The Covenant of Works

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From the Editor

"The Covenant of Works in the Theology of Meredith G. Kline" was originally written for a festschrift that was never published. It is here lightly revised in two parts in the hope that it will elucidate the late Meredith G. Kline's profound reflections on the nature of the biblical covenants, especially the importance of distinguishing the covenant of works, in its various biblical manifestations, from the covenant of grace. While not every officer will agree with everything Kline has written on this topic, or my understanding of it, my intention is to add to the conversation, which has been continuing since the Reformation. I would also remind readers that nothing published in our two denominational periodicals is being endorsed by the OPC, as stated in the second paragraph of the "Editorials Policies of *Ordained Servant*":

> *Ordained Servant* publishes articles inculcating biblical Presbyterianism in accord with the constitution of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and helpful articles occasionally from collateral Reformed traditions; however, views expressed by the writers do not necessarily represent the position of *Ordained Servant* or of the Church.

However, we do make every effort to ensure that we publish articles and reviews that are within the bounds of our constitutional standards. Within those bounds there is plenty of room for discussion.

Chapter 16 completes *The Voice of the Good Shepherd.* I explore orality in three areas: 1) the use of manuscripts in preaching, 2) the reading of Scripture in worship, and 3) trusting the power and presence of God in the preaching moment.

Ryan McGraw, in his review article, "Moving Forward by Stepping Back," reviews a popular, engaging, but very imperfect book, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Pre-Modern Exegesis* by Craig A. Carter.

Darryl Hart's review article, "Who Are the Nonverts?" reviews *Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America* by Stephen Bullivant. Bullivant is a theological sociologist who analyses contemporary nonreligiosity. This is a very thought provoking review of an important book.

Shane Lems reviews *Questioning Faith: Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt* by Randy Newman. This book explores ways to communicate the gospel to

unbelievers who would like to know more. Not every unbeliever is virulently opposed to the gospel, but many have questions that they need answered.

Harrison Perkins reviews *The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation* by J. V. Fesko. Charismatics often believe that Reformed, confessional Christians have no interest in the Spirit. Fesko shows that the Reformed have always had a rich and deep biblical understanding of the third person of the Trinity. But unlike the Charismatic theology, our knowledge of the Spirit is tied to the Word, the means of grace, and the attributes of God.

Our poem this issue is "The Uses and Lessons of Plants" by Christopher Campbell, who is a member of Grace OPC, Sewickley, Pennsylvania. He previously lived in North Dakota where he served Bethel OPC (Mandan) as a ruling elder. His daughter is Judith Dinsmore, managing editor of *New Horizons*. His poem is based on the book *In the Garden: An Illustrated Guide to the Plants of the Bible published* by Whitaker House.

Finally, our cover is of a bell on an antique barn at the Eccardt Farm in Washington, New Hampshire, where we own a small camp nearby, Shadowbrook, a place for meditation without electricity or running water. The bell was used before telephones were invented to alert family and workers of meals and other events. Sometimes my digital covers are just pretty pictures I have taken, but occasionally they are related to the theme of the issue. In the covenant of works we are reminded that the law has great value because it reflects the character of God for us as his image. So the bell reflects a necessary discipline, but it cannot make anyone obey its call.

Blessings in the Lamb,

Gregory Edward Reynolds

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- “Clarity on the Covenants.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 15 (2006): 22–27.

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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.

ServantTruth

Pictures of Heaven: The Covenant of Works in the Theology of Meredith G. Kline, Part 1

by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Like his esteemed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary colleague, Professor David F. Wells, Dr. Meredith G. Kline knew where to join the spiritual battle in the modern world. Both men have called us back to our roots in Reformed theology: biblical, historical, and systematic. Even as Wells has chronicled and critiqued the incursions of a virulent secularism into the church, so Kline has perceived the importance of faithful exegesis in the explication of orthodox federal theology as the most powerful bulwark against such infiltration. At the center of that concern is clarity and depth in gospel presentation facilitated by articulation of the classic doctrine of the covenants, especially requiring a clear exposition of the covenant of works, as distinct from the covenant of grace.

It is this aspect of theological anthropology in the theology of Meredith G. Kline that I will adumbrate in this chapter. In surveying Kline's rich exposition of this doctrine, I will seek to locate his views within the historical range of the Reformation and Post-Reformation theological tradition and demonstrate their consistency with the confessional standards of Westminster. In the recognition that this sketch is a small part of the early assessment of Kline's corpus, it is neither definitive nor comprehensive.

Combining the familiar categories of the post-Reformation dogmatics of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms with an exegetically articulated biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), makes Kline's covenant theology, in my opinion, the best recent account of the covenantal structure of the Bible, expressed in terms of the classic Reformed categories and structure. For all his creativity—especially in his descriptive vocabulary—his covenant theology clearly distinguishes works and grace in the various administrations of the single covenant of grace. The centrality of Kline's concern to maintain the purity of grace in the Reformation doctrine of justification is reflected in such articles as "Covenant Theology Under Attack."[1] All the while, in the great tradition of Reformed confessional and

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[1] Meredith G. Kline, "Covenant Theology under Attack," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 15:2 (Feb. 1994): 3–5. The unexpurgated original of this article has only been published on the Internet URL: http://www.upper-register.com/papers/ct_under_attack.html. This was intended as a review of Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). In this article Kline also references his own exegetical article, "Gospel until the Law," *JETS* 34:4 (1991): 433–46, as well as T. David Gordon, "Why Israel Did Not Obtain Torah-Righteousness: A Translation Note on Rom. 9:32," *WTJ* 54:1 (1992): 163–6. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace" *Presbuterion* 9 (1983): 85–92.

theological writing, his dogmatic assertions proved to be the fruit of careful biblical exegesis as a consummate Hebraist. He echoed Wilhelmus à Brakel's contention:

> Acquaintance with this covenant [of works] is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ by his active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect.[2]

Historical theologian Richard Muller has alerted us to the lack of clarity displayed by scholars since the early twentieth century regarding the origin and the theological content of this doctrine. Muller has convincingly demonstrated that two fundamental contentions of these writers are misleading. 1) The term "covenant of works" used by older Reformed theologians indicates a radical priority of law over grace. 2) The term "works" indicates a form of legalism. In both cases, the sources show otherwise as Muller summarizes: the "permanence of the original divine intention to ground fellowship in the nature of God and in the *imago Dei*."[3]

The late systematic theologian John Murray (1898–1975) provides an example of this lack of clarity—although Muller does not mention him—in his exposition of covenant theology, especially the covenant of works.[4] In selfconsciously distancing himself from the historical exegesis and dogmatic conclusions of the older Reformed theologians, Murray appears to have paved the way, or at least opened the door, for the development of the virulent monocovenantalism that has emerged in recent decades.[5] Current theological reflection has noted the impact of Murray's call for "recasting" the doctrine

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[2] Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Logike Latreia, dat is Redelijke Godsdienst in welken de goddelijke Waarheded van het Genade-Verbond worden werklaard* (Dordrecht, 1700), translated as *The Christian's Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout, with a biographical sketch by W. Fieret and an essay on the "Dutch Second Reformation" by Joel Beeke (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992-95), 1:355, in Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus A Brakel," *CTJ* 29 (1994): 76.

[3] Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law," 99.

[4] John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblical-theological Study* (London: Tyndale, 1954); "The Adamic Administration," *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:47-59; "Covenant Theology," *Collected Writings*, 4:216–240; "Law and Grace" *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (London: Tyndale, 1957), 181–201; "Covenant" in J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 264–8. The latter article does not even refer to a prelapsarian covenant.

[5] Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 16, 26, 253–8. See also T. David Gordon's assessment of the influence of Murray's incipient monocovenantalism on Norman Shepherd, Greg Bahnsen, and advocates of the Federal Vision, 257–8. It is interesting that both Murray's and Fuller's covenantal aberrations were forged in opposition to Dispensationalism. Murray was on almost every other theological topic an expositor of sound Reformed orthodoxy, as his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) and *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), among so many other works, demonstrate.

of the covenants and offers an alternative position more in concord with post-Reformation dogmatics and confessions.[6]

Meredith G. Kline has been among the first theologians in the second half of the twentieth century to notice the inherent dangers of an incipient, as well as a developed, monocovenatalism and to argue for a more orthodox, confessional account through the application of Reformed biblical theology. Already in 1983 Kline launched an exegetical inquiry into John Murray's proposed revision of covenant theology, in his article "Of Works and Grace."[7] Then in 1991 he dealt directly with Murray in "Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant,"[8] thus signaling a growing concern with what he called the "Fuller-Shepherd theology," as it took its cue from Murray. Then in 1994 he popularized his concerns in "Covenant Theology Under Attack."[9]

The importance of the covenant of works in Kline's theology evolved throughout his writing and teaching career. While each of his published books represent that development chronologically, his magnum opus, *Kingdom Prologue* (*KP*),[10] stands at the heart of Kline's articulation of the covenant of works because he revised it over the years as he expanded and refined the course that defined his teaching career, "Covenant-Kingdom Foundations," in which he approached Genesis as the prologue to the entire Bible. From this course his biblical theology was spun. It was his stated desire that his federal theology be understood then from *KP* and his final book, *God, Heaven, and Harmagedon* (*GHH*).[11] These two volumes represent his most mature thought on the covenant of works,[12] clarifying his "more obscure and less mature formulations in *By Oath Consigned*."[13]

Early in his career, however, Kline already perceived the importance of an orthodox understanding of the covenants in avoiding practical errors of all kinds. In a 1953 article in *The Presbyterian Guardian,* Kline emphasized how the unique pedagogical and

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[6] "Introduction," Bryan D. Estelle, et. al., eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith*, 13, 15–17; T. David Gordon, "Abraham and Sinai Contrasted in Galatians 3:6-14," 240–1, 252–8.
[7] Meredith G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace," *Presbuterion* 9 (1983): 85–92.
[8] Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel until the Law," *JETS* 34:4 (1991): 433–46.
[9] Cf. f.n. 1 above.
[10] Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000). Readers should be aware that this book has undergone several revisions since its first publication in three parts in 1981, 1983, and 1986. The first one-volume edition appeared in an edited edition in 1993, and the final version in 2000. Earlier editions are often cited in articles prior to this date. The pagination is not the same.
[11] Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).
[12] See the disclaimer from the "Meredith G. Kline Resource" site, URL: http://meredithkline.com/?page_id=37: "Dr. Kline has changed or clarified his views on details of covenant theology found in *By Oath Consigned* (specifically on the questions of grace before the fall and whether there are curses associated with the new covenant). . . . He would rather people read *Kingdom Prologue* and *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* to understand his mature views." Cf. "Law Covenant" WTJ 27 (1964/65): 18, fn. 26. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).
[13] Meredith M. Kline to Richard Belcher, Jr., 27 July 1992, Orthodox Presbyterian Church archive, Willow Grove, PA.

