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for
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Officers

South Congregational Church in Kennebunkport, Maine / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

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✦ From the Editor

Welcome to our twelfth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant*, which began in 2006 as an electronic publication and continues in that format today, as well. *Ordained Servant* itself is in its twenty-seventh year of existence. Such a journal would be nearly impossible if it depended on subscriptions for its support. Thankfully, this little journal for church officers is a ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, depending for its existence on the generous giving of God's people and the tireless efforts of those who contribute to its production from month to month and year to year. I count it as one of the great privileges of my life to be part of this endeavor.

Pictured on the front cover is the South Congregational Church in Kennebunkport, Maine. The church was built in 1824, with the exception of the portico, which was added in 1912. The cupola, restored in 1991, is designed after the style of Christopher Wren, and the steeple has the original 1824 Aaron Willard clock with its unique wooden face, still keeping accurate time and ringing on the hour.

Once again I would like to thank general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange, and the subcommittee of Darryl Hart, Sid Dyer, and Wallace King for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Diane Olinger, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, and Andrew Moody; and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. Finally, I want to thank Ann Hart for her meticulous editorial work, and Jim Scott for his excellent final proofing and formatting in InDesign of this printed volume.



—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

✦ Servant Thoughts

Editorials

Analog Elegy

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2017¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

When we moved into Chestnut Cottage in 1992, we kept the heavy black plastic and metal rotary telephone, with its sonorous bell ring, as a reminder of the historical and the material—the analog. Don’t get me wrong, the digital has made me delirious with delight in its efficiencies. How much less I would have written without those ephemeral letters and words, which even now I see, as I type, promised to be printed in hard copy. But I always feel that they are not my words, real words, until I print them out on paper and hold them in hand, fully incarnated. When they occupy space, when the slow swirl of the clock hands tell me time, I know that I am located in my embodied life. But with every screen I feel absorbed into a disembodied world, so unlike the world of the resurrection in which I live and hope. I know what you’re thinking: “He hates technology.” No, I only fear its unintended consequences—its powerful allure to unreality and even idolatry. And it’s not just a digital temptation; it is a technological one—the work of men’s hands.

This man-centered focus affects why I think cremation tells the wrong story, one of ephemeral

efficiency, like the digital letters I hammer out on keys. Not that I would condemn those who prefer ashes that the wind floats away to flesh lowered into the earth. This is a wisdom decision. I am just reflecting on the possible perils of efficiency, which is one of the main goals and benefits of electricity; we assume that efficiency is always good. Yet, it often turns out to be an autonomous ploy—worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

Escape into virtual images that lack analog substance is borne out of fear of the realities of space and time, time that robs us of all sense of permanence and personal presence. The virtual inebriates us into the illusion of endless and perfect life—controllable—without need of redemption. In real life there is no such escape—so I understand the allure of that insubstantial dream. In this world, this rock-hard world, I must face my mortality and the mess that Adam’s disobedience has wrought. The imagery of screens ill prepares me to be buried. And where will this leave me if I am not ready to breathe that last breath? In a dark shadow from which there is no exit. No wonder sociologist of technology Sherry Turkle laments the preference of so many for virtual reality (VR) instead of real life (RL). Her latest book’s title expresses this well: *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic, 2011).

The analog, as the lexicon reminds me, is itself an analogy of something else, something greater than the present world. God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). If I am seduced to ignore this analogy, how will I be moved to seek my Creator and Redeemer? The analog world is hard-edged since Adam’s fall, and so, because of our native sinfulness, it invites us to seek a digital escape. But it also invites us, with its combination of beauty and distress, to long for a better world, with memories of Eden embedded in it. The blossoming promises of spring make us long in the shroud of fall leaves for a flower that

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=593&issue_id=121.

will not fade. A gravestone on Horse Corner Road in Chichester, New Hampshire, says it well:

Hope looks beyond the bounds of time
When what we now deplore
Will rise in full immortal prime
And bloom to fade no more.

So I cherish my analog world, not in itself, but for its prodding realism. “That at least, if goodness lead him not, yet weariness may toss him to my breast” (George Herbert, “The Pulley”). This is why God has withheld ultimate rest, his greatest treasure, from us all in this present existence. Weariness is built into God’s world so that we will not adore his gifts instead of him. We must not rest in the nature that he has given, but must love him above all and find our happiness in his glory. The analog world beckons us to this glorious end. We mustn’t let virtual reality rob us of this hope.

So, in this new year, rub shoulders with the members of your church, email a distant friend, or better yet, write a letter that incarnates your care, and maybe take up skiing or racketball. Don’t seek some imaginary safe space, but rather seek the only true safe place in the universe: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:1–2). He will enable you to face the challenges of the new year. ©

Gregory E. Reynolds serves as the pastor of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of *Ordained Servant*.

Testimony: A Journey in Reformed Ministry

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2017¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

As a child of the turbulent sixties, I came to the Reformed faith via a circuitous route. Raised in a liberal Congregational church in New England, I took readily to the rebel spirit of the counterculture I discovered in architectural school in Boston in 1967. Long before the personal computer and the Internet, I was influenced by radio, TV, and the electric excitement of rock and roll. I think of us baby boomers as a technological crossover generation, because we caught the tail end of literary education. In my lifetime the electronic environment has gone from prevalent to ubiquitous.

The Lord used my Baptist mother’s and uncle’s influences and prayers to turn me to Christianity after I had exhausted a variety of forms of Eastern mysticism. After completing my exploration of Eastern sacred texts with the I Ching, I began reading the Bible. This made me realize that there was nothing like the grace of God in the gospel. Much to my joy, I discovered that the Christ of Scripture deals concretely with sin and death in a way that Buddhism and Hinduism do not. I had never really understood how good the good news is until then.

After spending time studying with Francis Schaeffer and Os Guinness at L’Abri Fellowship, and finishing my undergraduate work at Covenant College, the Reformed faith took firm hold of my soul. The encouragement of my pastor and several professors, combined with a strong desire to communicate the Word of God to others, moved me

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=601&issue_id=122. Adapted from an article in *Westminster Seminary California Update*, Spring 2012: 20–21.

to attend Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and enter the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1980 as the organizing pastor of a mission in New Rochelle, New York.

I soon learned that many of my favorite professors from Westminster in Philadelphia were leaving to start a new Westminster in California, led by Robert Strimple, Robert Godfrey, and others. Later that decade I ended up on a small three-man committee to study the possible revision of our denominational magazine, *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Jay Adams, one of the trio, convinced me that the new seminary's Doctor of Ministry program, which he had designed, was just what I needed to improve my preaching. I was hooked.

Having spent much of the early part of my training and first decade in ministry immersing myself in the Puritan and Reformed tradition, I thought I was on solid footing to reevaluate the nature of modernity and how it affects preaching. It seemed to me that many preachers were intimidated by the vaunted sophistication and superiority of electronic media, and thus were willing to compromise the simple means prescribed in the Bible to communicate God's Word to his people and the world. In January of 1990 I spent my orientation month in Escondido taking classes with Edmund Clowney, Jay Adams, Robert Godfrey, Dennis Johnson, Joey Pipa, and Joel Nederhood. The spiritual and intellectual environment was thoroughly stimulating, and given the difficulties in the church I was pastoring, it did me a world of good. It was a time of true renewal.

Most encouraging and life-altering was Dr. Joel Nederhood's intensive course, "Effective Preaching in a Media Age." He focused on television, which was still the most pervasive medium—the Internet had not yet become a force in popular culture. Consequently, he challenged me to think about the total environment in which we preach, and then about preaching itself, and how preaching relates to the challenge of electronic media. No one in the Reformed or evangelical world had come to understand the importance of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman as Nederhood had.

