

# After the Election

A scenic landscape photograph of a river flowing through a forest. The foreground is dominated by large, dark grey rocks partially submerged in the water. The river flows from the background towards the foreground, reflecting the sky and the surrounding trees. The forest is dense with tall evergreen trees and deciduous trees showing vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and red. In the distance, a range of blue mountains is visible under a clear sky.

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# *Ordained Servant Online*

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### **CURRENT ISSUE: AFTER THE ELECTION**

**November 2022**

### *From the Editor*

For many years since the Reagan presidency Christians have tended to put too much trust and hope into federal elections. Ever since the evangelicals were awakened from their fundamentalist political slumbers, politics has taken center stage. Scott Meadows properly places the kingdom of God on center stage in his article “After the Election.” This will be well worth reading next Monday and Wednesday, before and after the election.

Alan Strange continues his commentary on our Book of Discipline chapters 1–2, part 2. Our book seeks to maintain a fine balance between saying too much, as a book of casuistry, and saying too little. Some ambiguities are purposeful, and others need fleshing out. In either instance each case must be considered on its own merits by our judicatories. Strange is helping us and future generations to do just this better.

Andrew Miller’s review article “The Trinity’s Biblical Foundation” looks at the value of Scott Swain’s *The Trinity and the Bible*. In a brief but densely packed book Swain emphasizes not only the central importance of the doctrine of the Trinity but also demonstrates how this doctrine was exegeted from the text of Scripture.

William Edgar reviews *After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* by Michael Ward. This is a detailed scholarly gloss on the text of Lewis’s famous book. One of the most memorable quotes from Lewis’s critique of the secular English school system is:

In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.<sup>1</sup>

T. David Gordon’s review article “Avoiding the Tyranny of the Attention Racket” reviews *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place* by Felicia Wu Song. He asserts that this book is the best book on this topic of the over one hundred that he has read. As a sociologist Song is most helpful in analyzing the nature and dangers of the electronic environment and in offering cogent and thoughtful alternatives. She offers the church as a “counter liturgy,” specifying in Christian terms what McLuhan called a counter environment.

My poem “Efficiency” looks at the dangers of making a god out of efficiency—one of the main gods in the pantheon of modernity.

Blessings in the Lamb,

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 16.

Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

# ServantLiving

## After the Election

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by D. Scott Meadows

The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is approaching with another national midterm election. Many exaggerate its importance—pundits to boost ratings, politicians to secure votes. In this article<sup>1</sup> I do not endorse any candidate or party. I would rather proclaim God’s Word for your upbuilding and encouragement and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).

Please consider some biblical truths to apply, especially, *after the election*, however it turns out. Whatever the outcome, beware of being too positive or too negative. If you like the results, you may be tempted to think they will solve our nation’s problems. They will not. On the other hand, if you are sorely disappointed, do not yield to a toxic mix of panic, depression, and despair. All is not lost.

What should Christians remember after the election? It will help us all to remember three truths: 1) The Lord Jesus Christ still reigns, 2) The government is still ordained by God, 3) The church is still triumphing in Christ. Let us reflect upon them one at a time.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ Still Reigns (Acts 2:36; Ps. 2:1–4)**

First, the Lord Jesus Christ still reigns. Jesus of Nazareth, once crucified and risen from the dead, has been exalted to heaven’s throne and to the office of Lord and Christ by the absolutely almighty and sovereign God. Jesus Christ is, objectively and eternally, King of kings and Lord of lords, and no wicked powers of earth or hell can change that.

The apostle Peter stressed this in his sermon to the unbelieving Jews on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:36. His dramatic, climactic thesis statement at the end of the sermon is this: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” This is not an exhortation for people to do anything but an announcement about what God has already done. When Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel . . . know,” he is not asking their consent to know. This is just a prefatory comment to what they are about to know, because Peter is about to tell them.

Of course, Scripture affirms that Jesus, even before he completed his mission on earth, was the Son of God, the Christ, and the Lord of lords, but his triumph and glorification took a giant leap forward when he had made atonement for our sins on the cross by dying in our place. His resurrection from the grave, his appearances as the living Savior to his disciples, his ascension to heaven, and his present session there at the Father’s right hand—all these are aspects of his triumph over the powers of hell. Christ’s eternal glorification as the conquering Savior began long ago and is well underway.

Beloved, after the election all of this is still true and real. No politicians or electorate can dethrone the Lord Jesus Christ. “Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished” (Prov. 11:21). God even mocks their ridiculous attempts, as Psalm 2 testifies:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally a sermon preached by Pastor Meadows several years ago.

themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. (Ps. 2:1–4)

Jesus is Lord today in the USA. Jesus was Lord when the Roman Empire was throwing Christians to the lions in the coliseum, during Muslim expansion in the lead-up to the Crusades, when the Roman Catholic Church was torturing our forefathers in the Spanish Inquisition, and when Hitler was tyrannizing Europe. Jesus will remain Lord whatever efforts might be made by all in this country who oppose our biblical faith.

Jesus is Lord. This is our faith, and our joy, and the basis of our confident expectation for the future. After the election it will be helpful to believe this and call it to mind.

This victorious, effective reign of our Lord Jesus has vast implications for life in this world. Let us consider two of them, first, with respect to civil governments, and second, with respect to the ministry and future of the church.

### **The Government Is Still Ordained by God (Rom. 13:1–7)**

The second vital truth to keep in mind, especially after the election, is this. No matter what happens, the civil government after the election will be the exact one which the Lord Jesus Christ himself has ordained. That has always been the case in human history throughout the world, and it will be until “Kingdom Come,” as they say, when Christ returns from heaven. After the election the government is still ordained by God.

I would not be able to say this so surely except for the fact that Scripture teaches it very clearly. In many passages this truth is assumed and implied, but it becomes explicit most famously in Romans 13.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom. 13:1–7)

Remember by whom this was written and under what circumstances. Paul the apostle wrote it when Nero was the Emperor of the Roman Empire—the infamous Nero, whose very name is synonymous with cruelty and debauchery. And what counsel does Paul give the Christians about their view of this government and their relationship to it? He tells them to view it as ordained by God and to live as good citizens under its authority, being subject to it and paying taxes and giving honor to whomever these things are due. In general, Christians, the beloved children of God, are morally bound to be subject even to the most wicked rulers, honoring them and supporting their government, in as much as they are not asked to deny the faith or affirm anything against God’s law.

In Paul’s argument, once it is established that whatever civil authorities exist are placed there by God and possess divine authority to carry on the functions of civil government, then it

necessarily follows that we Christians must be subject to them, honor them, and pay taxes. Failure in this is to revolt against God himself, Paul says—with Christ’s authority as an apostle, no less. This truth and responsibility will not change after the election.