typological nature of the Mosaic theocracy militates against using Israel as a model for the secular state."[14]

1. Defining of the Covenants

Kline was careful to preserve the meaning of God's redemptive activity by defining a biblical divine covenant in non-redemptive terminology to include the creation covenant with Adam in the general definition,

> The evidence from all sides converges to demonstrate that the systematic theologian possesses ample warrant to speak of both promise covenant and, in sharp distinction from that, of law covenant. . . . This definition must correspond in its formal structure to one of the actual types of arrangements historically called "covenant" and at the same time be serviceable as a unifying formula for the totality of divine-human relationship from creation to consummation.[15]

Thus, he defined a covenant more broadly as "an administration of God's lordship, consecrating a people unto himself under the sanctions of divine law. In more general terms it is a sovereign administration of the kingdom of God."[16] He took issue with O. Palmer Robertson's definition, "a covenant is a bond in blood, sovereignly administered,"[17] which had in turn been influenced by Murray's definition, "The covenant is a sovereign dispensation of God's grace. . . . From the beginning of God's disclosures to men in terms of covenant we find a unity of conception which is to the effect that a divine covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and of promise."[18] Defined this way it is understandable that Murray would balk at using the word covenant before the fall. But the temptation to do so emerged in the Fuller-Shepherd theology.

Furthermore, Kline understands the covenant relationship between God and man as essential to the *imago Dei*. It cannot be defined merely in terms of sin and grace.

2. The Nature of the Adamic Covenant

Kline's doctrinal understanding of the Adamic covenant goes far beyond the narrow concerns of covenantal structure. Kline profoundly understood that God can only relate to man made in his image by way of a covenant. For Kline the twin realities of covenant and the *imago Dei* are constitutive of one act of creation. "Man's creation as image of God meant . . . that creating the world was a covenant-making process. There was no original non-covenantal order of mere nature on which the covenant was superimposed."[19] The

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[14] Meredith J. [sic] Kline, "The Relevance of the Theocracy," *The Presbyterian Guardian* 22 (Feb. 16, 1953): 26–7.
[15] Meredith G. Kline, "Law Covenant" *WTJ* 27 (1964/65): 8, 11.
[16] Kline, "Law Covenant," 17. Cf. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 1–7, 59.
[17] O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 4.
[18] Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 19, 30.
[19] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 92–3. Cf. David VanDrunen, "Natural Law and the Works Principle under Adam and Moses," in *The Law Is Not of Faith*, 291–2. Cf. Lee Irons, "Redefining Merit: An Examination of Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology," in Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, eds., *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline* (Greenville, NC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 266.

nature of this primal covenant reveals the essence of biblical anthropology, as well as soteriology and eschatology. This is why the "Covenant of Nature," or "Life," is an appropriate title for this covenant, since the essence of man's nature is always seen in relationship to his Creator. Law defines the character of God and its reflection in the *imago Dei.* Thus,

> law constitutes the ground structure of redemptive covenant administration and thus . . . a definition of covenant as generically law covenant would be applicable over the whole range of history as is necessary in a systematic theology of the covenant. . . . the principle of law is more fundamental than that of promise even in a promise covenant. . . . The difference is rather that redemptive covenant *adds* promise to law."[20]

It is in Christ that law and promise cohere, in whom the eschatological goal of all covenants is realized. German theologian Heinrich Heppe (1820–79) summarizes the Reformed doctrine nicely:

> 1.—As God's creature man possessed nothing but the duty of obedience to God, without being able to raise any claim to enjoy blessed communion with Him. At the same time, as a creature in God's image man was made capable of and appointed to such communion by God Himself, since God wished to ensure this to him by entering into a covenant relation with man. Consequently man as a creature in God's image was created for covenant communion with God.[21]

Heppe's first quoted source after his summary is WCF 7.1:

> The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

So, Kline,

> Our conclusion is, therefore, that Genesis 1–3 teems with evidence of the covenantal character of the kingdom in Eden. We have in fact seen that the covenantal identity of this creation order was given to it with its very existence, particularly in the creation of man, its head, in the image of God. The creational covenant will here be called "The Creator's Covenant of Works with Adam." By continuing the use of the term "works" we preserve an important advantage that the traditional name, "Covenant of Works," has when combined with use of "Covenant of Grace" for redemptive covenant—the advantage of underscoring the fundamental law-gospel contrast. . . . Furthermore, though Adam could not enrich God by adding to his glory, it was

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[20] Kline, "Law Covenant," 11–13.
[21] Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources,* trans. G. T. Thomson, ed. Ernst Bizer (1950; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 281.

> nevertheless precisely the purpose of man's existence to glorify God, which he does when he responds in obedience to the revelation of God's will.[22]

For Kline, the idea of defining covenant in purely redemptive terms undermines not only the grace of the gospel but the eschatological goal of creation and redemption, since for Kline the Edenic "Covenant of Works was eschatological. . . . The change in covenants from Works to Grace does not change the canons of eschatology."[23]

Was There Grace or Merit in the Garden?

In the last three decades of his career, Kline became more dogmatic about the importance of excluding the word "grace" from the definition of the first covenant between God and Adam in Eden. This became evident when he reviewed Fuller's *Gospel and Law* in 1983.[24] While it is clear in the history of doctrine that grace, or similar words such as gratuitous, has been used by Reformed theologians with reference to the original covenant with Adam, Kline believed that care in terminology was the best defense against monocovenatalism and its threat to the grace of the gospel. Thus, he defined grace carefully. "The distinctive meaning of grace in its biblical-theological usage is a divine response of favor and blessing in the face of human violation of obligation."[25] Hence,

> Theologically it is of the greatest importance to recognize that the idea of demerit is an essential element in the definition of grace. In its proper theological sense as the opposite of law-works, grace is more than unmerited favor. That is, divine grace directs itself not merely to the absence of merit but to the presence of demerit. It addresses and overcomes violation of divine commandment.[26]

It should be remembered that those older theologians who have spoken of a gracious element in the Adamic covenant were not proposing a monocovenantal view of grace and works before the fall, but were using "grace" in a non-redemptive way to refer to undeserved favor.[27] Undeserved in this case was not due to sin, but rather to the creator-creature distinction and the utter dependence of the first man on his Creator's favor in all of life. So A. A. Hodge comments on WCF 7.1,

> This covenant is variously styled, from one or other of these several elements. Thus, it is called a "covenant of works," because perfect obedience was its condition, and to distinguish it from the covenant of grace, which rests our salvation on a different basis altogether. It is also called the "covenant of life," because life was promised on

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[22] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 20–1, 111.
[23] Meredith G. Kline, "Intrusion and the Decalogue" *WTJ* 16 (1953/54): 2, 3.
[24] Kline, "Of Works and Grace" 85-92. See fn. 11 above.
[25] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 112.
[26] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 113.
[27] Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:578, shows that Turretin is concerned to protect the Creator-creature distinction enunciated later in WCF 7.1. He refers to God's obligation in the covenant of works as a "gratuitous promise." Cf. "Herman Bavinck on the Covenant of Works," trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. in Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, eds., *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline* (Greenville, NC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 169–85.

> condition of the obedience. It is also called a "legal covenant," because it demanded the literal fulfillment of the claims of the moral law as the condition of God's favour. This covenant was also in its essence a covenant of grace, in that it graciously promised life in the society of God as the free-granted reward of an obedience already unconditionally due. Nevertheless it was a covenant of works and law with respect to its demands and conditions.[28]

Kline, in the tradition of Charles Hodge, enunciates precisely what is at stake in properly defining the covenant of works in terms of the works principle,

> "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). There was a first man Adam and a first covenant of works. And for the redemption of the lost world there is a second and last Adam, the Adam from heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45–49), and another covenant of works. This second covenant was kept, this second man was obedient and his obedience under this covenant of works is the foundation of the gospel order. The redemptive program as well as the original kingdom order in Eden is thus built on the principle of works.[29]

> Appeal is made to the fact that man as a creature is an unprofitable servant even when he has done all that has been required of him in the stewardship of God's gifts. Or, stating it from the reverse side, man cannot possibly add to the riches of his Lord's glory for God is eternally all-glorious; everything belongs to the Creator. Hence, the conclusion is drawn that in the covenant relationship we must reckon everywhere with the presence of a principle of "grace" and, therefore, we may never speak of meritorious works. The rhetoric of this argument has gone to the extreme of asserting that to entertain the idea that the obedience of man (even sinless man) might serve as the meritorious ground for receiving the promised kingdom blessings is to be guilty of devilish pride, of sin at its diabolical worst. With respect to the over-all structuring of covenant theology, once grace is attributed to the original covenant with Adam, preredemptive and redemptive covenants cease to be characterized by contrasting governmental principles in the bestowal of the kingdom on mankind. Instead, some sort of continuum obtains. A combined demand-and-promise (which is thought somehow to qualify as grace but not as works) is seen as the common denominator in this alleged new unity of all covenants.[30]

> Because grace cannot be defined apart from this context of covenantal stipulations and sanctions and is specifically a response of mercy to demerit, it must be carefully distinguished from divine love or beneficence.[31]

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[28] A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (1869, repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 122.
[29] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 138.
[30] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 108.
[31] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 113.