His report on the use of television as a medium to communicate the gospel for the Christian Reformed Church impressed me as a uniquely useful model for thoughtful evaluation of an electronic medium. Almost everyone, Christian and non-Christian, naively thought of all technologies as neutral tools. I think this is still largely the case, although there are signs of a new awareness among Christians. The effect of various media on the message and the messenger seemed rarely to be considered. I was convinced of the enormous value of Nederhood's assessment and have spent the last three decades developing his insights. By the time I completed the final phase of the doctoral program, I had moved to New Hampshire and had helped plant an OP church in Manchester, New Hampshire.

The final phase of the doctoral program, a decade after orientation, was only two weeks long, but no less stimulating than the first. By then the faculty had changed somewhat, and I enjoyed courses from Philip Ryken and Peter Jones, and some great fellowship with the director of the doctoral program, Iain Duguid, as well as James Dennison. Thankfully, the August California sun proved hotter than the questions of the examination committee, and my thesis was approved. All that remained was returning to graduate the following May. Meanwhile, Wipf and Stock published my project in the form of the book *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (2001). Jay Adams's requirement that we produce something useful for the church was a valuable prod to this volume.

The McLuhan I had once believed to be the guru of the new media turned out to be a profound critic of media, as well as a conservative Roman Catholic. He owned neither a TV nor an automobile—about as unlike a sixties hippie as one could imagine. What deceived me was the fact that while McLuhan detested the basic tenor of modernity, especially as it expressed itself in electronic media, he believed that his mission was to alert people to the media environment in order to navigate it wisely. His was a descriptive rather than a prescriptive project. Postman, on the other hand, added

a strongly prescriptive dimension to McLuhan's insights. Through my research in Westminster's doctoral program, a whole new world of interest emerged. For example, I joined the then nascent (1997) Media Ecology Association, of which Marshall's son Eric and many other media scholars are members, interviewed Neil Postman, the author of the ground-breaking book *Dr. Netherhood* had us read, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), and, best of all, rekindled my love for preaching the Word of God.

My research in homiletics and media gave me a new sense of confidence in the regular task of pastoral preaching. I concluded that, despite modern assessments of the inadequacy of preaching, it must be central to the ministry and worship of the church because it is God's chosen medium for communicating his Word. This reinforced what I already believed. Beyond this fundamental encouragement, I came to a new understanding of the relationship between written and oral communication. I realized that one fault among us Reformed preachers has been the failure to translate our excellent academic training in the theological disciplines into effective pulpit speech. This insight has enabled me to become more direct and applicatory in my own exposition of Scripture.

As a member of the OPC's Committee on Christian Education, I have enjoyed using some of the things I have learned through my initial research in WSC's doctoral program to bear on OPC ministry, especially the oversight of the denominational website and editing our journal for church officers, *Ordained Servant*. One of my passions is to challenge Christians, especially preachers, to ask critical questions about their stewardship of electronic media. The probing—an especially McLuhanesque exercise—can be painful, as I am forced to engage in it myself, but I believe it is essential for Christian maturity in ministry. Observe the media environment and act accordingly. McLuhan used Edgar Allan Poe's short story "A Descent into the Maelstrom" to illustrate this point. Every medium, and the totality of the media environment, affects, for good or ill, our relationships with God, others, the church, and God's world; and they

affect the way we perceive each of these.

I am grateful for my training at both Westminsters; the intellectual and theological integrity of J. Gresham Machen and the Old Princeton lives on. There is no dichotomy between spiritual and intellectual development. ☺

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Diminishing Humanity: How the Modern World Is Dehumanizing Us

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2017¹

by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The psalmist's age-old question, "What is man, that you are mindful of him?" is now the great question of our age, as technology has given us tremendous power to manipulate the created order. For all its benefits, it has also given sinful, autonomous man the false idea that he can redesign human nature. This is a dangerous concept, the hazards of which are becoming more evident with each passing year. Without the Creator's view of what the being he has created is, dehumanization,

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=652&issue_id=129. Originally "Reduction, Retreat, Reformation: A Christian Response to Contemporary Dehumanization," a lecture given on January 23, 1989, to the class of Dr. Dennis Roark, "Christianity and the Natural Sciences," The King's College, Briarcliff Manor, NY. This version is revised and expanded.

which began with the first sin, is inevitable. Notice that the psalmist's question is addressed to God. It is precisely the lack of transcendent reality in the modern mind that leads to the illusion of pervasive human control. The apotheosis of the human ends ironically with dehumanization.

The problem of dehumanization has emerged as one of the fundamental problems of the modern world, especially since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The Christian view of humanity, based on the transcendent special revelation of God's Word, offers unique intellectual and spiritual tools to analyze, critique, and present solutions to the problem. Tragically, both the church and the world seem only to be able to feel the pain of our diminishing humanity without really understanding the problem, much less its solution.

There is a hint of dehumanization in the International Style of architecture. This style grew out of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus School, uniting art and technology. For example, Le Corbusier's mass housing "machines for living" were built to "human proportions," but notably lacked the humanly important elements of decoration and delight.² The apotheosis of science and technology is diminishing our humanity in significant ways, so that we are becoming T. S. Eliot's "hollow men."³ C. S. Lewis warned that modern education was producing "men without chests."⁴ As quantity replaces quality, virtue is shoved aside by technique.

At the level of popular culture, the symptoms are legion. We hear people say, "I feel like a number." "I get lost in the crowd." "Nobody cares." "Whatever!" Our virtual connections have made us "alone together," longing for community, while traditional social connections are fast eroding.⁵ We

are amazed to get a live person on the other end of the phone line when we call a business or other institution. The media have so saturated us with exposure to disasters throughout the world that we become callous to suffering. Entire population groups have been liquidated: White Russians in Russia, Armenians, Jews in Germany, Mosquito Indians in Nicaragua, Kurds in Iraq, Sudanese, and the unborn daily in the Western World.

There is also a reflection of diminishing humanity in art and literature, mirrors of our culture. In Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, man disappears almost entirely. Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman said of his film *The Silence* in 1963, "God is dead. There is only silence in the universe."⁶ Much of modern art is, as George Roche said, "the nightmares of a materialistic society."⁷ The rejection of the God of the Bible diminishes the humanity in its self-expression.

The Diminishing of Our Humanity

Our rejection of a Christian view of humanity was the real problem when the rejection of any transcendent reality became an assumption of the modern mind. As G. K. Chesterton is believed to have said, "When people reject Christianity, it is not that they believe in nothing, but they will believe in anything."⁸ The late Jacques Barzun maintained that dehumanization is "brought about by the sway of number and quantity."⁹ "Science is an all pervasive energy, for it is at once a mode of thought, a source of strong emotion, and a faith as

2 First century BC Roman architect Vitruvius's three rules of good architectural design were expounded in his foundational *The Ten Books of Architecture*: firmness (*firmitas*, structural integrity), commodity (*utilitas*, usefulness), and delight (*venustas*, beauty).

3 T. S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men" was published in 1925.

4 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 1.

5 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books,

2011).

6 Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1976), 202.

7 George Roche, *A World without Heroes: The Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 1987), 71.

8 Émile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G. K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen, 1937), 211. The quote is actually Cammaerts's interpretation of something Father Brown says in "The Oracle of the Dog" (1923).