The third major truth for after the election also follows from the unshakeable sovereign reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it pertains to something much more important than civil government—the church.

### **The Church Is Still Triumphant in Christ (Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 2:14)**

Because Jesus is Lord, after the election the church will still be triumphant in Christ. Defying all hostile powers, Jesus boldly proclaimed, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). We all know that the church Jesus has in mind here is not a building or even an organization but a redeemed people, a spiritual body, the elect of God called out from the kingdom of Satan, delivered from the powers of evil, and given life and liberty in Christ for all eternity.

This proclamation is the cosmic battle-cry of our Warrior-King Jesus Christ and a divine prophecy guaranteeing valiant conquest in his long siege against the enemy. It is very emphatic by the use of positive and negative affirmation. “I will build my church,” the risen Lord says, who has received all power in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18). He first said this 2,000 years ago, and He has been building it ever since. He also said, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” using an idiomatic expression for the powers of death—a symbol of all that is anti-God, miserable, and under a just curse for its evil. The devil and his minions have fervently opposed the spread of the gospel, the salvation of souls, and the glorification of the name of Jesus Christ throughout the world, and all to no avail. Every single one of the persons for whom Christ died either has been saved already or will be in His time, and the host of Jesus’s faithful disciples has already grown beyond all human measure, including individuals “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

From the little band of one hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1, adherents have increased to the point that those who identify as Christians number between two and three billion in our time, far more than any other religion. I would not suggest that all these people are saved. Rather, in a very dramatic way against great opposition, the living, reigning Lord Jesus has been doing battle with the devil and prevailing over him, rescuing from his clutches every single sinner chosen by God from eternity to be saved. Hundreds of millions more people identify as Christians than as Muslims, the second largest religious group. Hindus, secularists, Buddhists, and other religious groups are much, much smaller.

When there were not nearly so many Christians in the world, the apostle Paul in his generation served Christ with good morale and confident hope that the gospel ministry was not in vain. He believed it was accomplishing exactly what Christ intended. That is why Paul could write, “Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Cor. 2:14). Here,

Paul compares the irresistible advance of the gospel, in spite of temporary frustration, to a Roman *triumphus* (“triumph”) in which the victorious general, along with his proud soldiers, used to lead in triumphal procession the wretched prisoners of war who were thus exposed to public ridicule. (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, in loc.)

Nero in Rome might seem impressive as he fumes against the Christians, but God leads his servants in Christ anyway. Our trek is an unstoppable march to victory as the gospel spreads and the well-deserved fame of our Savior becomes more and more widely known. Nero could not do anything to stop it.

Call all this to mind after the election. No matter what, the church is still triumphing in Christ. Many professing Christians seem more concerned about the well-being of the United States than they are about the church, or they think the church's fortunes rise and fall with religious freedom in the USA. That helps account for their obsession with politics and neglect of worship and fellowship and evangelistic witness. They are far too elated and dejected with various political upheavals.

Does Scripture reveal anything about the destiny of the United States of America? In general, it does. As a political entity it is destined for the trash heap of history, if not before Christ returns, when he returns. That great judgment day is described symbolically in Revelation 14:8, "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made *all nations* drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality" (Rev. 14:8) (emphasis mine). We read elsewhere in Revelation that all nations were deceived by her sorceries (18:23), and that includes our beloved nation with all the rest. You see, all that finally matters is that the one holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9), the spiritual Israel which is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it alone, shall be saved. And because Jesus is Lord, it shall.

I sincerely love my country, the United States of America. I have been a patriot from my boyhood, when I had bedroom curtains with themes from the American Revolution. I have held a secret security clearance and performed defense work as an electrical engineer for the US military, and I am glad to have rendered this service. I proudly display an American flag, and I love the national anthem. I know that important issues are at stake in this election. I fully intend to vote, as is my habit even in primaries and local elections. I will not be very happy about certain candidates winning, and I will breathe a sigh of relief if my candidates prevail.

But after the election I will remember that Jesus Christ is Lord, whatever government comes about is ordained by God, and, finally, that the church is continuing in triumph toward an ultimate victory over all our foes. As the hymn writer said so eloquently,

The church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end;  
Though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale,  
Against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.

'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;  
Till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

—Thomas Benson Pollock, 1871, "The Church's One Foundation"

The upcoming election is completely in the hands of God—the God we worship, the God who loves us as his own chosen people, bought by Christ's blood and preserved for his everlasting kingdom. Keep everything in perspective. We are on the winning side already, and our ultimate victory is assured. Let not your heart be troubled. The Lord reigns. He sets up rulers and casts them down at his good pleasure. He is with His church to the end, to defend, guide, sustain, and cherish her for the praise of the glory of his grace, in this age and the age to come. Be comforted and pray that he will show us his mercy. Amen.

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# Servant Standards

## Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 1 & 2, Part 2

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by Alan D. Strange

### Chapter II Jurisdiction

#### B. The Session's Jurisdiction

1. The session of a particular church shall have jurisdiction over all those whose names are on the roll of the church.

**Comment:** A session has jurisdiction over all those whose names are on the roll of that congregation. Most communicants in the OPC are ordinarily on the roll of a local church; some communicants, for several reasons discussed elsewhere, are on the roll of a regional church, of which the presbytery is the governing body. In those cases, the presbytery has jurisdiction over those members as well, of course, as it does the ministers who are members of that presbytery. Presbyteries sometimes assign the oversight of members on the rolls of the regional church to a committee (like the presbytery's Home Missions Committee) or to a local church (with the consent of all). Otherwise, most communicants as members of a local church are under the jurisdiction of their own session, the one governing their church, unless they are before a higher judicatory on appeal or in the special circumstances of BD 3.6 and, in the bringing of charges, arguably place themselves under some other judicatory that may censure them if charges prove not amenable to judicial process.<sup>1</sup>

2. Members shall be received and their names placed on the roll of the church only by order of the session and according to the following provisions:

a. Members may be received by a letter of transfer from another Orthodox Presbyterian church. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception (see the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section C), and at that time he shall become invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which such complaint is made.

b. Members may be received by a letter of transfer from another church of like faith and practice approved by the session. The session may examine the candidate for membership

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Jones, in his BD commentary, argues that a private party bringing a charge can be censured only by his own judicatory and not the judicatory to which he brings the charge, if that judicatory differs from his own judicatory (p. 55). More on this when commenting on BD 3.6.

to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ alone, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section D, and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

c. Members may be received by reaffirmation of faith. Reaffirmation of faith is made by an individual who has previously confessed his faith and united with a church other than a church of like faith and practice, and now desires to become a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The session shall examine the candidate for membership to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ alone, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section E, and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

d. Members may be received by confession of faith. Confession of faith is made by an individual who has not previously been a communicant member of the church, and now desires to become a communicant member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The session shall examine the candidate for membership to assure itself so far as possible that he possesses the knowledge requisite for active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, relies for salvation on the work of Christ, is trusting Christ for salvation, and is determined by the grace of God to lead a Christian life. The session shall acquire jurisdiction over him by virtue of its vote of reception and his public profession of faith before the congregation according to the Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter IV, Section B or F (as the case may require), and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

e. Noncommunicant unbaptized children whose parent(s) are members of the church shall be received by baptism.

f. Noncommunicant baptized members may be received with their parent(s).

