For example, the moderator of the session, if a minister, will be the moderator of the congregational meeting. He does not have a vote in the congregation, so the only vote that he would possess would be to break a tie (if he chose to exercise it, wisdom would suggest that he should let such a tie vote alone and allow it to fail). Another instance of this is when a presbyter not on the session is invited in to moderate a sessional meeting (or a congregational meeting). Such a one, including a ministerial advisor to a congregation without a pastor, could vote to break a tie but not otherwise. This is why this section makes conditional the moderator's right to vote: it extends to all judicatories of which he is a member, whether at the level of the session, presbytery, or general assembly.

## Chapter XIX Clerks

Every judicatory shall choose a clerk from among those who are or those eligible to be its members to serve for such a term as the judicatory may determine. It shall be the duty of the clerk to be accountable for the recording of the transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required; and such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be considered as authentic vouchers of the facts which they declare, in any ecclesiastical judicatory and to every part of the Church.

**Comment:** Sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies shall choose a clerk from those either members of those judicatories or eligible to be such. The term of the clerk is set by the judicatory that he serves. The clerk's duties include all those that the judicatory may

reasonably determine and, in any case, at least those duties herein enumerated, including both receiving and sending all correspondence. The heart of such duties involves an accurate keeping of the minutes (“the recording of the transactions”), including their preservation, and the furnishing of relevant minute extracts when required by those filing judicial appeals, complaints, etc. Only the clerk’s extracts, signed by him, serve as the authentic vouchers of the facts to the whole church of such actions as are described, serving in any ecclesiastical judicatory as true attestations of such.

## **Chapter XX**

### **Ordination and Installation**

1. It being manifest by the Word of God that no man ought to take upon himself the office of deacon, ruling elder, or minister, the Scriptures declare that the church shall set men apart by solemn act for its service.

**Comment:** God gifts men for office as he sees fit. He makes this clear to the men in question by an internal call, in which they desire to serve Christ in his church as deacons, ruling elders, or ministers. This internal call is accompanied by an external call in which the church recognizes the sort of gifts and calling a man possesses, particularly as some tests are made in which such gifts may be made manifest in areas of service associated with each of the offices. Without such an external call, no man may take any office upon himself, but he must wait upon the determination of the church.<sup>2</sup> We do not believe that a person is infallible in thinking that he has an internal call—he may or may not have such a call. Likewise, we do not think that the church is infallible either: it may keep a truly gifted and called man out of office, and thus out of ordained service, to its own hurt, or it may, contrariwise, put in office one who is not truly gifted and called, also to its own detriment.

In any case, it is the visible church, according to the Word, that must make the determination that a man is duly gifted and called and thus fit to be ordained to office. The church, after examining deacons and elders at the sessional level, and ministers at the presbytery level, makes judgment as to whether the candidates for such office are properly qualified. Deacons and ruling elders may be duly ordained only after also receiving the approbation of the congregation. Similarly, ministers are ordained by a call of the congregation and the approbation of the presbytery. The church thus “sets apart” by a solemn act for service men it deems qualified to hold office in the church.

2. Ordination is that act by which men are set apart to the offices of deacon, ruling elder, and minister. It is the church’s solemn approval of and public attestation to a man’s inward call, his gifts, and his calling by the church.

**Comment:** This solemn act of the church “setting apart” certain men deemed fit for office (deacon, ruling elder, and minister) is called “ordination.” In some Reformed churches, and in historic Presbyterianism, only ministers were ordained with the laying on of hands. Ruling elders and deacons were often ordained without the laying on of hands, with deacons often not being ordained but only installed. These days, at least in

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<sup>2</sup> Much has been written on the internal and external calls to the ministry. An older work that is essential here is Robert Lewis Dabney’s “What is a Call to the Ministry,” accessible at [https://gpts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Dabney\\_What-is-a-Call-to-the-Ministry.pdf](https://gpts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Dabney_What-is-a-Call-to-the-Ministry.pdf); a more contemporary treatment of the question may be found in John Sittima, *Called to Preach? Pondering God’s Commission for Your Life* (Dyer, IN: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 2010).