9 Jacques Barzun, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 1.

fanatical as any in history.”¹⁰ According to Daniel and Revelation, the progress of world history in its idolatry tends toward diminishing our humanity. Thus, the symbolic image of beasts. Paul describes the dehumanizing effects of idolatry as it degenerates to sexual perversion:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom. 1:22–25)

A Brief Survey of Diminishing Our Humanity

Contrary to many thinkers, like Alfred North Whitehead and Francis Schaeffer, dehumanization did not begin with the twentieth century or the “line of despair” formed by the philosophers Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and the Enlightenment. Humanity began to be diminished at the moment of the historic fall of Adam. When Adam chose to worship created reality and to seek meaning apart from God, his humanity became diminished. “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Rom. 1:25). This is what the Bible calls idolatry: locating ultimate loyalty and devotion in the created order, rather than in the personal Trinity. These are the God substitutes satirized by the psalmist in Psalms 115 and 135 and by the prophets. If we deny the historic fall, we are left with humanity the way we find it in its corrupted form.

Idolatry diminishes humanity by alienating us from the personal Creator in whose image we are made. Thus, our humanity is intimately and inextricably wrapped up in our relationship with God.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

Man’s ultimate ethical commitment determines the objects of his affections and devotion. His rebellious stance is both reflected in and cultivated by the idols he constructs. “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them” (Ps. 115:8). Idolatry dehumanizes. Idolatry is at the heart of the thought forms and moral habits of a fallen culture. Media, especially electronic media, create a pervasive environment. Thus, the vast and world encompassing Babel-like project of modernity highlights the use of technology to create a culture independent of God.¹¹

Idolatry also diminishes our humanity by alienating us from other people. Immediately after the fall in Genesis 3 and 4 we see: guilt and shame; Adam and Eve trying to cover their sin and escape from God; blaming each other; ultimately committing murder. Alienated man becomes a brutal manipulator. Our abuse of the natural world exemplifies our alienation from creation itself.

Something significant did happen with the Enlightenment. In philosophy Immanuel Kant sought to save science from the skepticism of British empiricist David Hume regarding the nature of “causality.” Hume argued that all knowledge comes through the senses, and that saying one thing causes another is a mental habit, not a fact. In his rescue attempt Kant elevated the “phenomenal” world of space and time and causality to the knowable, and free will, immortality, and theology to the unknowable “noumenal” world of God. G. W. F. Hegel absorbed all reality into the Absolute. History is the Absolute realizing itself in one grand inter-related evolutionary scheme. Science is essential to furthering the process. Thus began the process of elevating science and technology; man becomes the controller of his own destiny. God became an unnecessary hypothesis. The created order is subjected to manipulation in order to better human life without any overarching purpose

¹¹ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 24.

apart from efficiency in the glorification of humanity. The idea of God, especially in Christianity, inhibits the evolutionary progress of humans liberating themselves. French sociologist Jacques Ellul defines technique—the broader motive or leitmotif behind our uses of technology—as the human quest for control through ultimate efficiency in every human endeavor.¹² Technology without *telos* is treacherous.

Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx declared complete independence from the Christian view in science, psychology, history, and political science. The nineteenth century declared the “Ascent of Man.” The twentieth century dawned to witness the diminishment of humanity on an unimaginably brutal scale. Man is reduced to a mere aspect of the natural world, a mass of molecules, a lucky animal, easily dispensed with in order to achieve certain revolutionary ends. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer writes:

Surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, Nietzsche knew the tension and despair of modern man. With no personal God, all is dead. Yet man, being truly man (no matter what he says he is), cries out for a meaning that can only be found in the existence of the infinite-personal God, who has not been silent but has spoken, and in the existence of a personal life continuing into eternity. Thus, Nietzsche’s words are profound: “But all pleasure seeks eternity—a deep and profound eternity.”

Without the infinite-personal God, all a person can do, as Nietzsche points out, is to make “systems.” In today’s speech we would call them “game plans.” A person can erect some type of structure, some type of limited frame, in which he lives, shutting himself in that frame and not looking beyond it. This game plan can be one of a number of things:

12 Ellul defines technique as “the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in *every field of human activity*.” Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxv (emphasis in original).

It can sound high and noble, such as talking in an idealistic way about the greatest good for the greatest number. Or it can be a scientist’s concentrating on some small point of science so that he does not have to think of any of the big questions, such as why things exist at all. It can be a skier concentrating for years on knocking one-tenth of a second from a downhill race. Or it can as easily be a theological word game within the structure of the *existential methodology*. That is where modern people, building only on themselves, have come, and that is where they are now.¹³

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche declared “God is dead!” Man is an “instinctive animal.” Ultimate reality is the “will to power.”¹⁴ Adolf Hitler lived out this vision of the superman as a kind of twentieth-century Cain, another in a long line of “brutal manipulators,” diminishing humanity as he was diminished himself.

In the 1960s many of us vainly attempted to reclaim our humanity by rejecting “the establishment” and the “military industrial complex.” But our alternative of a modified American Eastern mysticism offered only an escape into the impersonalism of various forms of pantheism. Politically, the New Left of the 1920s and 1930s fueled the countercultural movement of the 1960s. As Italian political and cultural philosopher Augusto Del Noce has astutely observed, metaphysics had to be rejected in order to implement the new empirical vision of liberated man. In analyzing the influence of Wilhelm Reich’s writings on the sexual revolution, he asserts:

Indeed Reich’s thought is based on the premise, which of course is taken as unquestionably true without even a hint of a proof, that there is no order of ends, no meta-empirical authority of values. Any trace not just of Christianity but of “idealism” in the broadest sense, or of a foundation of values in some objective reality,

13 Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* 180–81.

14 Walter Kaufman, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 125.

like history according to Marx, is eliminated. What is man reduced to, then, if not to a bundle of physical needs?¹⁵

The Technological Diminishment

Technology has become the chief god in the pantheon of idols, beginning with the Enlightenment. Control over material culture is overwhelming all human concerns and aspirations. As “extensions of man,” technology was defined by the human. Presently man is being transformed as an extension of material culture and technology. What we think we control has a way of controlling us.

The modern incarnation of the idol Narcissus is revealed in the world of screens. Narcissus, a Greek god who falls in love with his own reflection, is symbolic of ultimate self-absorption. People have abandoned their porches for their entertainment centers. Witness your town or street with its eerie blue cathode ray light radiating from your neighbors’ windows as you walk by, if you ever walk by. Public space is increasingly diminished in our communities. Witness the people who are “somewhere else” even while they are in your space on a smart phone.

Couch potatoes are not only passive observers but takers, cultivating an incapacity to give of themselves. Furthermore, they have little to give. Consumption reigns. The moral nature concerned with commitment and values is replaced by the aesthetic nature concerned with the enjoyment of the senses. God created us such that the moral nature is meant to inform and control the aesthetic.

One great ironic tragedy of the world of enhanced “communication” is the problem of loneliness. Psychologists Robert Kraut and Vicki Lundmark studied the effects of Internet use with ninety-six families over two years. They concluded that “the more time individuals spent online, the greater the degree of depression and loneliness

15 Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. and ed. Carlo Lancellotti (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

they experienced.”¹⁶

Richard Stivers in his book, *Shades of Loneliness*, contends that modern mental disorders are not genetic or chemical in nature, but relational, and that relational breakdowns are in turn exacerbated by technology. “I think that a technological civilization provides an extremely harmful environment. The various shades of loneliness are the price we pay for living in a society dominated by technology.”¹⁷ In the nineteenth century personality supplanted character in defining the human.¹⁸ Stivers argues that public opinion motivates envy as the unifying principle of personality.¹⁹ “Technology makes human relations abstract and thus impersonal.”²⁰ TV promotes superficial emotions and attachments. It becomes a substitute reality. Direct experience is lost and so is reality itself.²¹ The self is no longer defined in terms of its relationship to God and others. Thus, fear and loneliness dominate.

Humans are meant to live in relationship to God and others. The superficial tendency of modern technologies is alienating. We are historically lonely because TV is an anti-narrative with no context, only the present. Those who have no past, have no future—and thus no hope.