**Comment:** These detailed sections (a–f) set forth six circumstances in which members may be received by the local church and have their names placed on the rolls by the sessions of those churches.<sup>2</sup> The first case (a) is transfer from one local OPC to another local OPC. The receiving session assumes jurisdiction, and the person transferred becomes a member of the new church when the session votes to receive the one seeking membership by a letter of transfer. A filed complaint does not stop the transfer, but if the complaint is sustained by the highest appellate judicatory, this action may impact the transfer in some way. Otherwise, all the right and privileges that would be properly part of membership in the new judicatory would not be impaired by the filing of such a complaint. What is

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<sup>2</sup> All these six circumstances should be coordinated with the details proper to each in a service of public worship as set forth in the OPC's *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (DPW), spelled out in DPW 4, "Public Reception of Church Members."

particularly important here is that the receiving session assumes jurisdiction when the one transferring becomes a member of the new church upon the affirmative vote of the receiving session.<sup>3</sup>

The second case (b) involves a letter of transfer from a church that is of like faith and practice. This would certainly extend to the churches who are member churches in NAPARC, for example. In this case, the session acquires jurisdiction over the new member when it votes to receive the transfer and the new member makes a public profession of faith before the congregation. In order to assure itself that the transferee is ready to make such a profession, which is to give expression to his faith in Christ and to take the five (5) vows required for membership in the OPC (see DPW 4.D), the session may conduct an examination of him. This examination is of the same sort conducted when anyone is preparing to make public profession of faith (see DPW 4.B) and seeks to ascertain whether the prospective transferee possesses the knowledge, reliance, trust, and commitment—the four parts listed in DPW 4.A.3—necessary for a credible profession of faith alone in Christ alone. Other matters also pertain here as to the filing of a complaint that were discussed immediately above.

The third case (c) of a session acquiring jurisdiction over a party involves a reaffirmation of faith on the part of the candidate for membership. Such a reaffirmation is in view when the prospect has previously made, in the session's judgment, a credible (evangelical) profession of faith in some other church and was a member thereof and either has no current church membership or is a member of a church that is not of like faith and practice (and thus no transfer of membership by letter would be in view). The session determines whatever preparation and examination is necessary for the reaffirmation of faith, the latter of which consists of the same elements that comprise a credible profession of faith, described above, along with the matters surrounding the filing of any potential complaint.

The fourth case (d) of acquired sessional jurisdiction involves a confession of faith on the part of one who has never done so and has thus not been a part of the church. This would be the path to take not only when one has never been a part of the church but also when one has not made a proper confession, perhaps having done so in a cult or a church deemed apostate by the judicatory. This confession of faith, after preparation and upon examination and affirmation of the five membership questions, consists of the same elements as comprise a profession of faith, detailed above. The session assumes jurisdiction upon the making of such a confession in the presence of the congregation, again taking into account any potential complaint as described above.

The fifth (e) and sixth (f) cases describe the enrollment of non-communicant members. Case e. notes that children who are unbaptized, either due to birth within the bounds of the church or parents recently joining on reaffirmation or confession, may be admitted to the non-communicant membership of the local church upon their baptism. Case f. makes it clear that when parents join a local church and have baptized children that those children

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, in his BD Commentary, helpfully notes about this provision, which may appear cryptic to many current users of the BD: “The rule that a complaint cannot impair a transfer until the complaint is ultimately and finally sustained is a rule derived from the Machen experience (cf. Introduction, above, regarding the immediate ancestor of the OPC BD). A vote to receive a member enjoys the presumption of correctness as a *fait accompli*, and even where irregularity is demonstrable, such does not necessarily imply invalidity of an act. This same principle regarding complaints is repeated elsewhere in this chapter, including the section on Presbyterian jurisdiction” (15).

are to be added to roll of the local church with them as baptized non-communicant members.

3. The names of members shall be removed from the roll of the church only by order of the session and according to the following provisions:

a. Members may be removed by a letter of transfer to another congregation approved by the session. When upon the request of a member the session dismisses him to another congregation, the clerk shall send a letter commending him to its care, and the clerk of the receiving church shall notify the dismissing church of the date of his reception. When notification is received the clerk shall remove his name from the roll and record the fact in its minutes. He shall be considered subject to the jurisdiction of the session which dismissed him until the time when he actually is received by the body to which he has been dismissed.

b. Members may be removed when they desire to be dismissed to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice. If it appears to the session that the spiritual interests of the members will be advanced by their uniting with such a church, it shall grant them certificates of standing, and, upon being informed that they have joined such a church, shall remove their names from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. Members shall be removed from the roll of the local church by ordination as a teaching elder, according to the Form of Government, Chapter VI, Section 4.

d. Members may be removed by erasure according to the following provisions:

(1) When a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; on being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(2) When a member of a particular church, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, unless the session institutes or continues other disciplinary action against him.

(3) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without a certificate of dismission, the session may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(4) When a member cannot be found, the session may, after two years, erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(5) When a member, without adequate reason, persists in attending a church of another denomination in preference to his own, or persistently and over an extended period of time absents himself from the stated services of the church, his name may be erased from the roll according to the following procedures: he shall be earnestly and personally dealt with by the session. If this effort fails, he shall be notified that at a meeting of the session not less than two months later his standing shall be reviewed. The session shall inform him of the time, date, and place of this meeting and invite him to show why his name should not be erased from the roll. If satisfactory reasons are not presented, the session shall erase his name from the roll, record the circumstances in its minutes, and send notification to him.

(6) When a noncommunicant member neglects the ongoing exhortation of the session to profess faith in Christ and rejects the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church, the session may upon prior notification erase his name from the roll.

e. Noncommunicant members may be removed with their parent(s).

f. Members shall be removed at their death. The session shall remove the name of the deceased from the roll and record the fact in its minutes.

g. Members may be removed by excommunication according to this Book of Discipline, Chapter VI, Sections B.5, C.1, and C.2.