When older theologians, such as A. A. Hodge, held some notion of grace in the preredemptive covenant, and when such references are put in context, there is a clear presentation of two different kinds of covenants. Nor is it to say that the use of the word "grace" in the Adamic covenant, given the present confusion over justification, is prudent. It would seem that since the word is used almost universally in Scripture of the undeserved redemptive favor of God towards sinners, the Westminster Confession is conscious of the wisdom in using the words "voluntary condescension on God's part" (WCF 7.1).[32]

On the other hand, Kline understood that if we deny merit in the creation covenant, we will undermine it in the covenant with the second Adam and endanger the imputation of Christ's active obedience. According to Paul in Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." So "Adam, like Christ, must have been placed under a covenant of works."[33] Charles Hodge affirms this reality, "By the offense of one all were made sinners. (4.) This great fact is made the ground upon which the whole system of redemption is founded. As we fell in Adam, we are saved in Christ. To deny the principle in the one case is to deny it in the other. . . . "[34] So Kline argues,

> In the offer of eternal life, so we are told, we must therefore recognize an element of "grace" in the preredemptive covenant. But belying this assessment of the situation is the fact that if it were true that Adam's act of obedience could not have eternal significance then neither could or did his actual act of disobedience have eternal significance. It did not deserve the punishment of everlasting death. Consistency would compel us to judge God guilty of imposing punishment beyond the demands of justice, pure and simple. God would have to be charged with injustice in inflicting the punishment of Hell, particularly when he exacted that punishment from his Son as the substitute for sinners. The Cross would be the ultimate act of divine injustice. That is the theologically disastrous outcome of blurring the works-grace contrast by appealing to a supposed disproportionality between work and reward.[35]

The fear that a concept of "strict justice" may eclipse God's condescension in the covenant of works is adequately addressed both by the clear assertion of the Creator-creature distinction, discussed above with reference to WCF 7:1, and by defining merit in a biblical way, in terms of the sanctions determined by God, as Lee Irons suggests, rather than importing the idea of merit expounded by late Medieval nominalism.[36] If the very creation of man in God's image is covenantal, as Kline asserts, then the original nature of man inherently reflects the character of God. The terms of the original covenant involved

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[32] Cf. *Justification: Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification,* Commended for Study by the Seventy-third General Assembly (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Ediucation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2007), 27–33.

[33] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 108–109.

[34] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1878, repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:121.

[35] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 114–5.

[36] Irons, "Redefining Merit," 265–9.

the essential loyalty of Adam to that created covenantal relationship. Thus, rather than thinking in terms of either congruent or condign merit,[37] Kline suggests covenantal merit:

> And according to the revelation of covenantal justice, God performs justice and man receives his proper desert when God glorifies the man who glorifies him.
>
> To be so rewarded is not an occasion for man to glory in himself against God. On the contrary, a doxological glorying in God in recognition of the Creator's sovereign goodness will become the Lord's creature-servants. But if our concepts of justice and grace are biblical we will not attribute the promised reward of the creation covenant to divine grace. We will rather regard it as a just recompense to a meritorious servant, for justice requires that man receive the promised good in return for his doing the demanded good. Indeed, if we do not analyze the situation abstractly but in accordance with the created, covenantal reality as God actually constituted it, we will see that to give a faithful Adam anything less than the promised reward would have been to render him evil for good. For we will appreciate the fact that man's hope of realizing the state of glorification and of attaining to the Sabbath-consummation belonged to him by virtue of his very nature as created in the image of the God of glory.[38]

Far from eclipsing the intimacy of paternal relation between God and man in Eden, the works relationship is one of love, "Bestowal of the reward contemplated in the creational covenant was a matter of works; it was an aspect of God's creational love, but it was not a matter of grace."[39] Even in what Kline believed was his less mature understanding of the nature of the Adamic covenant in relationship to grace, in his 1968 *By Oath Consigned*, he makes this distinction:

> Grace, in the specific sense that it effects restoration to the forfeited blessing of God, is of course found only in redemptive revelation. But in another sense grace is present in the pre-redemptive covenant. For the offer of the consummation of the original beatitude, or rather the entire glory or honor with which God crowned man from the beginning, was a display of the graciousness and goodness of God to this claimless creature of the dust.[40]

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[37] Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 471–2.
[38] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 111.
[39] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 112.
[40] Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 36. See also fn. 12 above.

ServantWord

The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Tongues of Fire: Develop Orality, Chapter 16[1]

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.

—Isaiah 58:1

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God,
which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is,
the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

—1 Thessalonians 2:13

By turning the oral tradition of the apostles into scripts,
the Gospels provided for a more permanent and thus more powerful rendition
of Jesus' life, which guaranteed the confidence and efficacy of the church's spoken word.[2]

—Stephen Webb

Acoustic space implies presence far more than does visual space. . . .
It is essentially inhabited space.[3]

—Walter Ong

The principle of *sola scriptura* "devours every dilemma that one might want to place between oral and written transmission."[4] The preacher must continually be improving his oral skills as a communicator. This requires the preacher to engage people with the content of the Word, with a convincing earnestness, and with a compelling directness. The original meaning of propaganda was to propagate an idea (Latin "to sow"). This is

[1] Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 378–85.
[2] Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 68.
[3] Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. Reprint, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 164.
[4] C. Trimp, "The Relevance of Preaching." *WTJ* 36, no.2 (fall 1973): 18.

persuasion in a positive sense. Preaching is a form of divine persuasion which intends the good of its hearers, while propaganda is mass persuasion which intends the good of the persuader.

As a preacher you must learn to distinguish between oral and written. As preacher and homiletician Dave McClellan reminds us:

> In the last three hundred years we can trace a move away from oral roots toward an increasing literary structure of the sermon. . . . While reading and writing were certainly not rare skills in the first century AD, their purpose was fundamentally different. Communication was primarily oral with literacy serving in a backup role. To a large degree those tables have turned. We now think of generating sermons in literacy and then converting them to some form of orality on Sunday.[5]

The written is for the eye, while the oral is for the ear.[6] The greatest problem for the seminary-trained preacher—few men can do without such training—is its rigorous literary training, which often translates into an academic approach to the preparation and the delivery of preaching. We are book, text, and lecture oriented. Lectures are content heavy and meant basically to inform, not to move or persuade. Listen to J. C. Ryle: "English composition for speaking to hearers and English composition for private reading are almost like two different languages, so that sermons that 'preach' well 'read' badly."[7] Perhaps there is some truth to the provocative statement that "people today are not tired of preaching, but tired of *our* preaching."[8] Thielicke observes that "the man who bores others must also be boring himself."[9]

Luther insisted that the gospel should "really not be something written, but a spoken word which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done."[10] Preaching thus, according to Luther—sounding very much like a similar assertion in the *Second Helvetic Confession*—"must be viewed and believed as though God's own voice were resounding from heaven."[11] As Walter Ong reminds us, "Sound is the medium that best carries a supernatural message, because it delivers something external without putting us in control of its source."[12] As we consider the use of manuscripts, we should remember that whatever we bring into the pulpit as an aid to memory should be designed for the ear—to be heard, not silently read. The best way to insure this is to preach the

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[5] Dave McClellan with Karen McClellan, *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), 36, 38.
[6] Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 162.
[7] Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 345.
[8] John W. Doberstein, Introduction to Thielicke, *The Trouble with The Church,* viii, referring to a statement by Paul Althaus, emphasis added.
[9] Helmut Thielicke, *The Trouble with The Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 9.
[10] in Webb, *The Divine Voice*, 144. *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. Theodore Bachman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 123.
[11] in Webb, *The Divine Voice*, 188. *Luther's Works*, vol. 24, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14–16*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 66–67.
[12] Ong quoted in Dave McClellan with Karen McClellan, *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), 102n41.

sermon aloud to ourselves in the study beforehand. As orator Quintilian observed, "The best judge as to rhythm is the ear . . ."[13]

Poet Donald Hall laments the disappearance of recitation and oratory from primary and secondary education:

> We did not speak pieces competitively as our parents and grandparents had done; entertainment by movies and radio had replaced recitation of poems and oratory. A pity. Loss of recitation helped to detach words from the sounds they make, which is the castration of reading. . . . educators threw out . . . the practice of reciting and performing literary work, and with the habit of understanding literature by hearing it, by absorbing the noises it makes.[14]

Thus, we need to offset and counteract one of the negatives of the written or printed word. It privatizes the experience of the reader and impresses the visual rather than the aural memory. We need to reconnect the written and the oral if we are to be effective preachers. One way is memorization, which modern pedagogy discourages. But memorizing the best literature, especially poetry, furnishes the mind with vocabulary, phrasing, cadences, and ideas. The earliest formally organized work on rhetoric, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, dealt with the importance of memorization as well as techniques to achieve a systematic structure of memory, known as the memory house.[15] Plato feared that the phonetic alphabet would undermine memory. Printing and computing have put several more nails into memory's coffin. But orality requires a well exercised memory. Memorizing Scripture, especially your preaching pericope, and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* will help mold this connection, both for you and your hearers. In the last chapter we saw how poetry has a special place in this department.

Proclamation and the Use of Manuscripts[16]

Does the nature of preaching as proclamation bear on the perennial debate over the use of manuscripts in the pulpit? Yes, because for one thing emphasis on delivering the message of another might lead preachers to believe that the quality of their oral presentation is irrelevant. In describing the role of a herald in Paul's world, David Wells

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[13] Quintilian, *The Institutes of Rhetoric*, 9.4.116, in McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 138n17. Loeb Classical Library, 4 vols., Latin text with English translation by H.E. Butler (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921).
[14] Donald Hall, *Principal Products of Portugal: Prose Pieces* by Donald Hall (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 51–52.
[15] The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is the oldest surviving Latin book on rhetoric, dating from the late 80s BC. While attributed to Cicero (106–43 BC) its authorship is unknown. Cicero's *De Inventione* is incomplete; only two of four volumes survive. Loeb Classical Library, vol. 403, Latin text with English translation by Harry Caplan (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1954).
[16] Adapted from Reynolds, "A Medium for the Message: The Form of the Message Is Foolish, Too," in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,* eds. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), 329–32. See also Gregory Reynolds, "On the Matter of Notes in Preaching," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 16–20.

informs us that besides understanding his role as delivering the message of the king, "the most important qualification for the task was simply 'a loud and clear voice'!"[17]

It should be of paramount concern that today the church often allows men to preach who have neither mastered good public speaking nor the ability to exposit a passage of Scripture clearly. The first should be a given, like piety; the second should be a high, and non-negotiable, demand. The exposition of Scripture has fallen on hard times. Our understanding of the nature of media should lead us to conclude that this medium—preaching—is all about what God has to say in his infallible Word. Thus, whatever we helpfully glean from ancient rhetoric, the Hebrew prophet, and not the Greek orator, is our model for preaching. This was the fundamental oral tradition of Jesus and his apostles.[18] Classics professor George Kennedy concludes regarding 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:16:

> This passage may be said to reject the whole classical philosophy and rhetoric. For rhetoric the Christian can rely on God, both to supply words and to accomplish persuasion if it is God's will.[19]

Should I use notes, or should I not use notes in preaching?[20] That is the question every preacher struggles with. A prior question will help to determine the answer: What are we seeking to achieve? Are we seeking good oral communication, including eye contact, rhythm, proportion, and passionate proclamation of God's Word? Are we seeking to communicate God's Word directly to God's people? My answer then would be that whatever helps the preacher achieve those goals, whether it is a full manuscript, full notes, a bare outline, or no notes at all, is what they should practice. But remember, eye contact reinforces pastoral connection.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each way. In most cases men will benefit from changing their use of notes as they grow in preaching experience. It is no doubt very helpful to begin with the discipline of writing a full manuscript,[21] although I do not think it wise to bring a full manuscript into the pulpit, due to the difference between written and oral linguistic construction. Because each preacher is different in training and disposition, I think dogmatism in this matter is unwarranted and may even be harmful to the young preacher's confidence. To insist that one cannot preach properly with notes is like saying a conductor cannot conduct properly with his score in front of him. The world's best conductors sometimes use scores and sometimes do not.