Presbyterianism, all three offices are ordained and installed, installation being in a particular place, and perhaps for a limited time, as is the case with elders and deacons who have term limits for service. Most ordaining bodies invite ministers and elders in ecumenical relations to come forward and lay hands on both of ministers and elders, though some retain the older practice of only ministers laying hands on either, seeing the laying on of hands as ministerial act (like the apostolic salutation and benediction or administering the sacraments).<sup>3</sup> The laying on of hands should take place only at the ordination of church officers.

Ordination, as the section notes, is the church's solemn approval of and attestation to a man's sense of inward call. It acknowledges the authority of leadership within the biblically defined limits of each office. Ordination is not the bestowment of gifts; only God gives gifts: ordination is the recognition and affirmation that God has given such gifts to a particular man that an ordaining body sets aside for service as a minister, elder, or deacon. It is not enough, as noted above, for a man to have an inward call. Such is always necessary, to be sure, but it is not sufficient, more is needed (though never less). And the more that is needed is for the church outwardly to affirm what the man claims inwardly, particularly as the church puts to the test and examines both the requisite graces (character qualities) of the man, such as we find in 1 Timothy 3:1–13, and the gifts necessary for the particular office, whether it be minister, elder, or deacon. It is not enough for a man to believe himself called; the church must concur in this opinion. As noted above, the church is not infallible and may think a called man not called or a not called man called, all to its detriment.

3. The church shall invest him with the office only when satisfied as to his gifts and only in response to a call to do work appropriate to that office. In the case of deacons and ruling elders their service shall be in the church. In the case of ministers their service normally shall be in the church, though in unusual circumstances it may be, if approved by the presbytery, in nonecclesiastical religious organizations.

**Comment:** This first sentence reflects what is true, especially the second part (“only in response to a call”), about ministers. A man may be seminary trained and may have clear gifts for ministry, yet he is ordained and becomes a minister only in response to a call, most commonly to a pastorate in a particular local church or mission work. The call could come to him also from the presbytery, for instance, to be a teacher or an evangelist, perhaps to teach Bible or allied subjects in a school, college, or seminary. In any case, only if a proper body extends an initial call does a man get ordained and enter into the gospel ministry in some field of service appropriate to ministers. The last sentence in this section of the FG indicates that a man may have an initial appointment to serve outside the church (as a teacher in a seminary, e.g.), though most commonly a man has a call to serve in the church, particularly as a pastor, either sole or senior, or in some sort of particular role (e.g., pastor of congregational life or teacher of the congregation) in a larger church.

Elders and deacons, contrariwise, are customarily certified, elected, and ordained/installed in the local congregation where their service will be employed. In more recent years, these lay office-bearers have begun to serve in capacities outside the local

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<sup>3</sup> James Bannerman, *Church of Christ* (1869; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 493–507. See also, particularly for the theology of the imposition of hands and of its restriction to ministers, the unpublished paper by Clowney, “Answer to the Complaint in the Presbytery of New Jersey (OPC) in re the Laying on of Hands at the Ordination of Ministers.”

church, and I do not refer to such service as elders have in the higher judicatories or that deacons may have on presbytery or assembly diaconal and like committees. I refer rather to medical doctors who may be elders or deacons or deacons who may be engineers or builders and who engage both in those offices and in their lay callings on the mission field, either foreign or domestic. These are newer and exciting ways that these officers may serve as associates to the ministers that are missionaries, particularly in the effort to bring a full-orbed Word and deed ministry not only in the local church but also in other fields of ecclesiastical or extra-ecclesiastical service.

4. The ordaining body, before investing a man with office, shall provide, or assure itself that he has received, such training and testing of gifts as may be necessary for the proper performance of the duties required by the office.