**Comment:** This large section is the opposite of the previous: it details how names are removed from jurisdiction of a local session. Note should be taken here that these same circumstances for removal are also treated in terms of erasure, which is an act of discipline without full process (see BD 5.2). The first section (a) describes what happens when a member requests a letter of transfer either to another OPC or to a church of like faith and practice, which is presumably a church that will receive such a transfer, as would the OP congregation. The session sends such a letter to another church upon the request of the member. The member seeking transfer must initiate this action. The member seeking transfer secures such when the session of the receiving church votes to receive him (in the case of another OPC) or when he professes his faith in the presence of the congregation of which he seeks to be a part. The receiving session notifies the sending session of the date of his reception so that the sending session can properly record such in its minutes. Until he is received by the new church he remains under the jurisdiction of the session of the church from which he sought transfer.

The second section (b) sets forth the procedure when a member requests a transfer to a church that the session deems not to be of like faith and practice, but a church nonetheless in which the session believes “that the spiritual interests of the members will be advanced by their uniting with such a church.” This would be some church regarded as gospel-preaching but not a Reformed or Presbyterian church. In such a case the session grants a certificate of standing that the member may produce to the other church, which may or may not desire it. In any case, when the session receives word that membership has been secured in the new church, it shall then remove the name of the member from its roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, thereby relinquishing jurisdiction over the departing member. The third section (c) also notes that when a member on the roll of a local church is ordained as a minister, his name is, upon ordination and installation, to be removed from the roll of that local church (as it will now be placed on the roll of his presbytery).

The fourth section (d) is a large one, detailing a number of different ways that a church may erase a member from its roll (as opposed to giving a transfer or certificate of standing). In the first case, the BD addresses the situation in which someone proposes to realign with a church that the session regards neither as one of like faith and practice nor one calculated to benefit spiritually the one seeking to join. The session can grant a certificate of standing if it deems that, in spite of the cited liabilities, to be an appropriate action. It can also, if it believes the circumstances warrant it, bring a charge against its member (perhaps because they clearly seek to flee the jurisdiction of that church or to become a part of a cult/false church). If the session chooses to grant the certificate of standing, it shall remove the member from its roll and its jurisdiction upon notice that the member has become a part of that other body/church. The session shall record the circumstances in its minutes.

In the second case (under 3.d), when a member of the local church, whether charged with an offense or not, tells the session that he no longer wishes to be a member in the OPC (the meaning of “does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church”), the session shall seek to dissuade him from this position. This might involve things like the pastor, parts of the session, or the whole session imploring him not to leave

and setting forth the reasons for such, including the reminder, that might apply here and elsewhere, that when someone wants his name removed from the roll of the church but does not seek to have it placed elsewhere, that outside the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25.2).

If all the efforts of the session to dissuade said member from leaving the OPC without a clear view to going to any other church fail, then the session shall erase his name from the church's roll and record the circumstances, including all that the session did to dissuade him, in the minutes. The session may, if it believes wisdom dictates, institute or continue other disciplinary actions against the member seeking to withdraw. Note that the citation of "other" disciplinary action would indicate that the erasure of this section constitutes disciplinary action itself (without full process, as BD 5.2 defines and addresses such more fully).

Section (3) addresses what is to happen when the session learns that a member has united with a church of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal from said session: nothing further is ordinarily to be done with the member in such a case since he has already united with another church. The language, it should be noted, is that of "may erase," which leaves the matter in the discretion of the session: there may be cases that it appears wise and necessary for the session to institute judicial process; otherwise, the session should erase the member and record the circumstances in its minutes. Section (4) describes what is to be done in the case of a member who has disappeared, as it were (a variety of circumstances are imaginable here), and whose presence cannot be ascertained after two years of his last sighting and/or church attendance. He may, after that amount of time, be erased from the roll and the circumstances recorded in the minutes.

Section (5) addresses the erasure of a member persistently (more than a time or two) attending a church of another denomination in preference to his own or persistently (again, multiple times) and over an "extended period of time" (one would think months) absenting himself from the stated services of the church, presumably from the Sunday worship service(s). Note that such absence must be "without adequate reason," meaning that anyone thus absent may claim to have a sufficient reason, which the session will have to assess as to its adequacy and should be, as a session is always bound to be, charitable in doing so (perhaps the reason is alleged illness, necessary distance, etc.). If the session determines that the member is, nonetheless, culpably absent, then it may erase the name of the member consonant with the way this section sets forth, namely, the session is to give the absent party opportunity to provide satisfactory reasons for his absence, and if such are not given the session may erase his name.

First, the member shall be earnestly and personally dealt with by the session. This means that the session should not approach these cases perfunctorily or as if it is merely a *fait accompli*, a "done deal." Rather, the session should seek, through the pastor(s), individual elders or groups of elders, and/or the whole session itself, to engage the party in view and to seek to win him back, to dissuade him from leaving that local church (or the church more broadly). Failing such effort(s), the session shall notify the party in question that his case will be assessed ("his standing shall be reviewed") at a meeting of the session that is at least two months away. It may be more, of course, but it cannot be less than two months in the future. This gives additional time for personal appeals and the party perhaps to rethink his position.

The session should make it clear, giving the precise time, date, and place of the meeting, that at the duly appointed session meeting he is invited to appear and to give reason(s) as to why his name should not be erased from the roll. If the appointed time arrives and the party in question neither appears nor gives adequate reasons, the session may then proceed to erase his name from the roll. The session shall record the circumstances of all these matters in its minutes, which is to say, the session should document its record of dealings with the party. It shall notify him of such proceedings, and, again, note, as appropriate, that there is ordinarily no salvation outside of the visible church, urging him to return and/or otherwise to associate himself with the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Section (6) describes the circumstance in which a noncommunicant member simply remains in that status and fails or refuses to profess his faith in Christ. This is something requiring care and discernment, but pastors and sessions should exhort and encourage the baptized covenant youth to profess his faith in Christ, especially as he enters his teen years. Many do it in the high school years, commonly before graduation from high school or at least by the age of eighteen or nineteen. There is a good deal of debate among us over age appropriateness for this, and I will leave the discussion of such to others and another time.

Note that this section addresses not only the neglect of professing faith on the part of the noncommunicant member but also “rejecting the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church.” This could apply in the case of someone under 18 or 21 (common ages for sessions to regard as a “time by which” profession of faith should be made by noncommunicants) who is in open rebellion/rejection against due authority in the home and/or church. Whatever the cause for a noncommunicant failing to profess his faith in due time, the session may, in the exercise of its judgment, having previously notified the recalcitrant or rebellious noncommunicant, erase his name from the roll of the church.

Returning to broader considerations, section e. notes that noncommunicant members may be removed from the roll of the church with their parents. A variety of circumstances have been discussed under which the names of communicants may be erased from the roll of the church. In those cases, the names of their children who are noncommunicants need not be dealt with separately (they would if communicants) but may be removed at the time of the removal of their parents. Two more instances conclude the circumstances under which the name of someone may be removed from the roll of the church: advancement to the church triumphant by death (section f) or removal from the visible church by the judicial censure of excommunication (section g), the latter being in keeping with the process described in BD 6.B.5, C.1 and C.2.