I continue to use notes because I find that they help me to stick to the point, but I use no more than basic notes to remain free in the preaching moment. Excellent cases may be made for the two opposite poles of the discussion: a full manuscript or no manuscript at

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[17] David Wells, "The Theology of Preaching," 23, quoting L. Croenen, "Proclamation," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (3 vols; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1979), 49.

[18] Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 36–37. Cf. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 374.

[19] George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 131–32.

[20] Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, "On the Matter of Notes in Preaching," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 16–20.

[21] I recently gave a box full of the late John Hills, Jr.'s manuscripts and outlines to the historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. They may be accessed in the archives in the OPC offices.

all.[22] I will present, not so much as a compromise, a third way. A slavish commitment to either extreme is simply unsupportable biblically and practically.

There are several things that we need to keep in mind when considering the use of notes in the pulpit. First, let me plead that preachers should be at liberty to determine what they bring into the pulpit by way of notes as long as the goal is achieved. John Hills recommended that the young preacher discipline himself to write out his sermons in full for the first five years of ministry. Several sermons were written out in full even nine years after his ordination. His outline notes became briefer as the years wore on. While the discipline of producing a full manuscript is useful in developing good preaching, we should avoid dogmatism when it comes to the use of notes in the pulpit, as long as good preaching is the result.

Manuscript preachers tend to be weak in distinguishing between oral and written language. Thus, it is my belief that the best sermon notes are structured as a set of visual cues, not a manuscript to be read or memorized, as I will discuss further below. This structure keeps the preacher on the track of the text. For some preaching without notes is desirable, but not necessary. What is crucial is communicating clearly and directly to God's people as God's spokesman. In the absence of this, while the preacher spends most of his time looking down at his notes, he will seem distant to his congregation. Whatever aids good eye contact in terms of manuscript or no manuscript will vary from man to man.

Advocates of manuscript preaching properly extol the verbal discipline this regimen exacts from the preacher. Although not advocating manuscript preaching per se, I would insist that the discipline of precise, well-ordered, and interesting speech can only be learned through deep reading and careful writing as I have discussed in Chapter 11.

Transcribed sermons of preachers who use few or no notes read very differently than manuscripts that were first written to be read.[23] Seminary training, as I have said above, makes us book, text, and lecture oriented. This indispensable fountain, from which the content of preaching flows, however, must not be confused with preaching itself, which occurs only in the preaching moment. Furthermore, whatever aid to the memory the preacher may bring into the pulpit, this is not the sermon. The sermon is the Word proclaimed in the presence of the congregation.

Contrary to popular misconception, extemporaneous preaching is fully prepared for, but exclusively oral in presentation, not rooted verbatim in a written manuscript. Should the manuscript be composed in literary as opposed to oral form, it will be poor pulpit communication. Quintilian distinguished between extemporaneous and impromptu speech. The latter is unprepared.[24] Extemporaneous preaching, as we shall see below, requires careful preparation but gives the appearance of being impromptu. Ancient "oratory assumes an extemporaneous delivery."[25] In his monumental history of the reading and preaching of Scripture, Hughes Oliphant Old makes a convincing case that

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[22] F. Allan Story, Jr., "Without a Manuscript," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 35–38; Matthew Cotta, "A Brief Defense of Manuscript Preaching," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 38–41.
[23] Portions adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 378–83.
[24] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 147–48.
[25] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 50.

the entire Bible is essentially a preaching document.[26] Thus, the oral form preceded the written.

Much of what I have said above about appreciating and cultivating orality may seem to indicate that I see no place for the full manuscript. That is not the case as long as the manuscript is itself a document written in oral form and used in the pulpit in a way that does not impede vital visual and personal connection with the congregation. Something else a manuscript should not restrict is the openness of the preacher in the preaching moment to add to or subtract from the manuscript as the moment demands. Quintilian observes that student orators who have been exposed to good examples

> will have at command, moreover, an abundance of the best words, phrases, and figures not sought for the occasion, but offering themselves spontaneously, as it were, from a store treasured within them.[27]

Dave McClellan insists:

> A reader may be a good reader but can never match the communicative intensity of an orator discovering out loud. . . . To preach well we need to be in a sort of discovery mode, which is categorically different than a reporting mode.[28]

Quintilian insisted that "premeditation is not so accurate as to leave no room for happy inspiration [*fortunae locus*]: even in writing we often insert thoughts which occur to us on the spur of the moment."[29]

On the other hand, one of the great weaknesses of preaching without notes is straying from the theme of the text and expanding minor points in a distracting way. It is all too easy to become so enamored of one's own facility in speaking without notes that the preacher forgets that his expansion of the sermon may lose or even bore his hearers in the process. I recommend with Quintilian an "artful spontaneity."[30]

Put the results of your study into an oral form. Homiletics is the art of translating the meaning of the text, in the context of systematic and biblical theology, into a form designed to transform God's people in the act of preaching. Theology serves homiletics not vice versa. Think of your preparation as soil for the sermon, not the sermon itself. Do not bring your study into the pulpit. Bring the results; and bring them in oral form. Extemporaneous preaching is live preaching, fully prepared for, but exclusively oral, not rooted in the manuscript itself. "The written text of the New Testament itself is ordered to . . . oral activity."[31] It is important to recognize that the structure of divinely persuasive speech is critical to its effect of the memory and thus the heart of the hearer.

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[26] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 1 - The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19–110.
[27] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 148, fn. 4.
[28] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 106.
[29] Chris Holcomb, "'The Crown of All Our Study': Improvisation in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2001): 66; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.6.5–6.
[30] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 147n1.
[31] Walter Ong, Review: *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (William A. Graham) in *America* (Mar. 4, 1989): 204.

Thus, your sermon notes, if you use them, should be structured, as I have said, as a set of visual cues, not a manuscript to be read or memorized. Use two manuscripts, if necessary: one is a written summary of your exegesis and application put in the order of your sermon; the other is a one page abbreviated form for the pulpit. Near the end of my first decade of ministry I had a young summer intern armed with the latest laptop computer. He had taken all of his seminary notes with this wondrous new device. I had just begun using a simple Apple 2C, which was a dinosaur compared to his. Of course, he prepared his sermon notes on his word processor and suggested I try the same. After some resistance my intern prevailed upon me to try word processing my sermons. I did so, much to my regret. Hitherto I had religiously used my beloved Mont Blanc fountain pen to write my sermons in full five page outlines, highlighting the main points in yellow and red. I had learned early on not to be a slave to my notes. They are useful to keep me on point, but not to keep me from adding thoughts and illustrations as they come to mind.

My only experience with word processing had been creating documents to be read, not preached. Book reviews, along with essays, periodical articles and the like, require an attention to grammatical and structural detail which preparation for oral presentation does not. In fact, as I learned through my first painful experience, preparing for preaching with precise writing is deadly to oral delivery, if that is the manuscript brought into the pulpit. Word processing, of which electronic mail is a type, while it allows non-typists like me to produce documents, has a tendency to encourage sloppiness of spelling, grammar, composition, and thought. The old handwritten manuscript and the more recent typewritten manuscript encouraged care and thoughtfulness, because revision was difficult. That was my approach to my first word processed sermon. Because I had put so much effort into composition, I felt naturally tied to the manuscript in my delivery. For written productions one *must* be, because that is the final medium of communication. After one awkward sermon I vowed never to use the computer again for sermons.

It was not until half a decade later that I made the attempt again. Meanwhile, since I had begun my doctoral work just after the first negative encounter with word processing sermons, I had reflected on the nature of orality and preaching in connection with the electronic media. With much more sophisticated software, I realized the potential of putting an entire sermon on one folded page, so that I could avoid turning pages in the pulpit. I began by rewriting old, five page sermons in the one page format. This enabled me to pay attention to the manuscript as a vehicle of oral communication rather than as a written record of a sermon. The highlighting and underlining had saved me from becoming a slave to the paper. Now I reworked the outline with directness and oral impact in mind. Few complete sentences, fewer quotations, highlighting vivid phrases in italic bold; everything was aimed at affecting the congregation. The difference was monumental. The effect has been dramatic. But it really all began with my reflection on my use of media, in this case the printed word, the written word, the word processed word, and the preached word. All of this was inspired by a passion to be a better preacher, a goal to which every preacher should never stop aspiring.

It is foolish to try extemporaneous preaching without careful preparation and experience. Richard S. Storrs's *Preaching without Notes* is a classic on the subject.[32] Extemporaneous preaching requires as much, if not more, careful preparation as does preaching with a manuscript, just a different kind of preparation. We should distinguish

[32] Richard S. Storrs, *Preaching without Notes* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1875).

between two kinds of extemporaneous preaching. Some write out a full manuscript and then memorize it word for word. A better way is to memorize the outline, markers guiding you in the right direction, and leave the articulation of the content to the preaching moment, based on your study of the text. But, if one uses a manuscript of some kind, what kind should it be? Quintilian insists that sticking to a manuscript does "not allow us to try the fortune of the moment."[33] That fortune, of course, in the case of the preacher, is directed by the Spirit. Dave McClellan in his excellent treatment of orality in preaching, *Preaching by Ear*, sums up his thoughts on the subject: "It is this balance of both preparation and spontaneity that Quintilian upholds as our standard."[34]

Clyde Fant's *Preaching For Today* (1975) is especially helpful in this department.[35] He deals with some of the unique mechanics of oral preparation. Write like you speak; do not speak like you write. If you have ever read a written transcript of one of your sermons, you will be horrified at how badly it reads. That is as it should be. Listening to your recorded sermons with the manuscript you used is a helpful exercise.

This does not mean that poor speech patterns or bad grammar are acceptable orally. While no single method is universally helpful for each preacher, Fant's point is that, like charity, orality begins at home. In other words, we must prepare *orally*. This means preparing our sermons "out loud."[36] After exegesis and the discernment of the point of the text, begin communicating it out loud, and then write down the main points of the logic of what you have said. Fant calls this the "rough oral draft." Then go back after more reflection on exegesis and the rough draft and make a "final oral draft." From this he recommends a final one page "sermon" brief.[37] A more recent book advocates "natural scripting," that is writing notes that sound exactly the way we speak.[38] Those who use limited notes in the pulpit, or only pay attention to highlighted full notes, already practice something similar. This is required to become an effective preacher.