Technology fosters gnosticism, as if humans are disembodied spirits living in the virtual rather than the real world. Marshall McLuhan warned of the “disincarnating” tendency of the electronic environment.²²

The Electronic Revolution displays a strong tendency toward what Os Guinness calls “Cybergnosticism.” [*Fit Bodies Fat Minds*, 1994, 129] McLuhan feared that the great

16 Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 41.

17 *Ibid.*, 6.

18 *Ibid.*, 13.

19 *Ibid.*, 15.

20 *Ibid.*, 17.

21 *Ibid.*, 24.

22 Marshall McLuhan, “The Brain and the Media,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message*, ed. George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1989), 184.

tendency of the global village would be “discarnate man. . . . The discarnate TV user, with a strong bias toward fantasy, dispenses with the real world. . . .” [“A Last Look at the Tube,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message* 1989, 197] In *Understanding Media* McLuhan observes: “Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the ‘Tower of Babel’ by which men sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity” [*Understanding Media*, 1965, 80].²³

The body is essential to being made in God’s image, and thus our humanity.

The Retreat of the Culture and the Church from Defining the Human

The Plague of Anti-intellectualism

The Romantic ideal of the authentic experience of the liberated individual has left us thoughtless. Harry Blamires says it well in *The Christian Mind* (1963):

Of course the very fact that nowadays we look upon convictions as personal possessions is a symptom of the disappearance of the Christian mind. It is precisely in such odd and scarcely graspable notions that the full extent of the secularization of the modern mind is glimpsed. One of the crucial tasks in reconstituting the Christian mind will be to re-establish the status of objective truth as distinct from personal opinions; to rehabilitate knowledge and wisdom in contradistinction from predilection and whim.²⁴

23 Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 57.

24 Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 40.

Anti-intellectualism deprives us of the ability to define the meaning of the human. At best secular thought has left us with an evolutionary notion that man is simply a sophisticated animal, who now has the ability to shape his own destiny and nature through biotechnology.

In the report of the President’s Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*,²⁵ Leon Kass, the report’s principal author, defines it as an “ethical inquiry.”²⁶ He distinguishes between “therapy,” which helps alleviate disease and injury, and “enhancement,” which seeks to improve humanity through bioengineering to yield better children, superior performance, ageless bodies, and happy souls. Technology without ethics is a dangerous reality. Albert Borgmann observed that the “root of the technological promise—[is] the eradication of trouble from the human condition.”²⁷

The Failure to Understand Media and Technology

Electronic media are altering the way we think, view the world, and the structure of culture. Naïveté regarding the dehumanizing tendencies of media is a major problem for both the culture and the church. “Every technological innovation is hailed as the final stride toward that universally rich and satisfying life.”²⁸

A culture informed and dominated by technology in general and electronic media in particular is deeply inhospitable to God’s Word, grace, and the sacraments, as well as the community of faith. We are coming to theological and spiritual conclusions outside the discipline of the church and the communion of saints.

25 *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, a report of the President’s Council on Bioethics (New York: Regan, 2003). Dr. Leon Kass is the principal author.

26 *Ibid.*, xx.

27 Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 78.

28 *Ibid.*, 19.

The Hope of Reformation: Reclaiming the Human

Develop Clear Thinking about Humanity with the Biblical Doctrine of Man

As Harry Blamires encourages us:

The sphere of the intellectual, the sphere of knowledge and understanding, is not a sphere in which the Christian gives ground, or even tolerates vagueness and confusion. There is no charity without clarity and firmness.²⁹

Articulate a Christian View of Humanity: Five Key Assertions

1. *The infinite-personal triune Creator has made everyone in his image.*

Personality and purpose are ultimate, not impersonality and chance. The inter-Trinitarian love and glory is shared through eternal communication in the mysterious interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of the divine Persons. God made humanity in his image so that we could communicate with God personally (Gen. 1:26; 2:7).

2. *God has spoken a personal Word to mankind in the Bible.*

Silence is not ultimate. Thus, from the beginning human communication was not only imitative of Trinitarian communication, but also covenantal in nature as God spoke to Adam in the garden. The very first human experience of communication was not social, but between God and man, and God was the first to speak. His speech was always by way of the sovereignly initiated and defined arrangement of his relationship with man, which the Bible calls a *covenant*. We were created with dignity and worth.

Humans are unique among the creatures, in contrast to the materialist biological reduction of Darwin. Barzun declares, “Man alone has a biography and he but shares a zoology.”³⁰ J. Gresham Machen, in *The Christian View of Man*, asserts that man as distinct from animal creation

“is capable of personal companionship with the infinite and eternal God.”³¹ Scripture gives us a true view of God’s world and God’s image-bearer, humankind.

3. *God has sent the True Man, Jesus Christ, to save us from our dehumanizing idols.*

The most significant declaration of Scripture is the startling statement with which John begins his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The phrase “In the beginning” harkens back to Genesis 1:1. There, as the name of the Son (Word) implies, was communication par excellence. In John 5:20 we read, “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.” The verb “shows” (δείκνυσθαι) means reveal, explain, and in the present tense indicates a continuous activity. In Christ’s high priestly prayer in John 17, we are told that there was a covenant made in eternity between the Father and the Son to save his elect people. “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (v. 4). Here is communication of the profoundest sort.

The quest for human perfection without Christ is a futile effort, but also an understandable aspiration. It represents the original deceit that man can live without God, and reflects the original intention of creation: glorious perfection in Jesus Christ.

4. *As God’s image-bearers, humanity is gifted with the ability to explore and draw out the potentialities of God’s creation.*

Our inventions must be employed in service to our fellow man. Because of sin, we must understand the ways that our inventions are both blessings and liabilities. All our inventions must be employed, above all, in service to God. Christians need to demonstrate the new humanity in Christ in every sphere and endeavor of life. Paul calls us to this complete consecration in Romans 12:1–2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the

29 Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 40.

30 Barzun, *Science*, 306

31 J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 145.

mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

5. *Exhibit true humanity in genuine community in the family, the church, and the world.*

Christians need to be better stewards of our electronic devices, so that we may focus more on face-to-face relationships. In writing my 2012 article on this topic, I was amazed to discover that this theme of the importance of face-to-face communication and fellowship is pervasive in the Bible.³²

Conclusion

Ken Myers, the host of Mars Hill Audio, was once asked, “Can modern technological man alter human nature?” He wisely responded “No, but we can do a lot of damage trying.” While Christians cannot control the damage that dehumanization inflicts, we can promote and model a Christian view of who we are as God’s image, but especially as that image is restored in the true and final man, the last Adam, Jesus Christ. ☺

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The Pulley: A Theological Reflection

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The Pulley

by *George Herbert*

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

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour,
pleasure.

When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

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

“Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

Imagine going back to God’s thoughts in Eden; this is where George Herbert’s *The Pulley* was born—in the biblical creation text, describing the creation of humankind. Herbert displays profound insight into Sabbath rest without ever using the word Sabbath. So, the image of the pulley is named only in the title, but gives metaphorical movement to the entire poem. Such is the in-

32 Gregory E. Reynolds, “Face to Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life,” *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2012), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=340; *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 20–26.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=653&issue_id=129.

tricate skill of Herbert. However, his theological acumen is not inferior to his poetic ability. For Herbert truth trumped wit—a critical feature of the Metaphysical poets—though he was a master of the latter. In this poem he exhibits penetrating insight into the nature of man and his quest for rest. Herbert explores Pascal’s “God-shaped vacuum” in every human heart, which, if not filled with God himself will not yield rest. The poem is made up of four quintets (five-line stanzas). They move from the creation of man to the answer to the question of why God withheld rest from him. He concludes with the way God moves us to find true rest.