**Comment:** The ordaining body, whether the session in ordaining elders and deacons or the presbytery in ordaining ministers, should make sure that candidates for all offices should be duly trained and tested. In the case of a minister, this is why a candidate for the ministry comes under “the care of the presbytery,” often in his first year of seminary (or just before), continuing on through the period of testing before licensure. Licensure makes one a “probationer,” to use the older language, and implies a period in which the licentiate further trains and receives ecclesiastical assessment. At the end of this period, the presbytery receives testimonials affirming ministerial readiness and fitness to receive and accept a call. All of this is described in some detail for the minister in FG 21–23.

For elders and deacons, training for such offices should occur at the local level, often under the direction of someone in pastoral office. After a degree of training, assessment occurs with a view to certifying the elder or deacon candidate as someone qualified to be put before the congregation for election to office, after which ordination and installation occurs (described in further detail in FG 25). Many churches prefer to do something like more general leadership training among the men, out of which suitable candidates for church office often emerge. Then, for those nominated to be elder or deacon, always with the approbation of the session, more specific elder and deacon training can occur. Many pastors have come, rightly, I believe, to regard officer training as one of their more important tasks, along with preaching/teaching, leading worship (including sacramental administration), and personal ministry.

5. Ordination shall be performed by the body which examines the candidate. In the case of deacons and ruling elders it shall be by the session, except that when a congregation is without a session the presbytery shall ordain such officers as have been elected by the congregation and approved by the presbytery. In the case of ministers ordination shall be by the presbytery.

**Comment:** The power of ordination is coterminous, ordinarily, with the body that has jurisdiction over the one being ordained and that has conducted his examination for office. This means that an elder or deacon is ordained by the session and that a minister is ordained by the presbytery. When a congregation does not have its own session (perhaps being a mission work or not having local elders to make up a session), the examination and approval of such an elder or deacon is carried out by such officers (usually in that presbytery) as the congregation has elected and the presbytery approved.

6. Installation is the act by which a person who has been chosen to perform official work in the church, having been ordained, is placed in position to do that work. When a man receives his first call to a service his ordination and installation shall be performed at the same time.

**Comment:** Installation always occurs simultaneous with ordination, though the latter only occurs once (unless a man out of office altogether comes back into office). When a man is first called to any of the offices, he enjoys both ordination and installation in the service dedicated to such. In a congregation that has elder/deacon three-year term limits, every time the elder or deacon is re-elected he is to be installed. If an elder/deacon moves to another church and is elected to service in that congregation, he must be installed there. A minister is installed in all calls to service subsequent to his ordination.

7. The installation of deacons and ruling elders shall be performed by the session except as provided in Section 5, above. The installation of ministers shall be in the charge of the presbytery.

**Comment:** Installation of ruling elders and deacons is performed by the session of the church that has elected them to service, whether following ordination or subsequent installations. The exception to this rule, installation in a church without an active session, is accomplished as is ordination in such a church, see section 5, above. Installation of ministers is in the province of the presbytery from whomever a call to a minister comes (from a local church, in or out of the OPC; from the presbytery; from the Committee on Foreign Missions, etc.).

8. When an officer, by reason of advanced age or disability, retires or is retired from a position and is no longer engaged in a service that requires a call in terms of Chapters XXIII or XXV of this Form of Government, the body calling him to that service in which he was last engaged before his retirement may, in recognition of his long and/or meritorious service, designate him "emeritus" with the title of his previous service.

**Comment:** When a minister, elder, or deacon retires or is retired (by reason of advanced age or disability), the body of his last installation (if an elder or deacon) or of his last call (if a minister), in recognition of his long and/or meritorious service, may designate him as "emeritus." This designation follows the title of his previous service, so a session would designate such a deacon as "deacon emeritus" or a minister as "pastor emeritus." Emeritus means "honorably retired" and generally means that the one thus designated is due whatever privileges the body thus honoring him chooses to accord. Some sessions, e.g., give emeritus elders or pastors the right but not the responsibility to come to session meetings. Some call on the emeritus officers for consultation on big decisions. Others have this as just an honorary title, meaning that it affords no special privileges other than an added measure of respect as the former pastor (or the like).

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# ServantReading

## Medical Technology: A Blessing Not to Be Idolized

A Review Article

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by William Davis

*Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, by Gilbert Meilaender. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020, 176 pages, \$18.92.