Dave McClellan in his quest for true extemporaneous preaching takes issue with Fant's "sermon brief," as resembling an outline, which McClellan views as artificial. Instead, he advocates a "roadmap as the visual and iconic sense to the thought blocks that portrays a sense of destination toward a specific end, and the resultant ease of transfer to memory."[39] I think he overstates his rejection of outlines, since his roadmaps function in a similar way. Fant seeks a slightly different means to achieve much the same end, which is a truly oral set of notes that map a progression of thought. But this is what a good outline does.[40]

The value of McLellan's work is his extensive application of Quintilian's pioneering treatment of the principles of rhetoric in *Institutio Oratoria*, to preaching. He works with a dimension of Quintilian which has been largely ignored: the place of improvisation in

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[33] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 149.
[34] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 150.
[35] Fant, *Preaching for Today*, 159–173.
[36] Fant, *Preaching for Today*, 165.
[37] Fant, *Preaching for Today*, 166–69.
[38] Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013), 45.
[39] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 133n11.
[40] Timothy Keller advocates the use of the outline, contrary to those who believe it hinders orality. Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 223–28.

rhetoric.[41] The function of memory in preaching must not be confused with memorizing a sermon text, but rather, as McClellan insists, remembering the pathway of the sermon like the main points of a story, which can then be told without notes.[42] Quintilian observed, "[T]he crown of all our study and the greatest reward of our long labours is the power of improvisation [*ex tempore dicendi facultas*]."[43] For Quintilian, improvisation was the *sine qua non* of oratory, "The man who fails to acquire this [faculty] had better . . . abandon the task of advocacy."[44] But improvisation for Quintilian was a learned and high art, acquired only after years of disciplined study and practice, never to be confused with the effusive efforts of mere talent.[45]

Furthermore, each genre of biblical literature requires a different approach, a varied use of outlines. The systematic announcement of "headings" may be helpful in preaching from the logically argued epistles of Paul, but the narrative of Judges may be better preached by following the story sequence and leaving the logical divisions "invisible" in the preaching moment. Headings, however, do also help the listener to remember the sermon. The recent discovery of the oral structure of ancient texts can be of immeasurable help to the preacher. Especially helpful in this area are the works of Robert Alter and J. P. Fokkelman on the literary structures of biblical narrative and poetry.[46] The distinction between oral and written logic should not be exaggerated in this discussion. No one can think, speak, or write, without logic. But the logic of narrative and the logic of epistles are quite different. They require different ways of ordering our thoughts, not a logic different from the way we think. The text itself dictates this. Much more work needs to be done with this area of homiletics.

The Public Reading of Scripture

If the public reading of Scripture is an essential part of the ministry of the Word, as we have seen in Chapter 8, then the same great care we give to sermon preparation should be given to reading Scripture aloud in public worship. Hughes Oliphant Old has titled his multi-volume history of preaching *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* because of the essential difference between the written Word of God and its public reading in worship. When we read the Scripture we are saying, This is the inspired source of what you are about to hear.[47] We are reading the word of the King.

The synagogue and the ancient church read the Scriptures through, seriatim (*lectio continua*), on a regular basis. Copies of the Scripture prior to the Gutenberg era were rare and expensive. The average person did not have a copy to read privately. For most of the

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[41] Chris Holcomb, "'The Crown of All Our Study': Improvisation in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2001): 53–72 in McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 147, fn. 1.
[42] McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 97–98, 132, 136–37.
[43] Holcomb, "The Crown of All Our Study," 53; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 10.7.1.
[44] Holcomb, "The Crown of All Our Study," 53.
[45] Holcomb, "The Crown of All Our Study," 56–58.
[46] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Jan Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide,* trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999); *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
[47] Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 52, 58.

church's history, God's people have received the Word only orally. In the electronic age we must not assume that people are reading their Bibles regularly or at all. Even when they are, they may not be reading the "whole" of Scripture. So there is a unique value for God's people to receive the Word with their ears, especially since it was written to be heard. The writing of Scripture was simply to preserve the revealed oral Word. The entire Bible is essentially composed as an oral and aural book. Israel's Shema calls God's people to hear, not read: "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). The Bible ends on the same oral note, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:6).[48] The immediacy of the effect when Scripture is read properly has a unique place in the life of the church. But we must cultivate this. The way that we read Scripture aloud, as well as our entire demeanor surrounding the reading, will determine the attitude of our hearers, especially in their reception of what we preach after we read.

Remember the immediate power of the human voice in orality, especially when what is read aloud is the very Word of God. The power of Josiah's reform is attested by the writer of 2 Kings:

> And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and *he read in their ears* all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. (2 Kings 23:2, KJV, emphasis added)

Read to catechize, sounding in the ear! Imagine how the Word sounded after being lost in the Temple for so many years, heard for the first time (2 Kings 22:8). The Word read poorly in the ears of God's people is tantamount to its being lost in the church today.

In Nehemiah 8:8 we read: "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." And in Acts 13:15: "After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.'" Also 1 Timothy 4:13: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." We normally consider this "reading" private, and silent. Its connection with exhortation militates against that individualistic interpretation, and that is why the ESV has modified "reading" with "public." Consider Revelation 1:3: "Blessed is the one who *reads aloud* the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (emphasis added). This is public reading as the ESV indicates. The public reading of Scripture does not replace private reading or preaching, nor does preaching replace the reading of Scripture. Rather, the public reading of Scripture demands the preaching of it. In both, the oral dimension is its special power. The immediate presence of God in the voice of the reader/preacher of his Word is subversive to the sinner's rebellious position in the First Adam, and it represents a living call to repentance and faith in the second and last Adam.

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[48] McClellan has a fine summary of what the Bible teaches about its own oral and aural nature, *Preaching by Ear*, 61–82.

Trust the Power and Presence of God

As I have said, whatever human forms of help the preacher brings with him into the pulpit the presence of the Author of the Word is indispensable.[49] All of our preparation will be to no avail, unless the Lord is present in our preaching. For this he must be asked, even in the act of preaching. Trust the Holy Spirit in the preaching moment. The greatest folly of our age is trusting the means, the techniques of accomplishing things. The means of preaching, unlike any other form of public speaking, is uniquely dependent on God's blessing in both preacher and hearer. Reformed preachers know the folly of trusting the Spirit without preparation; but we need to deal with the equal folly of trusting our preparation without trusting the Spirit, as if the delivery and effect of preaching were a merely human production. Pray for the only power that can make the medium effective: the power of God's presence in your preaching through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Your special and general preparation will be used in the act of preaching in ways you will never be free enough to experience if you are a notes-slave. The Holy Spirit brings illustrations, ideas, and applications to mind in the act of preaching.

Unction is not a human attribute, it is the secret and mysterious influence that God's Spirit bestows on faithful preaching. I love the subtitle of a recent book on preaching: "The mysterious act of preaching."[50] There is no formula for effective preaching, because the effect is produced by the Lord. Thus, it is not a tone of voice, or style of delivery, or the notes we bring into the pulpit. The sovereignty of the influence is meant to move us to pray and depend humbly on God's power in our preaching. He alone has access to the secret recesses of the human hearts of our hearers. Paul knew this well when he asked the Ephesian Christians to pray for his preaching:

> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18–20)

Prayer is no substitute for study, but it must also not be a *mere* article of our faith, unpracticed in our private preparations for the pulpit. The effectiveness of our preaching will always be directly related to our dependence on God's power through all our studious, intellectual efforts in opening God's Word. The Spirit influences the hearer and the preacher alike. As Augustine insists, the true preacher "is a petitioner before he is a speaker."[51]

As we have seen in the Reformation conception of preaching as witnessed in the *Second Helvetic Confession*, "the preaching of the word of God *is* the word of God." Our Lord, the incarnate Word, has identified the preaching of his ordained spokesmen with his Word: "The one who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). Herman Hoeksema correctly insisted that the Greek of Romans 10:14 should be translated as the American Standard

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[49] This section is adapted from Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 384–85.
[50] John Koessler, *Folly, Grace, and Power: The Mysterious Act of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).
[51] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 141.

Version has it: "And how shall they believe in him *whom* they have not heard?" as opposed to, "him *of whom* they have not heard?"[52] Thus, it is "the preached Word rather than the written Word" which is the primary means of grace.[53] Christ is immediately present as the true Speaker in the preaching moment. "The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation."[54] So Calvin comments on the same passage: "This is a remarkable passage with regard to the efficacy of preaching . . ."[55] Preaching is not speaking about Christ but is Christ speaking. Haddon Robinson goes so far as to insist that even the inspired letters of Paul were no substitute in his ministry for the preached Word: "A power comes through the word preached which even the inerrant word cannot replace."[56]

Anticipating the new covenant, Isaiah connects the voice of God with the human herald:

> Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. (Isa. 52:6–8)

In his biography of James I. Packer, Alister McGrath gives Packer's excellent definition of preaching:

> "The event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message of instruction and direction from himself through the words of a spokesperson." Preaching was thus defined, not in terms of human performance or activity, but in terms of divine communication.[57]

Paul said it clearly to the Thessalonian church: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). The preacher should never be satisfied with anything less than a congregation that is "taught by God" (1 Thess. 4:9).

While recognizing that you are a mere man like each of your congregants, and a sinful man at that, you must have the confidence that God has connected with his preaching ministry. If, as an ambassador, you stick to God's message, and depend upon

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[52] David H. Schuringa, "The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace: The Views of Herman Hoeksema and R. B. Kuiper," Th. M. thesis (Theological Seminary, 1985), 18–22. Later in chapter III (34–43) a convincing case for the grammatical correctness of this translation is made.
[53] Schuringa, "The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace," 33.
[54] Schuringa, "The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace," 43.
[55] Schuringa, "The Preaching of the Word as a Means of Grace," 44; John Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, *Calvin's Commentaries,* vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 398.
[56] Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980) 17, in Heck, *The ERS: The Five Steps of Bible Exposition*, 12. Cf. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 52.
[57] Alister McGrath, *A Biography of James I. Packer: To Know and Serve God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 256.

the power of his King, you may be assured that God's Word, and not your own, is what the church receives. Calvin recognized God's condescension in this arrangement in commenting that God "deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them."[58] The egalitarianism which favors dialogue does not favor faith, as Peter Berger notes: "Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue' but by proclamation."[59]

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Finally, as I have explained in Chapter 10, the deep well from which true preaching comes is biblical meditation. Our age does not provide either the atmosphere or the motivation for careful, nuanced reflection. The pragmatic bent, reinforced by our sophisticated Bible software, tends to propel us into gathering information in a mechanical way, leaving the illusion of having "studied" a text. Word and phrase searches have a beguiling power over the student. While I am not advocating the abandonment of these useful tools, they are never a replacement for quiet meditation in thought and prayer, especially in a place designed with little or no electronic distraction. Take time to pray and think and pray some more before you switch on the machine.