The first stanza reveals God’s intention to bless his image-bearer with the “world’s riches,” poured out of a heavenly glass to concentrate all of the world’s wonders in the consciousness and possession of his first human creation in the Paradise garden. A “span” is the short distance between the tips of the thumb and little finger of an outstretched hand. Perhaps Herbert had Psalm 8 in mind: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:3–4). Man is small in the context of the vast universe, and yet he is made “a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned . . . with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5), and is given dominion over the entire created order. He is unique among God’s creatures.

So, in stanza two the blessings are poured out. “Strength” is first, implying not only physical power, but also mental and moral ability to create culture and rule the world with integrity. Then “beauty flowed” gives the impression of beauty’s presence everywhere and uniquely perceived by man. The entire creation reveals the beauty of its Creator, but only mankind appreciates that beauty. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:20). Then “wisdom, honour, pleasure” paints a portrait of man being given the highest dignity of all

creatures, equipped to rule the world for the glory of God and everlasting enjoyment of him. But wait, God knows something about man that would ruin his design: Sabbath rest is a unique blessing at the bottom of God’s treasure chest. So “God made a stay,” withholding this single blessing.

Stanza three explains why. The subtlety of Herbert’s theological acumen is revealed in these lines:

“For if I should,” said he,
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature . . .”

“Also”? Yes, God has entered *his* rest upon completing his creation on the sixth day. Remember, rest here is enjoyment of a completed task, not sleep. But God recognizes a special danger in giving this gift to man at creation: “He would adore my gifts instead of me” and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Mankind would seek Sabbath rest in the created order: “And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature,” eliminating him from human life, a temptation amplified in modernity. “So both should losers be.” God created man to worship and serve him above all, to glorify God and enjoy him forever in true Sabbath rest. Without such worship there can be no lasting enjoyment of God or his world, only outer darkness; God’s purpose in creating man would be frustrated. Complete rest is an eschatological gift that would come, not with the first creation, but the second creation in the second Adam. “Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’ [Gen. 2:7]; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45).

Stanza four envisions the ultimate purpose of withholding rest from man. It begins with a beautiful, adroit pun: “Yet let him keep the rest.” Everything but rest he may keep and vainly seek rest in those very blessings. Also rest rests in the glass. The built-in frustration of this vain quest for rest without God will leave man in a state of “repining restlessness,” perpetual discontent, yet with a “pining”—a longing for fulfillment. Man is constantly seeking satisfying rest in every endeavor and, even when it seems attainable, death ends the delusion, as Ecclesiastes teaches.

There can be no spiritual repose without God. So, “rich and weary” man may learn this lesson: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

When Herbert says, “If goodness lead him not,” he no doubt has Romans 2:4 from his King James Bible in mind: “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” In other words, if God’s goodness in providence doesn’t move people to turn to him, “weariness” may. There are, of course, in the Bible and church history, examples of God using both these means to bring people to himself.

The loveliest line of all is the last: “May toss him to my breast.” God has sent weariness on this great errand, to achieve intimate communion between mankind and the true and living God. This is the great end of humankind. The image of leaning on the breast of God reminds us of John’s reclining in this personal fashion (John 13:25; 21:20). So much Scripture envisions this goal: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10). “My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Ps. 84:2).

So, what is the significance of the pulley? It is a metaphor that frames the poem. The simple image of a rope running over a suspended wheel yields the paradox that pulling down lifts up. We need such to draw us to God.

Human depression and restlessness will lead to aspirations for eternal rest. The notion of a pulley is not unconnected to the central idea of ‘rest’ in the poem: . . . it is the weight of ‘rest’ on one rope which will hoist or ‘toss’ the individual to God’s level, and . . . when the believer has achieved ‘a final sabbath rest within the bosom of a loving God, then the motion ceases and the pulley reaches a point of stasis, or final rest’ (Hunter, 1976).²

2 Hellen Wilcox, ed., *The English Poems of George Herbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 549. The image

“In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most humans persist in the delusion that a person who *has everything* will be happy.”³ As I have been memorizing and reciting this poem on my walks for the past year, I have always ended with a prayer for my unbelieving children, relatives, and friends. Thank God we have this promise: “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (Heb. 4:1). And, we are encouraged to pursue Sabbath rest by the one who has won it for us, the Lord Jesus Christ: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). ☉

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of a pulley was used before Herbert by Nicol Burne in *Disputation* (1581), and by Thomas Nashe in *Red Herring* (1599). I owe several insights to Wilcox’s commentary, which is a compilation from many writers.

3 Jim Scott Orrick, *A Year with George Herbert: A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 123.

The Shape of Ministry in the OPC

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

The shape of something is its form, outline, or contours. It gives one a good idea of a large subject, but it does not get into depth on any one issue. That is what I hope to do in this essay: present a portrait of the office of minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.²

A ministry in the OPC is essentially a minister of the Word (*verbi divini minister*). As ambassadors of Christ, ministers must exegete and proclaim the message of their King. Understanding the text of Scripture and the culture in which the embassy of the church is established is necessary in order to be faithful ambassadors. All aspects of the ministry flow from the ministry of the Word. This ministry is confessional, means-of-grace focused, and pastoral in execution. The narrower—that is, more biblical—the job description, the deeper the ministry of the Word. That description must be rooted in Scripture, which is clear in our Form of Government.³

Chapter VI Minister or Teaching Elders

2. Every minister of the Word, or teaching elder, must manifest his gifts and calling in these various aspects of the ministry of the

gospel and seek by full exercise of his ministry the spiritual profit of those with whom he labors. As a minister or servant of Christ it is his duty to feed the flock of God, to be an example to them, to have oversight of them, to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing and beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, to exhort and convince the gainsayer by sound doctrine, and to dispense the sacraments instituted by Christ. Among those who minister the Word the Scripture distinguishes the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.

3. He who fills this office shall be sound in the faith, possess competency in human learning, and be able to teach and rule others. He should exhibit holiness of life becoming to the gospel. He should be a man of wisdom and discretion. He should rule his own house well. He should have a good report of them that are outside the church.

Chapter VIII Pastors

Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation of God's people, who joins with the ruling elders in governing the congregation, is called a pastor. It is his charge to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=660&issue_id=130.

2 Originally "The Shape of Ministry in the OPC" was a lecture given each June since 2010 at Camp Shiloh to the students gathered at the annual Shiloh Institute, introducing aspiring ministerial candidates to ministry in the OPC. This, of course, is my perspective after four decades of OPC ministry, but not the only perspective.

3 The Form of Government, in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Containing the Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education, 2011), VI.2–3; VIII, p. 9–11.

in Christ, visiting in the homes of the people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the gospel to the lost.

There are sadly many misconceptions of what the Christian minister is. He is not a celebrity seeking to influence people through the force of his personality; he is not a chief executive officer or social organizer developing and directing a program; he is not a motivational speaker who influences people through stories and moral lessons, promoting a more successful life in this world. A proper job description comes from God's Word. It is the ordinary ministry of Word, sacrament, and prayer. It is through ordinary men called to minister God's Word that God's extraordinary redemption in Jesus Christ is revealed.

An OPC Minister is:

A Minister of the Word

1. A Preaching-Centered Ministry *(Verbi Divini Minister)*

The centrality of live pastoral preaching is the heart and soul of pastoral ministry.⁴ Nothing digital or virtual can replace this spiritual reality. The ministry of the Word of God—the reading, preaching, and hearing of Scripture—is the supreme act of worship. All else in the life of the church flows from this.

The Bible, not the culture, defines the office of minister of the Word:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

⁴ This is the burden of my book, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001).