Bioethics is concerned with at least three different kinds of questions. All three kinds of questions have become more difficult to answer with rapid advances in medical technology over the last six decades. To see the differences between these kinds of questions, consider a married couple who is struggling to get pregnant. Sixty years ago, In Vitro Fertilization was not an option. It was not possible to test embryos for genetic abnormalities. No one was growing “eternal” stem cell lines from aborted fetuses to enhance medical research. One kind of bioethical question would focus on the choices available to the couple seeking to conceive and carry a child to term. For Christians, these questions would revolve around identifying the biblically permissible ways to pursue having children and acknowledging their biblical obligations to protect every life that resulted from their efforts. Another kind of question raised by this couple’s situation would focus on the public policies that best protect the interests of the couple and others involved with infertility: parents, babies, health care providers, and researchers. A third kind of question would ask what kind of people the parents should have become in order to handle the crisis of infertility when it arose. This kind of question properly goes beyond the couple to their parents (eager to have a grandchild) and their church community (in all the ways they support and set expectations on the couple). These questions are clearly different. Someone helping an infertile couple make choices about reproductive technology options should not insist that the couple spend years growing in patience, self-control, and dependence before helping them. The questions about public policy do not matter to the couple in the midst of their crisis. Public policy impacts the kind of people we become, but it is only one influence among many.

Gilbert Meilaender’s *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* is an outstanding guide to the third kind of question: what kind of people should we become in order to deal faithfully with the possibilities offered by advancing medical technology? The positions Meilaender takes on public policy questions are sound, but the book does not provide detailed reasons for these positions that would help a Christian in a debate with someone who disagreed (nor does Meilaender intend to provide debating points). For questions about how to help people in the midst of a medical crisis—the first kind of question—the book will be frustrating. Because Meilaender is most concerned to help Christians guard

their hearts against idolatry, the fourth edition does not take account of some important changes in the practice of medicine between the first edition in 1996 and 2020. As a result, the book's implicit advice for people in the midst of medical crises may end up wounding the people who need guidance. With this caution in mind, however, the book is an exceptionally important resource for people *not* in the midst of a crisis. Careful attention to Meilaender's work here and his other publications will prepare Christians (and others whom Meilaender invites to "listen in") to have hearts that handle medical crises faithfully when they come.

The central concern of Meilaender's *Primer* is the need for Christians to recognize that the rapid advance of medical technology has the power to tempt us into idolatry. Meilaender's chapter topics are chosen to highlight medical advances that encourage us to alter where we are placing our trust and thus what we are willing to allow. The threats to our hearts posed by expanding medical options for fulfilling the mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" take up chapters two through five ("Procreation versus Reproduction," "Abortion," "Genetic Advance," and "Prenatal Screening"). For Christians *not* in the midst of the crisis of infertility, Meilaender's recommendations are sobering and wise. Legal and efficient "assisted reproduction" options are often reckless with the lives of the unborn. Meilaender rightly insists that Christians cannot set aside protecting every child in pursuit of having a child "of their own." Making an idol of childbearing is wrong, and these technological advances intensify temptation to idolatry. The church needs to be talking about these idols and taking seriously Meilaender's warning that "technology has a momentum all its own" (13).

Chapters six through eleven ("Suicide and Euthanasia," "Refusing Treatment," "Who Decides?," and "Gifts of the Body: Organ Donation," "Gifts of the Body: Human Experimentation," and "Embryos: The Smallest Research Subject") consider the temptations to idolatry near the end of life. Aside from a curiously out-of-date argument against the use of "advance directives" for end-of-life decision-making, the guidance that Meilaender gives in this section is biblically sound and insightful. (The chapter "Who Decides?" is largely unchanged from the first edition in 1996. A lot has changed in the way families are asked to make decisions for loved ones in the hospital since 1996. Although Meilaender correctly supports the use of "Durable Powers of Attorney for Health Care" in all editions of the book, this chapter deserved to be updated lest it cause confusion.) Meilaender's warnings about creeping idolatry in these chapters lead him consistently to ask how the new medical realities threaten our relationships and corrupt our understanding of what it means to be human. For example, the rapid rise of efficient organ transplantation and the push for donor organs threatens to alter our relationship to our own bodies. These developments encourage us to allow organ-seekers to pressure families to "bring some good" out of the death of their loved one, suggesting that their embodied life and death would have no meaning otherwise. Although I believe it is biblically appropriate to be a volunteer organ donor (and am one myself), Meilaender's warnings about this feature of current medical practice are sound.