Above all, spend all your life's energy in being a faith herald of the Good Shepherd.

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[58] John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1, in James Daane, *Preaching with Confidence: A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15.

[59] In Daane, *Preaching with Confidence*, 16.

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Moving Forward by Stepping Back

A Review Article

by Ryan M. McGraw

Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Pre-Modern Exegesis, by Craig A. Carter. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018, xxiii + 279 pages, $29.00, paper.

This provocative book has gained much traction over the past several years. Hermeneutics, which we know as principles of interpretation, is lately often enveloped in communication theory of how others understand us and how we understand them. As such, it has become a massive area of debate in contemporary philosophy, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Within Christianity, this debate pulls in questions about how one sees Christ in the Old Testament, whether the New Testament use of the Old Testament is a model for biblical interpretation, what the role of church tradition is in interpreting the Bible, whether reading communities transform the meaning of the texts that they read, whether exegeting texts in historical contexts adequately reflects the divine authorship of Scripture, and many more. Hovering around these topics is the question of whether to read the Bible like any other book, or in a special way because it is divine inspiration.

Craig Carter adds his voice to this debate by effectively throwing down the gauntlet, challenging readers not to play by expected rules. His main contention is that pre-modern exegesis is superior to post-Enlightenment exegesis, because it recognizes divine transcendence, divine authorship, and divine action in the church through biblical texts. While other authors, like his mentor John Webster, have pressed such themes, Carter's no holds barred assault on modern academic biblical interpretation draws a line in the sand: either we stand on the side of pre-critical exegesis with what he calls the "Christian Platonism" of the "Great Tradition," or we stand with the atheistic (even Epicurean) rationalism of post-Enlightenment thinking. In doing so he has, as it were, ripped the lid off Pandora's box. Critiquing historical-critical exegesis and its influences on Evangelical grammatical-historical exegesis brings the fear of chaos and disorder. Yet like Pandora's box, hope comes out of the box as well, restoring divine action through biblical texts to its primary place. The main contention of this review is that while Carter places his finger appropriately on a sore spot in modern biblical interpretation, his unusual (though memorable!) catch phrases and concrete examples leave readers with work to do as they hope for a path forward. Following this evaluation, I append some comments targeting ministers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.[1]

[1] This review is thus a modified version of Ryan M. McGraw, "A Review of Craig A. Carter, Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Pre-Modern Exegesis," in Books at a Glance, 2024.

Carter's eight chapters follow a broad two-step line of argumentation. First, the church needs to recover a theological hermeneutic, placing divine action through Scripture first in biblical interpretation (chs. 2–4). Second, pre-critical exegesis is the best model for putting theological hermeneutic into practice (chs. 5–7). Bracketing this material, his first and final chapters illustrate his proposed problem and solution by demonstrating the inadequacies of mere grammatical-historical exegesis in preaching through Christ as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53.

The introduction will likely hook readers, especially pastors, who will sympathize with Carter's painful experience of preaching through this text. Christians know, especially in light of apostolic use of this chapter, that they must find Christ there. Yet pastors regularly find that plowing through piles of commentaries on Isaiah, while pulling them well through grammatical and contextual issues, do not adequately prepare them to preach Christ from the text, apply it to their congregations, and present their material in gripping and engaging ways that do not merely feel like a running Bible commentary.

Such a common pastoral trial led Carter to question whether something was wrong with current evangelical assumptions about how to handle biblical exegesis. He could not be more right in recognizing that readers and preachers must respect divine intention through texts, seeking divine action in those who read and hear them. His solution is to approach the Bible starting with a proper theology of Scripture (ch. 2), moving next to a "theological metaphysics" related to the God behind the text and working through it (ch. 3), and then searching through Christian history for alternatives to modern approaches (ch. 4). What he learns from doing so is reading Scripture as a unity centered on Jesus Christ (ch. 5), rooting the "spiritual sense" of Scripture in its literal sense (ch. 5), and learning to see and hear Christ in the Old Testament (ch. 7; "the climax of the book," 191). Challenging the assumptions of most modern evangelical readers, especially the undertext that the church missed the boat for most of its history, is well-placed. We need to read the Bible seeking God, being changed by the Spirit and renewed in Christ's image as we do so, all while listening to voices from the Christian tradition.

One overarching strength of the book is that, unlike his mentor Webster, who often stressed the vital centrality of exegesis in theology without doing much of it, Carter's work is filled with careful reflection of concrete texts of Scripture. This makes his advancement of Webster's otherwise outstanding work a significant move forward, enabling Carter to strike a nerve with Evangelicals more directly.

Despite the great value of Carter's aims, the path still needs some clearing to reach his goals adequately. We can see this best by looking at his eccentric (and eclectic) use of terms, by singling out his reliance on John Calvin as a model for biblical interpretation and teaching, and by evaluating his example of how to preach Isaiah 53.

First, Carter's ultimatum is to recover what he calls "Christian Platonism." Most readers, like myself, might not react favorably to this term initially. Yet Carter envelops five main ideas under "Christian Platonism": anti-materialism, anti-mechanism, anti-nominalism, anti-relativism, and anti-skepticism (79–80). One overarching concern here is to maintain divine transcendence (46–48), wedded to divine providence governing and working through all things, including God's work through biblical texts. However, Carter makes too much hinge on his peculiar terminology—for instance, when he asserts that opposing Christian Platonism is "to oppose philosophy itself" (82). This is theological and philosophical overreaching (82).

Referring to "Thomas Aquinas' Christian Platonism" (65, fn., 6) illustrates well my reservations about the term "Christian Platonism." Aquinas wove together elements of

Aristotelian and neo-Platonic thought (especially, but not only, via Pseudo-Dionysius), which served as vehicles to carry his Christian philosophy and theology. Like Aquinas, most medieval and post-Reformation scholastics were too eclectic to meaningfully label them "Christian Platonist." Carter's ascription of Christian Platonism to C. S. Lewis is closer to the mark (89, fn., 59), since Lewis would have owned up to the title.

What Carter is getting at is valuable, in that he seeks to demonstrate that the Triune God is ontologically transcendent, working imminently in creation and providence. However, Christian Platonism is an unfortunate way of summarizing the "Great Tradition." Traditional Platonism, as he notes at points, has liabilities. Relegating ideal forms to a mental world potentially subjected "god" himself to these ideal forms. Alternatively, by placing forms in real things, Aristotle had the advantage of enabling people to study individual things (like human beings) as having their own forms, making them distinct and individual rather than mere shadowy reflections of a world of perfect ideas. Arguably, this latter option proved to be an easier path for late medieval and early modern Reformed theologians to place God in his own category, giving form, material, efficient causation, and purpose to all created things. Of course, Carter solves this dilemma by encompassing Aristotle under Platonism (78–79). It seems, however, that the answer to Carter's concern is not ultimately Christian Platonism as much as it is his dogged assertion of the Creator/creature distinction and relationship.

Carter fills his book with other subordinate, semi-ambiguous catch phrases as well. For instance, he presses Hans Boersma's language of "sacramental ontology" (57). What he means is that Scripture mediates Christ to us (59). However, while sacramental language aims to incorporate divine presence and action in everything, many have questioned whether this is the right way to put things. If everything is a sacrament, then effectively nothing is a sacrament. Yet Carter moves towards equating "Christian Platonism" with Boersma's "sacramental ontology" and Webster's "domain of the Word" (59). Though he later notes Kevin Vanhoozer's reservations about such terminology, preferring "covenantal ontology" instead (248), Carter pulls him too under the shield of Christian Platonism. It is questionable as well whether his appeal to *sensus plenior* really conveys the idea of divine intent behind biblical texts. *Sensus plenior* is elastic and ill-defined, though Carter seems to mean that the divine author intended more than the human authors of the text. If we tether this notion to the actual words of the text, reading passages in light of the completed canon, then it admits a good sense, but *sensus plenior* sometimes transgresses these bounds.

What he is really defending is multiple meanings or "senses" of Scripture (e.g., 183). However, he seems in the end to want only two senses: the literal meaning of the text and its Christological "spiritual sense" (98, 164, 176, 181, and the appendix). We will see below that this is what he does in practice by way of illustration. While such catch phrases and others like them are memorable, they do not reflect the diversity of thought in Christian history well, which Carter presents as mostly monolithic before the Enlightenment (e. g., 85). However, as he concedes near the end, "As we have seen throughout this book, terminology is extremely varied and difficult to pin down" (222).

Second, perhaps the most implausible move, stretching the bounds of credulity, lies in chapter six. Carter strangely associates authors from Origen up through John Calvin as all belonging to the same Great Tradition. Particularly, he says things like, "Calvin was aware of the truth contained in the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture" (183) and that his "ritual castigation" of Origen (184) was not meant to rule out allegorical exegesis. Calvin did not press a spiritual sense rooted in the literal sense, as Carter argues. Instead,

Carter's so-called spiritual sense was merely the proper application of the text. Moreover, using Calvin's exegesis of Galatians 4:24 is a dubious example (184), due to the unique nature of the passage as a rare reference to "allegory." Carter's wildest assertion is that Calvin "shows no interest whatsoever in arguing for a single-meaning theory as the Enlightenment does" (186). This is hard to fathom given Calvin's context, assertions, and actual exegetical practices. Calvin adhered so strictly to the literal-historical sense of Scripture that, during and after his lifetime, Lutherans were even accused of "Judaizing" by not finding Christ and the Trinity often enough in his commentaries. Even Carter later acknowledges that Calvin "makes little use of the spiritual sense (or allegory)" (222). Yet he concludes, "I have made Calvin the hero of my narrative of the development of the Great Tradition" (250). Later Reformed and Lutheran controversies over Calvin's exegetical methods introduce a significant complication with Carter's approach. Again, he presents a rather naively monolithic view of the Great Tradition, using divine transcendence as its common thread ("Christian Platonism") while flattening out the vast diversity present in the pre-critical Christian tradition. This is revisionist history at best, failing to allow historical figures to speak with their own voices in their own contexts. Yet how can we listen to them if we cannot hear them clearly first?