### **C. The Presbytery's Jurisdiction**

1. Presbytery shall have original jurisdiction over all the members of the regional church not enrolled as members of a local church. The provisions of this chapter, Sections B.2 and B.3, shall apply *mutatis mutandis*.

**Comment:** Now we turn to examine the question of original jurisdiction as it pertains to presbytery, the governing body of the regional church. Presbytery has appellate jurisdiction over all appeals that come to it from the sessions of its member congregations. It has original jurisdiction over all those who are members of the regional church, such as the ministers of that region, as well as those who may be members of the regional church because they are part of a mission work, from a dissolved church, from a church that left

the OPC, etc. Everything in and commented upon in B.2–3, above, with respect to the jurisdiction of the session applies to the jurisdiction of the presbytery, with all the appropriate changes being made (*mutatis mutandis*: “with things changed that should be changed”).

2. The presbytery shall have original jurisdiction over all the teaching elders who are on the roll of the presbytery. The names of teaching elders shall be placed on or removed from the roll of presbytery only by order of the presbytery, and according to the provisions of the Form of Government and this Book of Discipline. If a teaching elder has been dismissed to another presbytery, he shall be considered subject to the jurisdiction of the presbytery which dismissed him until the time when his name is placed on the roll of the presbytery (cf. Form of Government, Chapter XXIII, Section 20) to which he has been dismissed. The receiving body shall acquire jurisdiction over him when his name is placed on the roll of the presbytery (cf. Form of Government, Chapter XXIII, Section 20) and at that time he shall be invested with all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which rights and privileges shall not be impaired by the filing of a complaint, unless and until such complaint shall be sustained by the highest judicatory to which complaint is made.

**Comment:** In particular, all ministers (or teaching elders) in a regional church are on the roll of the presbytery, which shall have and exercise original jurisdiction over all its ministerial members: the names of teaching elders can be placed on or removed from the roll of the presbytery only by order of the presbytery in accordance with the FG and BD. If a teaching elder is dismissed to another presbytery, he remains under the jurisdiction of the dismissing presbytery until the time that his name is entered on the roll of the receiving presbytery (cf. FG 23.20). Accordingly, the receiving presbytery acquires jurisdiction over the entering minister when his name is placed on its roll, at which time he receives all the rights and privileges of membership therein, which a complaint shall not impair, though it may in the case of its being sustained by the highest judicatory to which it is brought (as with the comments under B.2, above, in this chapter).

#### **D. Special Circumstances**

1. If a session shall cease to exist or become so small as to prevent it from working effectively, the presbytery shall provide for an election and ordination of elders from within the congregation; or the presbytery, with the consent of the congregation, may appoint ruling elders or ministers, or both, normally from within the same presbytery to be an acting session or to augment the existing session temporarily.

**Comment:** A session requires at least two members (a minister and ruling elder or two ruling elders) to be functional. If a session goes below two members, or perhaps below some greater number in a larger church, and the presbytery concludes that the session cannot work effectively (discretion is in view here), the presbytery shall provide for an election and ordination of elders within the congregation, if such is practicable and possible. It may well be the case that the local congregation has no such candidates available. In that case, the presbytery may, with the consent of the congregation, appoint ruling elders or ministers, or both, to be either an acting session or to augment the existing session temporarily. Office-bearers appointed as augmentees shall normally be from within the same presbytery, though occasionally, at the boundaries of such, they may come from a neighboring presbytery.

2. If a church ceases to exist, the presbytery of jurisdiction shall secure the records, exercise care over its members, and issue certificates of dismissal to other churches.

**Comment:** A particular church may cease to exist for a variety of reasons. When such occurs, the presbytery of which the congregation has been a part (“the presbytery of jurisdiction”) shall perform several actions: it shall secure the records (sessional minutes, legal documents, correspondence, etc.), exercise care over its members—perhaps assigning it to an agreeable nearby OPC session or a committee of the presbytery—and issue certificates of dismissal to other churches.

3. If a presbytery ceases to exist, the general assembly shall assign each church and minister to some other presbytery.

**Comment:** The same is true for a presbytery. If a presbytery, generally due to having become unworkably small, ceases to exist, the judicatory over it, the general assembly, shall assign each church and minister in the newly dissolved presbytery to some other presbytery.

4. The higher judicatory in each instance shall either conclude any uncompleted case of discipline begun in the lower judicatory, or refer the case to the judicatory to whose care the accused has been committed.

**Comment:** When a local church, for instance, is dissolved, the presbytery shall either conclude any uncompleted cases of discipline begun in the lower judicatory or refer the case to the judicatory to whose care the accused has been committed. In the latter case, the presbytery might retain jurisdiction over, say, those who have come onto the roll of the regional church (from a dissolved church, for example) and might find it necessary to conclude any such disciplinary cases that come from the dissolved church. It might be wise for a presbytery to assign the conclusion of any such cases to a judicial commission acting on behalf of the presbytery. In the case of a dissolved presbytery, disciplinary cases would presumably be ordinarily assigned to the presbytery that assumes the work and membership of the recently dissolved presbytery and not the higher judicatory, the general assembly, which would not conclude such cases sitting as a body. The general assembly, as our BD conceives of it, sits strictly as an appellate judicatory and does not exercise original jurisdiction in any judicial cases.

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# ServantReading

## The Trinity's Biblical Foundation

### A Review Article

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By Andrew J. Miller

*The Trinity and the Bible: On Theological Interpretation*, by Scott R. Swain. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021, 144 pages, \$19.99.

We simply do not think about the Trinity enough. Too many of us do not understand how the doctrine of the Trinity can be practical. Nor do we really understand *how* the Bible reveals the Trinity—some think that only the New Testament features the Trinity! Experience shows that candidates for ministry come to presbytery with a decent understanding of soteriology but a weak doctrine of God. Seminaries have a difficult task in inculcating a rich and orthodox doctrine of God in students over a relatively brief period.

Is it too much to say that we have put the cart before the horse? If we do not understand the Trinity, how can we understand soteriology, the work of the Triune God wherein the Father sends the Son to accomplish a salvation applied by the Holy Spirit? As John Webster writes, “in an important sense there is only one Christian doctrine, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in its inward and outward movements. Whatever other topics are treated derive from the doctrine of God . . .”<sup>1</sup>

It is this spirit that Scott Swain’s *The Trinity and the Bible* comes in service of the church. Swain shows us how the Bible teaches the Trinity, giving a masterclass in how theology and exegesis relate in practice, hence the subtitle *Theological Interpretation*. Just as years ago I marveled at how Calvin’s *Institutes* reasoned from Scripture for the *filioque* (The Spirit proceeding from the Father “and the Son”), Swain’s method left me likewise thinking, “of course, why did I not see that before?” This book explains the *way* in which the Bible teaches what would later be articulated as Nicene orthodoxy.