The final chapter, "Sickness and Health," goes to the heart of the idolatry and how-we-understand-ourselves problem. Modern medicine is prone to see all health challenges as pointless. Drawing on Jesus's answer to his disciples' question about the man born blind (John 9), Meilaender points out that the issue was not who was to blame, but rather how God would use the blindness for his glory. Health is not our chief end. Sickness and

suffering are not pointless. Jesus Christ himself took on flesh like ours—limited, dependent, frail, and ultimately suffering—not only to accomplish our redemption, but also to draw intimately near to us in our sickness and suffering. A crucial part of resisting making an idol of medical advances is rejecting the lie that sickness and suffering are pointless. The goal is to “become people who give thanks for medical progress without worshipping it or placing their trust in it” (123).

Meilaender’s analysis is spiritually rich, making reassuring use of allusions to Scripture. Even so, readers unfamiliar with Lutheran theological ethics may find two aspects of Meilaender’s book puzzling. First, Meilaender uses Scripture to draw attention to the *works* of God, and in particular the incarnate Christ in his life and death on the cross. When Meilaender refers explicitly to Scripture, it is not with a list of passages that support his recommendations. While I prefer seeing many explicit references to Scripture, Meilaender’s approach gives human embodiment attention it deserves. The Lutheran imagination is drawn to Jesus hanging on the cross. From there, it easily sees that Jesus suffered *in his body* and so he knows what it feels like to be limited and sick. Not only did Jesus suffer *for* us, Jesus suffers *with* us.

The second feature of Meilaender’s book that may puzzle non-Lutheran readers is his pushing back against seeing medical advances as “redemptive.” Giving medicine that kind of credit, according to Meilaender, increases the chances that we will make medical advances an end in themselves, and thus objects of worship. Many Calvinists are comfortable with seeing everything that pushes back against the effects of the fall as part of Christ’s cosmic work of redemption, and thus as foretastes of Christ’s consummate kingdom. Although I am comfortable thinking of medicine as “redemptive,” Meilaender’s warning is worthy of careful consideration. Triumphalism in the guise of “redemptive activity pushing back against the fall” may owe more to Enlightenment confidence than it does to Scripture.

The fourth edition of Meilaender’s *Bioethics: A Primer* is most valuable for its persistent attention to the impact that our frequent encounters with medicine can have on our hearts. Meilaender is a clear and compelling writer, making profound spiritual questions easy to understand. Ministers of the Word and everyone involved in church education should give this book sustained, careful attention. A year of COVID-19 has made the role of medicine in our lives unavoidable. Thoughtful efforts to preach and to teach in ways that nurture biblical attitudes about health, sickness, parenting, suffering, and death will bless the church in ways that will pay dividends for years. Meilaender’s book is a good first place to look for help with that task.

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# ServantReading

## Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry by *Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson*

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by Ryan M. McGraw

*Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in the Ministry*, by Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson. Phillipsburg, NJ: 2020, 177 pages, paper, \$15.99.

Few people enjoy receiving criticism, and most avoid critical people. Yet regular criticism, whether well-intended or not, is a standard fixture of the Christian ministry. To be fair, this is endemic to any public position, especially those speaking publicly like pastors, politicians, and teachers. Receiving criticism is unavoidable in Christian ministry, it is an inevitable reason why many leave the pastorate, and it is indispensable for humble growth in Christ. Joel Beeke, with the help of Nick Thompson, provides pastors with biblical wisdom and sanctified common sense for addressing criticism in the Christian life. This book is not only for pastors, but for everyone, since malicious critics need repentance and friendly critics need encouragement and instruction in how to help build up their ministers.