Third, his model for drawing from the Great Tradition, a sample sermon on Isaiah 53, lacks many key characteristics of historical Christian exegesis and preaching. In the end, I am not convinced that Carter fully puts preachers in a better position to preach Isaiah 53 like he depicts in his introductory chapter. Though he gives readers a written summary of his sermon on the text (239–44), his example neither matches historical-critical exegesis nor the Great Tradition. After his iconoclastic attack on modern exegetical methodology, one would expect a clear use of allegory and application, for instance. He instead gives a didactic summary of how the passage is a prophecy of Christ's death and resurrection as our high priest. Absent is the doxological rhetorical flair and searching questions of Gregory, Augustine, Aquinas, and even Calvin. The intro is purely contextual and canonical, and non-experimental in tone. There is also no application within the points, with only implicit application at the end. He does not really illustrate how to use the primary tools of the Great Tradition, especially the four senses of the quadriga. Doing so would have told us what the text said and pointed us to Christ, both of which he does, while also engaging the hearts of believers in the church with application (tropology) and directing them to the beatific vision (anagogy). His note that his sermon is "not loaded with illustrations or stories" (244) certainly stands in contrast to authors like Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, to name two only. Readers are left with a dry hollowed out exegesis that looks neither like the Great Tradition nor like post-Enlightenment hermeneutics. Despite his salutary challenges to contemporary hermeneutics, marked by some rhetorical eccentricities, he leaves readers a bit rudderless in the end.

What lessons then can we gather from the above? There is no golden age in church history. The Spirit used flawed people like us to fumble through preserving the truth, employing more or less successful methods. Radical differences exist between pre and post-Enlightenment exegesis, yet there is no monolithic Great Tradition. There is a broad Christian tradition, always obsessed with the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and the Bible, which, by God's grace, continues into the modern period. Many in the Great Tradition got to the right ideas in the wrong ways, while many in the modern (and post-modern) period stress right ways, though often built on wrong ideas. Eclipsing the Trinity and Jesus Christ in favor of an objective, historically contextualized text is bad (even devastatingly terrible), but leading us to grasp the thought of biblical books in their own grammar, contexts, and

thought processes is good. Yet the wild allegorizing of some in the Great Tradition is less than helpful in understanding Scripture, though the Trinitarian and Christological ideas conveyed through these allegories are often true, breathtaking, and soul-enrapturing. The Spirit preserves the church's text-centered Trinitarian and Christological tradition through flawed people influenced both by pre and post-Enlightenment exegesis. Thankfully, the Spirit is raising people today aiming to place the Triune God back at the heart of theology, with the Christ-glorifying Spirit becoming once again front and center in hermeneutics.

In short, we have something to take and something to ditch from every century of church history, including both the Great Tradition and our own. The sobering fact, however, is that it is far easier to pull exegetical specks out of our brother's eyes than it is to see the logs in our own. We are too close to our times to have proper perspective, but we should be chastened, humbled listeners, attending both to the Spirit's voice in Scripture and to his continued work through the Great Tradition, of which we hope we remain a part. Carter's challenge is well placed, generating conversations that the church needs to have as she looks back while searching for a path ahead.

More pointedly, what benefits does Carter's material offer ministers in the OPC? We should remember that preaching is more than exegesis and biblical theological technique. Colossians 1:28–29 gives us an agenda for preaching, which aspects of Carter's Great Tradition can help us pursue: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." While our Confession of Faith well states that "the full sense of any Scripture . . . is not manifold but one" (Westminster Confesstion of Faith 1.9), preaching entails more than merely presenting what the Bible means. We must preach Christ, applying him to everyone's consciences, preparing them to meet Christ in glory. The medieval quadriga, or fourfold sense, may be off base in terms of seeking multiple senses in a given text, yet something true remains. What if our goals in preaching were to tell people what the text says, how it directs them to Christ, what the church should do in light of it, and how it directs them to see Christ in glory? Retaining the single sense of Scripture makes our exegesis better, but shifting the quadriga into goals would likely make our preaching even better. Whether or not Carter achieves his aims adequately in challenging modern hermeneutics and promoting the Great Tradition, he reminds us of something important. Even where the Christian tradition has been flawed, the Spirit often instilled a good instinct in his people. This book usefully spurs us towards reflecting on ways that he has done so.

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Who Are the Nonverts?

A Review Article

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by Darryl G. Hart

Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America, by Stephen Bullivant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022, xi + 272 pages, $27.99.

Almost every assertion about the recent past needs to be qualified by "once upon a time." That seems to be especially true for the claims in 1955 that Will Herberg, a theologian-turned sociologist and editor at *National Review*, made about religion in the United States. Because survey data showed that 68 percent of Americans were Protestant, twenty-three Roman Catholic, and four Jewish, Herberg concluded that "to be an American today means to be either a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew, because all other forms of self-identification and social location" are "peripheral," "obsolescent," or merely parts of a larger "religious community." He added that "not to be a Catholic, a Protestant, or a Jew today is, for increasing numbers of American people, not to be anything."

Within a decade many scholars of religion were already questioning Herberg, but today the idea that the major Western religions could give a measure of meaning to the American people seems preposterous. The recent rise of people who do not identify with any religion, so-called "nones," makes Herberg's America look like a vintage postcard. Explanations for the increase of "nones" are varied and many—most having some affinity to theories of secularization—but atheists, agnostics, and others, those who describe their religion as "nothing in particular," are increasingly the object of scholars who study American society. According to recent data from the Pew Research Center, "about 28% of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, describing themselves as atheists, agnostics or 'nothing in particular' when asked about their religion." For scholars who correlate religion to civic responsibilities, these results are noteworthy. The Pew study notes that "'Nones' tend to vote less often, do less volunteer work in their communities and follow public affairs at lower rates than religiously affiliated people do."[1]

"Nonverts" is a descriptor that adds a further layer to this trend of no religious identity. In his new book, Stephen Bullivant, a British academic with doctorates in both theology and sociology, uses polling data and interviews to describe people who have switched from religious somethings to religious nothings. These Americans do not merely choose "none" in social surveys about religion but do so after having grown up with some religious beliefs—hence "nonvert." Bullivant estimates that forty-one million Americans fall into the category of "nonvert." Roman Catholics account for the most—

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[1] "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," Pew Research Center, January 20, 2024 https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/.

sixteen million, followed by seven and a half million ex-Baptists, two million ex-Methodists, two million ex-Lutherans, one million ex-Episcopalians, and one million ex-Presbyterians. These numbers indicate that of all the "nones" in the United States, only 30 percent grew up *without* religion. For those doing the math, that means that 70 percent of those who no longer affirm a religious identity came from identifiable religious backgrounds (9).

To the author's great credit, these statistics, which could be alarming on several levels, do not become fodder for predicting the end of civilization. Bullivant is cautious about the data, because he knows how unreliable polling surveys can be. For instance, he cleverly describes how thick religious ties may be in comparison to what social survey instruments measure. One interview with an American Roman Catholic revealed a person of Irish descent, baptized and confirmed in the church, who does not observe the faith, attends family weddings and funerals, admits to praying "a Hail Mary" when her child was hospitalized, makes a big deal of St. Patrick's Day—drinking Guinness, and "dyeing the Chicago River green. Bullivant then asks, "how do you distill all that down to a single tick-box in reply to 'What's your religion?'" (51). Depending on the question or even the time of day, a person might respond one way on one day and a different way a week later. In sum, social surveys reveal numbers that appear to be precise but that are influenced by a host of factors that make them highly impressionistic. A survey is "the combined product of both an actual empirical reality *and* the precise methods used to try and measure it." This means "no Platonic Form of the Ideally Worded question" exists *and* that "better and worse methods" do exist for attempting to measure certain social trends (53).

With that glance at the way the sausage is made, Bullivant is still emphatic that "nonvert" is an important development in America. For those with the eyes of ecclesiology to see, the question is one of membership or belonging. How much do American believers identify with religious institutions, how do they pass on such patterns of belonging to children, and to what degree has religion become either a highly personal affair (without requirements for membership) or so much part of an individual's experience that people leave faith and recover it the way customers change Internet Service Providers.

However imprecise the seemingly scientific measurements of the American people, the demographics of "nonverts" suggest important changes within the last thirty-five years. The largest group of nones fall in the ages of twenty-five to thirty-four (39 percent of the total). Among this group, almost two-thirds are "nonverts," the highest of any age group. The second highest number registers in the ages thirty-five to forty-four, where 75 percent grew up in religious homes (20 percent of the total). On descriptors of race, sex, education, and politics, "nonverts" do not deviate significantly from the rest of the population, though Bullivant does remark that "nones" are "predominantly White, affluent, and well educated" (71). What is striking among "nonverts" is the ongoing affirmation of religious belief. Thirty-five percent of "nonverts" believe in a higher power, and roughly 20 percent "know" God exists, "no doubt about it" (65). When it comes to beliefs about life after death, 55 percent of "nonverts" believe life does not end with death, over 45 percent believe in heaven, close to 40 percent in hell, and over 40 percent in miracles (69). These statistics show the effects of growing up religious.

For all the curious features of the data, the statistics about age are striking and lead the author to venture into the lane of historical explanations. Why have younger generations left religion? For instance, Baby Boomers make up only 16 percent of the

total “nonverts,” not exactly the expected number for Americans with a reputation for opposing the Vietnam War, experimenting with drugs and sex, and distrusting anyone over thirty years old. Here, Bullivant notices changes in American nationalism, foreign policy, and the Cold War. During its forty-five year struggle with Soviet Communism, going to church or synagogue was easy and expected. Indeed, part of America’s boasted superiority was its religious character. Being a good American went hand in hand with being a believer—especially a Protestant one. “Cold War oppositions between ‘godless communism” and ‘Christian America,’” Bullivant observers, “engendered a Pavlovian association between being un-religious and being un-American” (124).

Even after Protestants and Roman Catholics began to adjust to the cultural “revolution” of the 1960s, their members and children were used to thinking of themselves as Christian, even if not as narrowly as before. Once the Cold War ended, the cultural affinities between being Christian and being a good American weakened dramatically. With this situation came a growing number of people who were dissatisfied with the religion of their youths and found (courtesy of social media) that other people also looked at faith skeptically and were willing to drop religion. Cultural conditions post-Cold War made it easier to become irreligious than it had during the earlier era.