Brief but powerful, *The Trinity and the Bible* brings together Swain’s previous essays on biblical reasoning and the Trinity (3). After laying out recent approaches to drawing the doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible, Swain reflects on B.B. Warfield’s explanation, then follows this with several chapters wherein he expounds the Trinity from key texts: Mark 12:35–37, Galatians 4:4–7, and Revelation 4–5. Swain’s final chapter gives “Seven Axioms: On the Trinity, the Bible, and Theological Interpretation.”

Swain’s first page thunders with Scripture on the Trinity and practical implications. For example,

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<sup>1</sup> John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 145, cf. 27.

The Bible . . . promises a Triune reward to its faithful readers: “The river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1) is our promised inheritance (Rev 21:6–7). Holy Scripture mandates baptism in God’s Triune name (Matt 28:19), calls us to bless God’s Triune name (Eph. 1:3–14), and blesses us in God’s Triune name: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). The Trinity is the foundation of typological reasoning: God’s agency through Christ and the Spirit connects Israel’s exodus and Christian baptism because in both events both parties ‘drink of one Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:13; see also 10:1–4). And the Trinity is the foundation of moral reasoning: Paul urges the Ephesians to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) because “there is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6). (7–8)

This selection of passages provides a taste of how the Scriptures speak the language of the Trinity. Clearly, as the early church formalized its understanding of the Trinity with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, technical language like *homoousia* was used to express what the Scripture said. Swain suggests theology as a “grammar of the language of Holy Scripture” (15). The Scripture speaks the language of the Trinity, and the church’s doctrine of the Trinity explains the grammar of that language. The development of the doctrine can be compared to children learning about nouns and verbs—it helps them to understand the language they already speak. This protects us from thinking that our theological formulations improve or refine Scripture (16, cf. 98).

While there is much to appreciate from B.B. Warfield, Swain takes issue in his second chapter with Warfield’s rejection of the designations Son and Spirit expressing their relation to the Father (34, 38). Traditionally, God’s “modes of operation outside of himself (*ad extra*) follow God’s ordered modes of subsistence inside himself (*ad intra*)” (37, cf. 52). Yet, Warfield’s doctrine of the Trinity was one of “‘principled non-affirmation’ of the doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit” (40). This was a “not unnatural development within a Princeton theological tradition already characterized by what we might call a ‘tepid affirmation’ of the doctrine” of eternal generation (41). Swain asserts that this even follows a trajectory begun by Calvin, but unnecessary—as Turretin and others recognized, “it is precisely the Son’s *distinct mode of being* as one eternally begotten that accounts for his *being consubstantial* with the Father” (43). Not accounting for these principles emasculates passages like John 5:26, Heb. 1:3, and Col. 1:15–16 that feature the affirmations of both the equality of the Son with the Father and the Father as begetting the Son.

Swain’s third chapter explicates the Trinitarian implications of Mark 12:35–37, where Jesus affirms that God is one and asserts himself as David’s divine Lord. Here Swain shows his work—focusing on the particulars of a biblical text and deriving theological implications. Theological Interpretation not only reminds us of the dance between exegesis and theology, but it also reminds us of the goal of exegesis: exegesis is “the act of loving attention we give to the historical and literary shape of scriptural texts in order to discern the singular identity and activity of the Triune God who presents himself therein” (1, cf. 61). One of the hallmarks of Swain’s idea of theological interpretation is

the belief that God still speaks through his Word and Spirit. “Reading is . . . a living *conversation* between an eloquent Lord and his attentive servants,” Swain writes, “a conversation in which the reader is summoned to hear what the Spirit of Christ *says* to the churches (Rev. 2:7)” (62).

Chapter four covers Galatians 4:4–7, which clearly teaches Trinitarianism: “God sent forth his Son . . . God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Swain’s argument is that

The distinction between God, his Son, and the Spirit of his Son in carrying out God’s redemptive purpose is not a distinction between God and other creaturely agents. It is rather a distinction within God’s monotheistic agency. In other words, God’s singular saving agency is intrinsically threefold. (88)

In the context of Galatians, Paul combats the Judaizers by showing that God saves by his own agency—salvation belongs to the Lord (92; cf. Ps. 3:8; Rom. 8:3). In this text the internal relations between the persons (one who sends and two who are sent) are naturally extended towards our redemption (94).

Our language about the Triune God must recognize God’s utter uniqueness, and Swain’s chapter on Revelation 4–5 argues “When Revelation 4–5 evaluates God’s worth, it does not locate his worth on a larger scale of meaning and value. Revelation 4–5 takes up the ordinary grammar of naming to convey God’s transcendent oneness” (104). “The One who sits on the throne is the transcendent Lord above all” (107). He is “the One who was and is and is to come” (Rev. 4:8), recalling Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 6. This same transcendent God is the Lamb who was slain, yet the persons are also distinguished and both praised: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13). Nor is the Spirit left out: “The Spirit *before* the throne is the Spirit *of* the two who are *on* the throne. The Spirit *before* the throne is the Spirit who proceeds ‘*from* the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (Rev. 22:1)” (114). Clearly, Revelation 4–5 “envisions the worship of one God in three persons,” who alone creates and redeems (117).

Swain’s final chapter, “Seven Axioms,” emphasizes key principles of theological interpretation. In summary, we are utterly dependent on God; knowing the Triune God is the gift of the Triune God.

*The Trinity and the Bible* is one of several solid new books on the Trinity. It helpfully clarifies several important issues. While academic, this book will help most readers cherish how the Bible speaks of the Triune God. It will certainly equip readers to defend the Trinity as biblical. I hope it finds wide readership, to the doxology of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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# After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*, by Michael Ward

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by William Edgar

*After Humanity: A Guide to C. S. Lewis's The Abolition of Man*, by Michael Ward. Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire, 2021, x + 241 pages, \$24.95.

Lewis's cryptic title reflects the reality of a Europe in deep trouble. It was in the midst of war. But it reflects an even deeper concern, the imminent danger of men (and women) "losing their chests." While the specific lens of Lewis's concerns is no doubt literary criticism, there is a far broader application: a growing distrust of both objective and traditional vision.

It is fair to say Michael Ward has devoted much of his scholarly life to the study of C. S. Lewis. Particularly memorable are *The Narnia Code: C.S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens* (Tyndale/Paternoster, 2010) and *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2008). He has now delivered a labor of love, his commentary on Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*.