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:1–5)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:1–2)

The ministry of the Word must be protected from the latest fads in worship. Ways of worship are not different “styles” that suit different people. They must be conducive to worshipping a holy God with reverence and awe. “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28–29). For example, the use of PowerPoint misses the point of God addressing himself to his people face-to-face through the mediation of his Son via the personal presence of his servant, the minister of the Word. Screens distance us from people and the churchly context of preaching.

Preaching demands explaining and applying the text of Scripture, the “whole counsel of God.” The preacher must “handle the Word of God correctly.”⁵ This means preaching the Christ of Scripture in the fullness of his mediatorial office as the God-man and head of the visible church: prophet, priest, and king; preaching the whole range of his benefits: justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.⁶

In Luke 24:44–46 Jesus reveals his Old Testa-

⁵ The Directory for the Public Worship of God, in *The Book of Church Order of the OPC Containing the Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education, 2011), I.A.3.a, p. 134.

⁶ The Shorter Catechism, in *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Christian Education, 2005), Q.23–26; 33–38.

ment hermeneutic to his disciples on the Emmaus Road, demonstrating that he is revealed in all of Scripture, the Tanach (Torah, Neviyim, Ketuvim); Christ is the eternal purpose of the history of redemption from the beginning. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8, NKJV)

... making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph. 1:9–10, cf. Rom. 8:28–30)

Paul's conception of the preacher is a herald, not a persuader.⁷ In 1 Corinthians 1:21 the ambiguity of the KJV translation best captures the range of meaning of Paul's phrase "the folly of preaching" (μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος). It is important to appreciate the proper semantic range of the κηρύξ ("preacher") word group. Both the message and the method are foolish. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The ESV, NKJV, and NIV, unfortunately, all opt for the message being foolish.

"Unlike the orator," a herald of the exalted King "was not results-driven; he was obedience-driven."⁸ He is an executive instrument of the Lord, declaring a message with the authority of Christ. He comes with an announcement from heaven; he is not audience-driven, meeting audience expectation as the persuader. This is why the Second

7 I have explained this in greater detail in "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 OPC*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 311–34.

8 Duane Litfin, "Swallowing Our Pride: An Essay on the Foolishness of Preaching," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 119.

Helvetic Confession makes this startling statement: "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God." The power of the message is given to the herald by the King himself; it is not determined by audience expectation. As Paul says in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Elsewhere he asserts the nature of his ministry with a different but equally humble metaphor, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1).

So, the message, the medium of proclamation, and the messenger as a simple herald, are perfectly suited to the Gospel of the suffering and crucified Christ. The preacher is utterly dependent upon the persuasive power of the Spirit of the King. As even the apostle Paul says, we should be

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 (confident, not brash) 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)

Trusting God in the preaching moment in the power of the Spirit of Christ is where the oral nature of preaching comes into its own. The notes are not a sermon, neither is the mere memory of a text. The sermon is the communication of God with his people through his messenger.

2. A Confessional Ministry (Confessional Mind-set)

Ministry of the Word is rooted in the ancient historical traditions of biblical interpretation. We stand on the shoulders of our fathers in the faith, especially as theology has been articulated in the confessions of the church, beginning with the ecumenical creeds of the ancient church. To shun confessions is the folly of starting over when mapping the complex terrain of biblical revelation. As C. H. Spurgeon once wisely eschewed such biblicism:

Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scriptures without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd that certain men who talk so much about what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves should think so little of what He has revealed to others. My chat this afternoon is not for these great originals, but for you who are content to learn from holy men, taught of God, and mighty in Scriptures.⁹

The confession and catechisms are time-tested road maps of the Bible. While they are not infallible, they represent the work of thousands of pious minds seeking to accurately portray the terrain of Scripture in summary fashion.

Remember also that these confessional statements are compromise documents. Where men of orthodox faith disagreed, they agreed that these matters could not be the confession of the whole church. We confess what we agree the Bible clearly teaches. This is the confessional mind-set.

3. An Ordinary-Means-of-Grace Ministry (52 Holy Days)

Public worship is the vital center of Christian life. Preaching, the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism, and prayer, enjoyed corporately, undergird and shape all aspects of the ministry and life of the church. This is the ordinary, or regular, way that God disciplines his people. This takes place primarily on the only holy day of the new covenant era, the Lord's Day.

Attention should be paid to what we might call "covenantal liturgy." That is the form of worship that is shaped by the attitude of worship "with

reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28). Our directory defines worship: "An assembly of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other but is, before all else, a meeting of the triune God with his covenant people."¹⁰ The content, or elements, of public worship are not only to be clearly warranted by God's Word, but also ordered by that same Word. For example, while that order will vary from church to church, God must be approached through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ with prayer for forgiveness and blessing before the other elements of worship can be engaged in.

This order, or liturgy, then forms the life of the church in this world. We are told by some that we must imitate popular culture in our "worship style" or young people will not come. But that stance shirks the responsibility of teaching a better way—the folly of imitation supplanted by the beauty of Reformed worship, formed according to the Word of God. Ministers and elders have a pedagogical responsibility to teach that worship must be regulated by the Word of God, that is the "regulative principle." The forms of worship must be suitable to the content of worship.

4. A Church-Centered Ministry

A ministerial oath from Geneva's *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1561 demonstrates the Reformed commitment to the centrality of the church:

I promise and swear that in the ministry to which I am called I shall serve God faithfully, bearing his word with purity for the edification of this Church to which he has obligated me. I further promise and swear that I shall not misuse his doctrine to serve any human inclinations or to please any living man, but that I shall employ it conscientiously to serve his glory and for the use of his people, to whom I am debtor.¹¹

10 The Directory for the Public Worship of God, I.B.1, p. 125.

11 Pierre Ch. Marcel, *The Relevance of Preaching*, ed. William Childs Robinson, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 110.

9 C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (1876; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1969), 1.

An Ambassador of Christ

1. Living in our Culture with the Church as a Counter-Environment: “Spirituality of the Church”

Being the church is the best thing Christians can do for our lost world. The doctrine of “the spirituality of the church” distinguishes the church as a uniquely spiritual institution bounded by the parameters of the Great Commission. In other words, the Bible defines the church’s mission. The visible church, structured according to the Word as an embassy of the risen Lord, announces and embodies *his*, not *our*, message to a lost world. Paul reminds us of his position in a pagan culture, preaching “the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains” (Eph. 6:20). The apostolic identity and mission of the church is clearly defined: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Ken Myers wittily reminds us of the danger of seeking to win the world by adopting its methods and media: creating a kind of parallel popular culture in which the church is “of the world but not in the world.”¹² *Terroir* in viticulture is the climate, soil, and farming techniques, the environment in which good grapes are grown for winemaking. The *terroir* of Christian discipleship is not the culture, but the Word that forms the life of the church. The uniquely transcendent reality of the gospel is the church’s authentic environment. The realm to which we invite people from the world is a domain antithetical to the world’s environment. They don’t need more of what they already have.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may

discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1–2)

Conformity to the world is the default position of every sinner born into the world. The church, formed by the preached Word, is the only environment that transforms lives that glorify God and enjoy him forever.

2. Living in our Culture as Ambassadors of Christ

Being an embassy requires understanding of the surrounding culture to which one comes as an emissary of another country. This means cultural participation along the lines of the Lord’s advice to the exiles in Jeremiah 29:7: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” But proper exegesis of the culture demands understanding and interpretation from a biblical perspective, through the lens of Scripture.