As simplistic as this summary of Bullivant’s explanation (based on data) may sound, the book makes a bigger and important point about the importance of belonging to a group and how membership sustains conviction. For some, this observation falls in the domain of social psychology. Christians might object because such analysis neglects the mysterious and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. But the Christian equivalents to social psychology are ecclesiology, biblical teaching about the body of Christ and the importance of being a member (arm, eye, foot) in the body of Christ (with Christ as head). Whether we consult social scientists or practical theologians, both are noticing how group dynamics reinforce belief.

Where Bullivant goes beyond either social psychology or ecclesiology is American history. For much of the twentieth century, mainline Protestantism “was the religious equivalent of an IBM.” Bullivant writes, “You knew what you were getting, and you didn’t need to have a special reason, whether of ethnicity or religious conviction, for getting it.” He adds that the “mainline’s power came from its close cultural, political, and moral fit with the *mores* of America” (86–87).

Of course, as critics of and exiles from mainline Protestantism, Orthodox Presbyterians were never comfortable with the cultural Christianity that dominated the mainline denominations. At the same time, as Christians living in the United States where generic Christian moral norms prevailed, Orthodox Presbyterians benefitted from the mainline’s influence on American institutions. Those benefits are even more obvious now that many serious Christians and Jews not only are unsupported but also find open hostility to their convictions from public institutions.

Nonverts is a thoughtful book that should provoke readers to ponder the way churches and denominations encourage members to be faithful. Perhaps even more importantly, Bullivant’s book will prod church officers and members alike to consider where the younger generations of Orthodox Presbyterians are landing in their own spiritual quests.

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ServantReading

Questioning Faith: Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt, *by Randy Newman*

by Shane Lems

Questioning Faith: Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt, by Randy Newman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024, 152 pages, $14.99, paper.

For some Christians, it is easy to forget that not all unbelievers are hostile to Christianity. Many people who are not Christians often have sincere and serious questions about the Christian faith. As Christians, we should, in a loving manner, talk to such people who have questions and do our best to answer them biblically. In other words, we are called to speak the truth in love and give a reason for the hope we have (Eph. 4:15, 1 Pet. 3:15). One good resource for doing so is Randy Newman's book *Questioning Faith*. In this apologetics book, Newman draws on many years of experience as he asks and answers some common questions people have about religion in general and Christianity more specifically.

There are six main questions in this book. Each question makes up one chapter. The questions are as follows: 1) *What if we aren't blank slates?* (the question of motives), 2) *What if faith is inevitable, not optional?* (the question of trust), 3) *What if absolute certainty isn't necessary?* (the question of confidence), 4) *What if our similarities aren't as helpful as we think?* (the question of differences), 5) *What if we need more than reasons?* (the question of pain), and 6) *What if there's more to beauty than meets the eye?* (the question of pleasure). Each of these questions and answers dives into various aspects of topics such as faith, doubt, suffering, beauty, and so on. Each chapter also contains stories about people who moved from unbelief to faith for various reasons and in various ways. Newman included an appendix for readers who want more information about Christianity. There is also a general index and a Scripture index at the back of the book.

Newman's questions and answers are quite relevant to the modern religious landscape of the United States. For example, the first chapter tackles the subject of morality. It gives the story of a man who was fully on board the anti-theist bandwagon of Christopher Hitchens. However, the wagon fell to pieces for this man when he saw glaring moral inconsistencies in Hitchens's views. In the wake of this fallout, the man found Christianity's views on morality to be more consistent, especially in light of the gospel.

Another example of this book's modern relevance is the discussion of desires in chapter two. In Newman's own experiences, he noticed many unbelievers were simply following their own selfish desires in life. He notes that those desires are related to

people's gods and their worship. This chapter is to get people to think about what gods they trust and question whether those gods give stability in life or not.

One other aspect of *Questioning Faith* that I found helpful is the various summary statements Newman gave throughout the book. As mentioned above, every chapter covers different topics. In each chapter, Newman gives a pointed statement to help readers hone their thinking. Here are a few examples: "Amid our doubts, we should seek confidence more than certainty" (55). "Observing the differences between religions may be more helpful than looking for their similarities" (70). "We need perspectives within us that can account for the beauty around us" (114). These statements are meant to help non-Christians think about their own beliefs and ideas in a more critical way. These statements also help open people up to receiving the truths of the gospel—truths that are far more satisfying and fulfilling than alternative beliefs and religious views.

Sometimes Christians can be callous and harsh when explaining or defending the truth. I recently read a book that called unbelievers various names on some pages, but on other pages it had calls to faith. I kept thinking, "If I were not a Christian, this book would *absolutely not* make me want to be a Christian!" Thankfully, Newman's tone in *Questioning Faith* is compassionate and gentle. His goal in this book is not to win a doctrinal argument or throw out quotable, edgy phrases to sound cool. His goal is to persuade readers of Christianity's truths. And he does so with a loving tone and in a kind manner.

This is a book I could comfortably give to a few people I know who are interested in Christianity. *Questioning Faith* will not unnecessarily offend readers who are not Christians. At the same time, this book will poke and prod readers to think about their own views and positions. The book does not avoid the hard topics and exclusive claims of Christianity. If you know someone who is a thinker and, at the same time, curious about Christianity, this might be a good book to read with that person. I even found it helpful for my own Christian walk. *Questioning Faith* helped remind me of the personal reasons for which I am a follower of Christ.

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ServantReading

The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation, *by J. V. Fesko*

by Harrison N. Perkins

The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation, by J. V. Fesko. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2024, xxxvi + 338 pages.

Reformed theology is often known for its understanding of salvation and often critiqued for ignoring the work of the Holy Spirit. Although the Reformed emphasis on salvation is well noted, the criticism that we do not give proper place for the Spirit's activity in the Christian life usually rests on an assumption about what the Spirit's work must look like. J. V. Fesko's new book shows how the Reformed view of salvation is closely tied to a rich understanding of who the Spirit is and how he is still at work among God's people.

The *We Believe* series from Lexham Academic is a new multi-volume project to tackle the main heads of doctrine from a Reformed perspective. Its goal is to look at "the primary doctrines of the Christian faith as confessed in the Nicene Creed and received in the Reformed tradition" (xix). That starting point of Nicene orthodoxy is of course where this book gets its lead to look at the Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life." Although the Nicene Creed is detailed in its description of the person of Christ and aspects of his work, it is more minimal in describing the Spirit's role in salvation, simply stating him as the one who gives life. Fesko's book expands upon exactly that point to show how Reformed theology has received Nicene orthodoxy in elaborating perhaps most extensively upon that very line. Fesko shows how the doctrines for which Reformed theology is most distinctly known are implications of confessing that the Holy Spirit is responsible for conveying life to sinners redeemed by Christ.

As readers of *Ordained Servant* will know, Fesko has been writing on Reformed soteriology for some time, making contributions both to historical theology and constructive systematic theology. This book is arguably the synthesis of that longstanding study, as it presents a survey of Reformed soteriology and reaches new depths by relating it to the Spirit's work both for the individual and the church. It brings together biblical theology, dogmatic construction, and perspectives for application.

One of the crowning features of this book is the chapters in part one that situate the work of the Holy Spirit in the context of redemptive history's full scope from creation to consummation. The Spirit was not absent at creation or from the Garden as humanity began our first moments. Fesko draws upon significant themes from biblical theology to show how the interrelated motifs of temple and sonship are not only imbedded in the creation narratives but also highlight the Spirit's presence and work. The original Garden temple was a place where the Spirit was at work. More than that, he was at work within

the covenant that God had made with his people. That principle will resound across redemptive history in each administration of the covenant of grace.

In part two, Fesko turns from an emphasis on biblical theology to dogmatic development. This section weaves together how the classic elements of the Reformed *ordo salutis* are intimately related to the Spirit's ongoing work in and through the church. After a chapter on the person of the Holy Spirit, the remaining chapters in this part outline how the Holy Spirit's role from the covenant of redemption is to apply the completed work of Christ to the elect. His work is to bring the elect to faith and thereby to unite them to Christ so that they may partake of his benefits. In this section, Fesko gives a fresh statement of the classic Reformed understanding of the facets of our salvation.

Although the emphasis in part three is on how the work of the Spirit shows itself in the life of the believer and the life of the church, this theme has really appeared throughout much of the book. Fesko rightly stresses that spiritual gifts have two important features. First, they come from the Spirit. That means that we should not lose focus on the person giving these gifts by getting lost on the gifts themselves. Second, the Spirit gives these gifts so that we might bless others and so that the church might work effectively as believers mutually encourage and benefit one another. This point marks how the Spirit's gifts are to equip us for service and to make a contribution within the life of the covenant community. Everyone has a gift and a way to bless their fellow church members.

While that point might sound rather basic, it truly highlights the profundity of Reformed pneumatology. Rather than limiting our experience of the Spirit to extraordinary and rather visible manifestations, as is the case in alternative paradigms, Fesko shows us how Reformed churches see the Spirit at work in everything we do as a church. Even the seemingly mundane aspects of helping one another in various ways as we walk with Christ are marks of the Holy Spirit empowering, encouraging, and enlivening God's people. We should never feel as though we have gone without a taste of the Spirit's goodness or of the power of the age to come as long as we have sat under faithful preaching of Holy Scripture. The Spirit himself is at work through the ordinary means of grace to bless Christ's people with an experience of grace as we live life together in the church. Fesko's book is an encouraging refresher on the majesty of the Spirit's work in making us partakers of all that Christ has won for us.

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By Christopher Campbell (1958–)

The Uses and Lessons of Plants

based on the book, *In the Garden:*
An Illustrated Guide to the Plants of the Bible
published by Whitaker House

The almond blossoms appear in late winter
Like a sudden snow or the agéd saint's hair—
A promise of the covering of sin,
A crown of many years' blessings.

The willows flourish where the water courses,
Growing quickly, letting down leafy shoots.
The righteous, like them, are planted and fed.
Israel's harps were hung there in sorrow.

The kings brought myrrh to honor
The infant Savior, just as His body, taken from
The cross, was wrapped in linen spiced with myrrh
And aloes. This cloth, discarded in the tomb,

Honored and dressed the body of our Jesus,
His death foreshadowed by Mary's anointing.
She washed his feet with tears and spikenard—
He of greater value received her rich offering.

On the cross they offered Him vinegar and gall—
The vinegar, wine gone sour, is what
The poor among them drank; the gall, a sedative
He refused so He might bear, unaided, God's wrath,

And become for us the Rose of Sharon
And the lily of the valley—the rose that
Solomon saw in the Mediterranean fields,
Unsurpassed in loveliness and glory.