Building on biblical Christ-centered foundations, most of this work expounds both destructive and constructive criticism. By lifting our gaze to the fact that the pages of Scripture record a plethora of criticisms against God and Christ, the authors place enduring criticism on an unshakable foundation. Believers endure criticism best, especially when marked by ill intent, when they keep their eyes on Christ and fellowship with him in his afflictions. Even destructive criticism can have positive effects in our lives. This hinges on whether we learn to respond to criticism in a mature biblical manner and do not merely dismiss criticism because of its source. Some criticism is simply rude, vindictive, and personal. Unfortunately, our “enemies” may be more willing to confront us with our faults than our friends will be to risk hurting our feelings. Beeke and Thompson give us the tools we need, replete with examples, to retain what is good and reject what is bad when this happens. Perhaps even better, and more off the beaten path, they encourage people and elders how to give pastors constructive criticism well and regularly, and elders how to give constructive criticism to congregations at least once a year. The advantage of both practices, if done well, is that it precludes allowing criticism to devolve into destructive criticism alone. Proactive criticism among loving friends is better than reactive criticism by upset people, whether valid or not. An appendix concludes the book by helping seminary students build godly habits that will enable them to receive criticism well in the ministry by developing godly interpersonal relationships now.

There is one elephant in the room worth noting in passing. Joel Beeke is a seasoned minister who has endured lots of criticism, while Nick Thompson is a recent seminary graduate. Why co-author a book requiring years of pastoral experience with someone who has almost none? Without detracting from the valuable content of the book, this combination of authorship will doubtless strike most readers as strange. The end product, however, is no less outstanding.

*Pastors and their Critics* is solid, wise, and necessary. Criticism is good for the soul, but only if that soul learns to respond to it humbly and wisely. We will never lose by taking criticism seriously, even when it is mostly wrong, if we are secure in Christ and learn not to despair. This is an uncommon and pleasant book on a common and painful aspect of the ministry. Whether you are a pastor or you have criticized one, which should cover most of us, this book is for you.

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# Servant Poetry

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## Ars Poetica—A Medley

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### There is no Frigate like a Book (1286)

By Emily Dickinson (1830–86)

There is no Frigate like a Book  
To take us Lands away  
Nor any Coursers like a Page  
Of prancing Poetry –  
This Traverse may the poorest take  
Without oppress of Toll –  
How frugal is the Chariot  
That bears the Human Soul –

\* \* \*

### from An Essay on Criticism

By Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

Some to conceit alone their taste confine,  
And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;  
Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;  
One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.  
Poets, like painters, thus, unskill'd to trace  
The naked nature and the living grace,  
With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,  
And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd,  
Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.  
As shades more sweetly recommend the light,  
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.  
For works may have more wit than does 'em good,  
As bodies perish through excess of blood.

\* \* \*

## On Writing Poetry

By C. J. Heck (1949-)

A friend once asked why I write poetry.  
Judging by the pinched look on her face,  
she might as well have asked why I juggle snakes.

In thinking on the matter,  
it's like having a sneeze that won't come.  
When it finally does, it just feels good.  
A poet understands...

To my friend, I simply said  
there are things inside that must come out.  
They are uncomfortable where they are,  
like having a mosquito bite that you can't quite reach.  
When you find someone to scratch it,  
it just feels good.

Oops, gotta go.  
I feel a poetic sneeze coming on  
and it's gonna feel  
so good.

\* \* \*

## Poetry

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

GOD to his untaught children sent

Law, order, knowledge, art, from high,  
And ev'ry heav'nly favour lent,

The world's hard lot to qualify.  
They knew not how they should behave,

For all from Heav'n stark-naked came;  
But Poetry their garments gave,

And then not one had cause for shame.