It is significant that Princeton Theological Seminary is closely associated with a university. Reformed ministry is to be well-rounded in the context of the liberal arts. That is the Princeton tradition in which we stand. Properly understood this does not compromise the antithesis of the church. Thus, OPC ministry seeks to avoid cultural compromise, which imitates the world, and cultural separatism, which seeks to create a culture all its own. The believer is to be spiritually separate in the midst of the world, as Paul reminded the Corinthian church, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:9–10). So, Jesus prayed for the church in his petition to the Father: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

Another temptation among Christians is the quest for cultural dominance, often referred to as redeeming or transforming culture. That healthy churches will have a salutary effect on a culture,

12 Kenneth A. Myers, *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989), 18.

no one should doubt; but it will only do so if the church pays attention to its biblical job description—to being the church.

So, respectful engagement with our culture retains the antithesis, while enjoying the presence of natural law and common grace in the world. After all, God is the Lord of both the church and the culture. Peter addresses this engagement:

In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15–16)

3. Living as Pilgrims Preaching of Another World to Mortals

Modern people, by and large, live for the world, believing that the present evil age is all there is. Foreign to this mind-set is the idea that here we have no continuing city, but in Christ there is a glorious city on the horizon. This perspective is coupled with the present access that Christians enjoy through the unique mediation of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, connecting us with transcendent heavenly reality, experience of the new creation now. The future is already partly present in the true church. The writer of Hebrews captures this “now and not yet” perspective:

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . . These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But

now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. . . . For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. (Heb. 11:9–10, 13–16; 13:14)

As citizens of heaven, the church is tasked with making the invisible visible to a lost and dying world. Jesus makes this clear in his high priestly prayer:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22–23)

An Undershepherd of Christ

1. Pastoral Work: Shepherd-Leaders, not Defined by the Culture

An OPC minister shares pastoral oversight of the church in every arena—local, regional, national, and international—with ruling elders. The biblical model of Presbyterian governance fosters corporate wisdom among leaders in planning and spiritual warfare:

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. . . . Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed . . . for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory. (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6)

The minister must not allow secular concepts of leadership (mentioned in the introduction) to subvert his biblical calling. God’s Word gives the minister his job description. So you are not a business manager, a psychologist, or an entertainer. Also certain tasks, which may be legitimate in their place, must not be allowed to compromise the time devoted to local ministry. OPC ministers are not called primarily to be conference speakers, perpetual bloggers, blog readers, or even authors:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Tim 4:1–2)

2. Implications of Media Stewardship for our Ministry in the Church

In the midst of our so-called “communications revolution,” the electronic environment is seriously undermining face-to-face encounters in our culture and in the church. Thus, for the ministry the centrality of personal presence, once assumed, has now become imperative as a healthy corrective to the loneliness and alienation of our culture. An all-round ministry means the pastor preaches and leads the people in worship, together with the elders personally overseeing the life and ministry of the church.¹³

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, . . . Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. (1 Thess. 2:17; 2 John 1:12)

Ministers should consider their personal presence with those to whom they minister in the church essential to effective ministry: “As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. . . . Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (2 Tim. 1:4; 3:14).

It is the duty of the minister and the elders to be aware of and seek to correct some of the most deleterious effects of the social media: they may undermine ecclesiastical authority, foster gossip,

and lead to depression among adolescents, among other things. OPC ministers are called to teach media wisdom and stewardship (media ecology), along with technological etiquette. When we know people well face-to-face, then texting, email, and phone calls can be effective supplements—in that order, from the least personal to the most. But they never replace personal, face-to-face presence.

There are many dimensions to this pedagogical need. Ministers should encourage people: to read good literature deeply, especially the Bible; to have a “cool spot” to eliminate distractions. They should discourage people from coming to doctrinal and ethical convictions on the Internet, from gossiping, and from making decisions about the church on Facebook. Encourage them to seek out church officers with questions about doctrine and church life. Encourage them to spend time with their families, developing the art of conversation. Emphasize the importance of Sabbath keeping and family and personal devotions. This is the day the Lord has set aside for us to enjoy the Lord’s presence in the presence of his people. This is what forms the Christian life. Be ready to instruct people about why we worship the way we do.

3. Fathering a Spiritual Family

An OPC minister cares for all kinds of people. “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thess. 5:14). This means a ministry of humility and gentleness (church militant is not to be confused with the church belligerent):

And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24–26)

Paul describes his ministry to the Thessalonians in the most tender parental terms:

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing

13 See Gregory E. Reynolds, “Face to Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life,” *Ordained Servant* (2012): 20–26; *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2012), http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=340.

mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:7–8)

The minister should be cultivating the full range of church ministry in congregational life:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom 12:14–18)

4. Maintaining the Unity of the Church

An OPC minister is institutionally and personally connected with the larger church, regionally in the presbytery, and nationally in the general assembly. This connectionalism is a vital part of Presbyterian government.

Because we are united doctrinally by our secondary standards, the confession and catechisms, we keep extraconfessional agendas in check. It should be remembered, as stated above, that those standards seek to enumerate the doctrines we all agree are biblical. Our own personal opinions about a wide range of issues must take a back seat to the maintenance of the peace and unity of the church.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1–3)

5. Suffering in the Cause of Christ

The OPC is mostly made up of small congregations. While smallness is not a virtue, Scripture reminds us not to despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). There are times in the history of the church and circumstances in various communions

when the Lord uses small things for his own grand purposes. This is often humbling. The stories of Paul and one of his best twentieth-century interpreters, J. Gresham Machen, remind us that the gospel of a crucified Christ will require the suffering of his disciples and leaders. While few will suffer to the degree that Paul did, the soft persecution of cultural rejection, humble church building, modest budgets and salaries, all call for an unwavering commitment that only our Lord, who gifts and calls men into his ministry, can give.

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (2 Cor. 11:21–29)

So, an OPC minister is a minister of the Word, an ambassador of Christ, and an under-shepherd of Christ. May he bless us in each new generation of ministers with men willing to forsake all for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. ☉

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✚ Servant Word

The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God: The Holy Spirit's Use of Preaching in Regeneration, Sanctification, and Illumination

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by Jeffrey C. Waddington

Reformer Heinrich Bullinger said that the preaching of the Word of God *is itself* the Word of God.² This sentiment has been a hallmark of Reformed theology regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in proclaiming the message of sacred Scripture in corporate public worship in the work of regeneration, sanctification, and especially illumination. While we recognize that the Holy Spirit can work without *means*,³ he *normally* uses means. That is, there is an *intellectual* element to the work of the Holy Spirit in the initial work of regeneration as well as the further work of progressive

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=604&issue_id=122.

2 It has been formally codified in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), ch. 1. Sam Chan attempts to buttress the traditional Reformed perspective with an appeal to speech-act theory in *Preaching as the Word of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick/Wipf & Stock, 2016). I should note that Bullinger was not idiosyncratic in his view, but reflects the common assessment of Reformers such as Luther and Calvin.