Some would consider *The Abolition* to be Lewis's most important book. Owen Barfield, Lewis's friend and mentor, declared *The Abolition* to be the best piece of discursive argument Lewis had ever produced. Praise for the work was not universal, but it was abundant.

*The Abolition* was based on a series of lectures delivered in 1943 but only published in 1947. The lectures were presented at the invitation of the University of Durham. The purpose of the *Riddell Memorial Lectures* was to take a subject that explored "the relation between religion and contemporary thought." He delivered them while he was a fully convinced Christian. However, the book hardly mentions his faith, even less any kind of theistic argument. Thus, Lewis's lectures said very little directly about religion itself; yet, they were certainly concerned with religious commitments. The subtitle of the lectures is somewhat misleading: *Reflections on education with special reference to the teaching of English in the upper forms of schools*. Though he does begin with considerations on a particular English textbook, the lectures rapidly become an extended argument against subjectivism in general.

The real title of the book under scrutiny was *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing*, which Lewis diplomatically called *The Green Book*. Its authors were Alexander King and Martin Kelley, but he dubbed them Gaius and Titius, presumably as not to appear *ad hominem*. Indeed, Lewis politely suggested the two did not really know they had entered such deep waters.

On the off chance you are not familiar with *The Abolition*, the premise is fairly simple, though the arguments are deep. Lewis begins by citing what is I. A. Richards's view that when we make statements about reality, we are not saying anything about the way things are, but about our feelings only. Though he obviously respects Richards, as well as fellow logical positivist A. J. Ayer, Lewis vehemently argues against their subjectivism.

To get at this problem of subjectivism, Lewis cites from the *Green Book* the well-known portion in Coleridge where two tourists are gazing at a great waterfall, and the one declares it "sublime" and the other "pretty." Coleridge predictably endorses the first while rejecting the second. Gaius and Titius amazingly tell us the tourists are not saying anything about the waterfall but only about their feelings. Lewis goes to town on this and argues for the rest of the book against this kind of subjectivism.

In a move that is reminiscent of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositional apologetics, Lewis points out that in the search for absolutes the authors destroy the grounds on which they can be

built. As Barfield puts it in his summary of the book: “Lewis contends that if man is nothing more than his freedom to reshape himself, if his nature is merely to be an isolated principle of will, then there can be no *reason* to shape himself after one pattern rather than another” (176). What would Lewis and Barfield say of today’s culture of the autonomous self?

In a move that might prove difficult for Van Tilians (such as I), Lewis spends much of the rest of the lectures defending the universal appeal of *The Tao*. By this he does not mean the technical term from Confucius and Mencius but the general, somewhat vague, idea of natural law. The Tao for Lewis is a way of appealing to universal morality, the kind almost everyone acknowledges when probed deeply enough.

Space prohibits an extended discussion of the meaning of the *Tao* for Lewis. Despite appearances, what it is not is a neutral building block to be followed by theism. That is, it is not a metaphysical construct. If anything, it is a tactic for argument, as my good friend Alfred Poirier suggests. So, for example, in *Mere Christianity* Lewis begins by appealing to the commonly held rules in an argument. When two people disagree, they do not typically say that logic does not matter but that the interlocutor is not keeping to its rules. The point that this is not metaphysical is difficult to make since there is a surface step-by-step progression through theism to the Trinity (100–101).

Let us pause a bit longer on this point. In the only essay I could find in which Van Til directly addresses C. S. Lewis,<sup>1</sup> the Westminster apologist faults him, along with Roman Catholicism, for trusting too much in the moral awareness of fallen man. If this is an ontological statement, then of course neither the Bible nor the Reformed confessions allow for any such kind of meritorious knowledge. Yet surely they recognize our ability to discern right from wrong, if only to run away from it (Rom 1:18–23). Can the apologist appeal to that knowledge? Van Til himself expounds on the *sense of deity* in every person. But he carefully refuses to call it a steppingstone. I think a generous reading of Lewis would come to the same conclusion about his appeal to the *Tao*.

One thing to remember about Lewis is that he was first and foremost a philosopher before becoming an expert in Medieval and Renaissance literature. In the *Abolition*, his philosophical proficiency is fully demonstrated. One finds echoes of his arguments spread throughout both his texts on literature and his fantasies as Ward meticulously demonstrates.

Two features make this a hard book to review. First, Ward claims, and I think mostly successfully, that he does not intend to pronounce any judgments on Lewis’s views. Yet, they are there lurking in the corners. Second, as Ward himself admits, the bulk of his book is a detailed exegesis of *The Abolition*, virtually sentence-by-sentence. It is a microscopic treatment, full of learned quotes from other commentators. Every so often he helps us see the forest from the trees. I have read the book several times and been blessed each time, finding new elements.

The dark title *The Abolition* is further developed by Ward’s title *After Humanity*. While Richards’s views were in the atmosphere, and so were the dangers to objectivity he underscored, it is the post-war era when humanity’s future was at stake. Ward suggests the title may be more positive, deriving from the abolition of slavery in 1833.

This is an important companion to Lewis’s masterpiece. One can learn a great deal from Ward’s astonishing knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “The Theology of C. S. Lewis,” unpublished manuscript in *The Works of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. Eric Sigward, for (LOGOS) Libronix Software, <https://presupp101.wordpress.com/2012/08/23/the-theology-of-c-s-lewis-by-cornelius-van-til>

# Avoiding the Tyranny of the Attention Racket

## A Review Article

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By T. David Gordon

*Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place*, by Felicia Wu Song.  
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021, xii + 216 pages, \$24.00, paper.

In my almost-twenty years of teaching an introductory college course on Media Ecology, among the most delightful aspects of the discipline is how inter-disciplinary it actually is. It is hardly recognized at all in many universities and/or exists only at the graduate level, which has allowed it to avoid and evade being pigeon-holed into either the humanities or STEM and then more so into its own (isolated) department. My most recent syllabus for the course contains a twenty-page bibliography that includes authors from fields as disparate as neuro-biology and theology, English literature and economics, sociology and history, communications studies and psychology. For polymaths, the field is an absolute delight, because the field appears to attract from all fields those who are interested in human behavior and how that behavior is cultivated differently by different media environments or ecologies. One of the “principles” media ecologists discover is that all media change is environmental or total (not additive), that we shape media and they shape us. Its corollary is that all changes in human media create winners and losers.

Felicia Wu Song, a professor of sociology at Westmont College, is well-qualified to write this book. Her professional training in sociology (University of Virginia, previous degrees at Yale and Northwestern) has not only cultivated an interest in human behavior, but it has also refined her ability to evaluate the environments or ecologies that cultivate such human behavior. Additionally, she has two decades of experience teaching on Internet and Society, which I would call “Media Ecology,” especially since her personal biography mentions her indebtedness to Marshall McLuhan, whose *The Medium is the Massage* she “stumbled upon” in 1995.