\* \* \*

## The Spirit of Poetry

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82)

There is a quiet spirit in these woods,  
That dwells where'er the gentle south-wind blows;  
Where, underneath the white-thorn, in the glade,  
The wild flowers bloom, or, kissing the soft air,  
The leaves above their sunny palms outspread.  
With what a tender and impassioned voice  
It fills the nice and delicate ear of thought,  
When the fast ushering star of morning comes  
O'er-riding the gray hills with golden scarf;

Or when the cowed and dusky-sandalled Eve,  
In mourning weeds, from out the western gate,  
Departs with silent pace! That spirit moves  
In the green valley, where the silver brook,  
From its full laver, pours the white cascade;  
And, babbling low amid the tangled woods,  
Slips down through moss-grown stones with endless laughter.  
And frequent, on the everlasting hills,  
Its feet go forth, when it doth wrap itself  
In all the dark embroidery of the storm,  
And shouts the stern, strong wind. And here, amid  
The silent majesty of these deep woods,  
Its presence shall uplift thy thoughts from earth,  
As to the sunshine and the pure, bright air  
Their tops the green trees lift. Hence gifted bards  
Have ever loved the calm and quiet shades.  
For them there was an eloquent voice in all  
The sylvan pomp of woods, the golden sun,  
The flowers, the leaves, the river on its way,  
Blue skies, and silver clouds, and gentle winds,  
The swelling upland, where the sidelong sun  
Aslant the wooded slope, at evening, goes,  
Groves, through whose broken roof the sky looks in,  
Mountain, and shattered cliff, and sunny vale,  
The distant lake, fountains, and mighty trees,  
In many a lazy syllable, repeating  
Their old poetic legends to the wind.

And this is the sweet spirit, that doth fill  
The world; and, in these wayward days of youth,  
My busy fancy oft embodies it,  
As a bright image of the light and beauty  
That dwell in nature; of the heavenly forms

We worship in our dreams, and the soft hues  
That stain the wild bird's wing, and flush the clouds  
When the sun sets. Within her tender eye  
The heaven of April, with its changing light,  
And when it wears the blue of May, is hung,  
And on her lip the rich, red rose. Her hair  
Is like the summer tresses of the trees,  
When twilight makes them brown, and on her cheek  
Blushes the richness of an autumn sky,  
With ever-shifting beauty. Then her breath,  
It is so like the gentle air of Spring,  
As, front the morning's dewy flowers, it comes  
Full of their fragrance, that it is a joy  
To have it round us, and her silver voice  
Is the rich music of a summer bird,  
Heard in the still night, with its passionate cadence.

\* \* \*

## Ars Poetica

By Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982)

A poem should be palpable and mute  
As a globed fruit,

Dumb  
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone  
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless  
As the flight of birds.

\*

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases  
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,  
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs.

\*

A poem should be equal to:  
Not true.

For all the history of grief  
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love  
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean  
But be.

\* \* \*

## Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,  
    So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

\* \* \*

## Ars Poetica

Mark Green (1957–)

*“A poem is never finished, only abandoned.” Paul Valery*

You smell the sea; you stagger out, pursuing  
Rudderless, but with ideas brewing  
Posing like a ship that's sailing by  
The muse calls out and pleads for you to try

To capture perfect vagueness for display  
At your command. Instead, she slips away  
This ideal ketch, coquettish, teasing, teasing  
Yet you pursue, dreaming of your seizing

That craft, Your perfect poem—*what might have been*—  
With quest abandoned, sails away again.

\* \* \*

## The Poem's Way

Gregory Edward Reynolds (1949–)

The poem's way has sprung with symmetry  
From concentrated, well-spent words,  
As Horace in the art of poetry  
Has said, with beauty like the flight of birds.

Then, enumerated Archibald MacLeish

How poetry should be, not mean—  
The music of the words unleash  
As if wordless and unseen.

“Unleash what?” you ask, and I  
Say, the sound of sense that  
Reverberates in every line to lie,  
Making music that is fat

With movement in your soul  
To make you think again about  
The things you see and roll  
Them over in your mind with doubt

That you have seen them well,  
For now they make you sing  
The words of the poet’s spell;  
Now you are truly on the wing.

The muse’s lyre works magic  
In your mind as you contemplate  
The enchanted spirit of its lyric  
Rhythms makes you meditate.