In addition to her academic competence, Song is widely read in several areas that pertain to this important book, including:

- familiarity with important contemporary or recently deceased observers of American culture, such as Charles Murray, Peter Berger, James Davison Hunter, James K. A. Smith, et al.,
- familiarity with the significant contributors to the field of Media Ecology, such as Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Jacques Ellul, Walter Ong, Sherry Turkle, et al.,
- familiarity with the growing literature sharply critical of the digital industry (of which many were once a part, such as Jaron Lanier, Susan Moeller, Catherine Price, David Greenfield, Matt Richtel, et al.),
- familiarity with significant observers of the human condition, such as Aristotle, Augustine, Pascal, Henry David Thoreau, Hannah Arendt, et al.,

- and familiarity with a broad range of writers about Christian spirituality, such as C. S. Lewis, Carl Rahner, Jürgen Habermas, James H. Cone, Richard Foster, Tish Harrison Warren, et al.

While her obviously broad range of understanding is impressive, more so perhaps is that the book is not at all “academic” in tone; many readers will not even notice how well-read Song is, and the uncluttered, neologism-free nature of her writing style made me doubt momentarily that she was/is a sociologist.

The book is divided into two parts: Part I consists of three chapters describing the present digital situation (and the commercial motivations behind it), and Part II containing a Christian assessment of the situation and how to live Christianly in the situation. Her chapter titles (with their sub-titles) are both engaging and instructive:

## **PART I**

1. Being at Altitude: Understanding the Digital Ecology
2. The Terms of Agreement: What Digital Media Companies Have Known All Along
3. The Industrialization of You and Me: How Social Media Makes Relationships a Business

## **PART II**

4. The Good News
5. Created for Communion, Settling for Connection: A Theological Anthropology
6. Digital Practices as (Secular) Liturgy
7. Reimagining Time and Attention: Soul Formation in a Culture of Productivity
8. Embodied and Embedded: Transforming Sites of Faithful Presence and Sacred Spaces
9. The Church as Counterliturgy: Alternative Futures of Faith Communities

Many chapters are followed by what she calls “The Freedom Project: Experiments in Praxis,” that grew out of her twenty years of teaching, and contain a page or two of thoughtful questions and or suggested experiments for her students, either to aid in understanding how addictive, narcissistic, and totalitarian the digital culture/“liturgy” is or in finding ways of replacing or augmenting digital culture with a more distinctively Christian one. I especially resonated with these, because in my eighteen consecutive years of teaching “Christ and the Media,” I assigned similar “experiments” that I labelled as such, especially things like weekend “fasts” or “sabbaticals” from any digital connections or even two-month fasts from one form of digital entertainment (streaming films, computer games, et al.) and one form of social media (SnapChat, Facebook, Instagram, et al.), with concise reflections on the experiments.

For those who have not yet read the growing critical and/or cautionary literature about the digital culture, the third chapter (“The Industrialization of You and Me”) will be the most informative and the most disturbing. What we once called “The Information Superhighway” does not buy and sell information; it buys and sells our *attention* and competes for it with the aid of neuro-biologists, sociologists, and other experts in human behavior. The industry does not spy on us (extracting information from nearly every touch we make) for the purpose of bribing us; it does not spy on us in order to convict us in a court of law; it spies on us in order to know what digital messages and advertisements would likely cause us to spend money, and then it sells this information to those who desire to have our money. Even when their algorithms “miss,” as it were, and we stoutly resist several links and ads, the industry has still

won, because it normalizes its intrusions into our lives. Even when we decline the offer or resist clicking a link, the industry, for that moment, still has attention that otherwise might have been directed to a book, a symphony, a loved one, or anything else. Even when a friend or family member chooses not to answer the phone, its alarm has disrupted the conversation, even for the several seconds it takes to notice that the call is not emergent, and often the thread of the conversation is lost and cannot be recovered. Every decision about posting a photo to some social media platform consumes some of our time, some of our attention, and some of our intellectual energy, each of which could have been (and would have been) expended otherwise.

In one of the most remarkable examples ever of the emperor's new clothes, many people blithely submit to such monopolizing of our attention, and yet then deny that they have done so. As Song points out, emerging adults spend (on average) one-third of each waking day (five hours) doing something with their smartphones, yet when they are polled about the matter, they routinely report that they were doing substantially less than half of that amount. Students of human addictive behavior call this "denial." They similarly deny that they send, on average, a hundred texts daily and that they check their phones over two thousand times daily.

Some critics of the industry recommend an entire, cold-turkey break from it. Jaron Lanier, who once worked in the industry, at one point thought individuals could control their use of social media and provided advice in his 2010 book *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*. His tone soured more recently (2018), writing *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. Tony Reinke came very close to doing the same in his 2017 volume *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*,<sup>1</sup> in which he said that he had not *yet* discarded his smartphone, but I suspect he did after the book was published. Song's voice is distinctive, possibly unique, in this regard. She recognizes the destructive dimensions of the industry as others have, yet she expresses a little more hope that Christian wisdom, encouraging fellowship, and both formal and informal disciplines, practices, and liturgies may make it possible for individuals, families, and other groups to be more intentional about what and to whom they attend, and how.

It appears that Song's reading not only of the pertinent literature but also reading her students' reflections on their experiments for twenty years has provided her with a distinctive voice about how Christians think about and *manage* the digital industry's environment. She is certainly not optimistic, but she is not fatalistic either; she appears to have a genuine measure of Christian hope that the Holy Spirit may very well assist some of her fellow believers in finding their narrow way in the twenty-first century (especially chapters 7–9). I have read more than a hundred books (and many articles) in the field of Media Ecology over the last few decades, and I am not sure there is a book I would recommend to Christians over this. It would be very well to read this in a group; those who are accustomed to such reading circles/fellowships would be well advised to put this volume on their menu.

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<sup>1</sup> Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (New York: Henry Holt, 2018); Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).

# ServantPoetry

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G. E. Reynolds (1949–)

## Efficiency

The movement of my hand gives rise  
Like Google to access and move  
Something, a rake or a fact, to groove  
Without stopping to surmise.

What have we lost? We need to ask,  
Why is speed better than slow  
Movements of thought's mild glow,  
Inconvenient, but essential to the task?

When my hand reaches for a book  
Instead of surfing through the Internet  
I'm halted to consider and to vet  
And take a first and second look.

Moving fast and breaking things  
Is the way of killing thought  
That Facebook mastered but is not  
The road that wisdom brings.

Efficiency, the foremost modern god,  
Eats meaning as he prowls about  
To cultivate the realms of doubt  
As he administers his surly rod.

The slow food movement is a way  
To meditate on what we eat  
And as we dine, we taste the sweet  
Labors of the farmer's long day.