3 Westminster Confession of Faith 5.3.

sanctification and illumination that needs to be remembered in this day and age when so many think of the work of the Holy Spirit in mystical (i.e., *nonintellectual*) terms *alone*.⁴ All of this is to say that under normal circumstances, the works of regeneration/effectual calling, sanctification, and illumination involve the means of the *external preached* Word in coordination with the inscrutable *internal work* of the Holy Spirit.⁵

My goal in this article is to first walk us through some of the *biblical seedbeds* of this Reformed confession that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. This will be followed by a brief consideration of the formulation of the doctrine in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). Finally, we will consider the contemporary ramifications of holding, confessing, and carrying out this doctrinal commitment in practical terms

4 See Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) Q&A 31 on effectual calling. Whether regeneration is identical with effectual calling or an element of it, is an interesting question which will need to be pursued on another day. I do, however, want to stress that a concern for the intellectual element of the work of the Holy Spirit in the use of means does not require that one be committed to an intellectualist anthropology. Elsewhere I have argued for a *concurrentist* anthropology or function of the various aspects or powers or faculties of the human soul involving the intellect, will, and emotions. All the capacities of the human soul were created very good by God, are fallen, and restored in the elect. There is an order, or taxis, to the proper functioning of the powers of the human soul (perhaps analogous to the internal relations of the persons of the triune Godhead). See Cornelius Van Til's comments to this effect in his *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1974), 34–36, but this taxis does not require *subordination* of one power to another. Western philosophy and theology is littered with debates between intellectualists and voluntarists and neither is correct. For more on this see my *The Unified Operations of the Human Soul: Jonathan Edwards' Theological Anthropology and Apologetic* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications/Wipf & Stock, 2015), 148–86. A recent work that rightly stresses the intellectual aspect of Christian discipleship is Vern S. Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

5 This is what we mean when we say that God uses the “ordinary” means of grace: the Word, sacraments and prayer, per WSC Q&As 88–107. The biblical texts that we will shortly examine remind us that the Word that is used is the *spoken* or *preached* Word. This does not discount the personal silent reading of the Word, but that God has indicated he will bless (i.e., work through or with) the public oral reading and preaching of the Word to bring sinners to himself and to edify the saints. The Reformed Scholastics would refer to these as the *principium cognoscendi externum et internum* or the external and internal foundation of knowing.

in public corporate worship.

The Biblical Seedbeds

There are many places we could turn to in our consideration of whether there is, in fact, a biblical basis for the Reformed confidence that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. But I will focus on three texts from the New Testament: Luke 10:16, Romans 10:14–17, and 1 Peter 1:22–25. In each case we find that *the Word is integral* to the new birth, further growth, and development of Christian disciples, and that this Word comes through the *medium* of human preaching. In this public proclamation of the Word of God, the proclamation itself is the Word of God. Another way to summarize what we will find is to note that the Holy Spirit ordinarily uses the public proclamation of the Word in the drawing of sinners to himself and in the building up of the saints and that *there is nothing more powerful or efficacious* towards these ends.

In Luke 10, Jesus begins his long trek toward Jerusalem and the events of passion week. The time is coming when he will give himself up once for all for the sins of his own. The time is growing short and so he dispatches seventy (or seventy-two) disciples to go into the various towns and villages ahead of him as a sort of advance team. They are to proclaim the message of the kingdom and to heal the sick. All of this mirrors the evangelistic campaign that Jesus sent the twelve disciples on earlier in the gospel with similar results. In the earlier account, and in this one, Jesus expects a mixed response to the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. In this later account Jesus issues stern rebukes to several communities to which the disciples will go. In that denunciation Jesus states that “the one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). Jesus reveals here that the proclamation of the gospel *by his disciples* is tantamount to *his own* proclamation and that acceptance or rejection of his disciples’ message is the acceptance or rejection of him and God the Father.

In Romans 10:14–17 the apostle Paul reminds us that people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ *by means of* the preached Word:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him *of* whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*⁶

It seems clear here that the calling on the name of Christ unto salvation requires the sending of messengers who convey or herald a message which is then heard and believed and then embraced and concludes with calling on the Lord. Faith, Paul says, comes through hearing the Word of Christ. Note that in verse 14, where I have italicized the word “of,” that this “of” is not in the Greek text but is typically inserted in English translations. The text should read “And how are they to believe in him *whom* they have never heard?” Jesus, Paul tells us, is speaking through the proclamation of the gospel. Let the late John Murray draw the proper conclusion: “A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by the sent messengers. The implication is that Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation.”⁷ We see here the necessity of the preached Word *in order for* the saving of souls (and presumably the feeding of the souls of saints). And we also see that in the public proclamation of the Word of God that Jesus *is himself* speaking. That is, if I may be so bold to state the obvious, to preach the Word of God *is* the Word of God *itself* since Jesus speaks in the act of

6 Emphasis mine.

7 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:58.

proclamation himself.⁸

In 1 Peter 1:22–25 Peter reminds the recipients of his letter, and us as well, that they (and we) have been born again by means of the imperishable seed planted in them and that that seed is the “living and abiding” Word of God which was preached to them.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God*; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” *And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*⁹

Peter notes that Christians are Christians by virtue of their having believed the imperishable seed that is the living and abiding Word of God preached to them. New life began in these saints by the proclamation of the Word of God. This new life began and continues in Christians since the Word of God is *living and abiding*.

These texts are seedbeds of the doctrine that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God. We can draw these conclusions from what we have seen here: (1) When the duly recognized and appointed heralds of the gospel proclaim that gospel, the *response that proclamation engenders is tantamount to an acceptance or rejection of Jesus and the Father*. (2) The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is disseminated by means of *external oral proclamation*. (3) *In the proclamation of the Word of God/gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus himself is speaking*. (4) The *new birth* involves believing the *living and abiding Word of God* which has been *publicly proclaimed*. (5) This same new birth involves *the implanting of the imperishable Word*, which in turn is *believed on*. (6) Since this imperishable seed is the *living and*

⁸ Paul’s citation of Isaiah 52:7 reminds us that the authoritative proclamation of the Word of God is a *joyful* task indeed.

⁹ Emphasis mine.

abiding Word of God, *it continues to bear fruit* in the *ongoing* life of all those who believe it. All of this demonstrates the biblical provenance of the Reformed dictum that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God.

The Second Helvetic Confession

This Swiss confession from 1566 codifies the insight of Heinrich Bullinger, noted at the beginning of this article. I will highlight the appropriate portions from chapter 1 of the confession:

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned, nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good.

Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written ‘No man shall teach his neighbor; for all men shall know me’ (Jer. 31:34), and ‘He that watereth, or he that planteth, is nothing, but God that giveth the increase’ (1 Cor. 3:7). For albeit ‘No man can come to Christ, unless he be drawn by the Heavenly Father’ (John 6:44), and be inwardly lightened by the Holy Spirit, yet we know undoubtedly that it is the will of God that his word should be preached even outwardly. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, ‘He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do’ (Acts 10:6).

For he that illuminates inwardly by giving men the Holy Spirit, the self-same, by way of commandment, said unto his disciples, ‘Go ye into

all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). And so Paul preached the Word outwardly to Lydia, a purple-seller among the Philippians; but the Lord inwardly opened the woman's heart (Acts 16:14). And the same Paul, upon an elegant gradation fitly placed in the tenth chapter to the Romans, at last infers, "Therefore faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:14–17).

*We know, in the meantime, that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, which is a thing appertaining to his power; but we speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.*¹⁰

First, the Word of God preached is the Word of God and none else ought to be expected. When it is preached it is received by the faithful for what it is, the very Word of God. *Note this is not said merely of the public reading or recitation of the biblical text which is to be expounded but of the whole preaching event.*

Second, it is the Word of God preached that is efficacious and not the character of the preacher. Even if the preacher should be wicked the Word of God still is the Word of God and the preaching is the Word of God.

Third, the *outward or external exposition* of the Word of God is *not made irrelevant or superfluous by the necessity of the internal work* of the Holy Spirit. *The Holy Spirit is the source of both the external Word and the internal enlightenment* of the mind and renewal of the will, to use the language of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

We see here that the Holy Spirit has "tied" himself to his own Word. While it is true that the Holy Spirit can work apart from the Word, he ordinarily works in and through the Word he himself inspired the human writers to set down. This theological grammar is not unique to the Second

10 Phillip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper, 1882), 3:832–33.

Helvetic Confession, but also is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q & A 89:

Q: How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A: The Spirit of God maketh the reading, *but especially the preaching of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.*¹¹

Here we see that the Holy Spirit makes the preaching of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners (i.e., illumination/regeneration and/or effectual calling) and of building up the saints in holiness and comfort through faith (illumination/sanctification). There is a *careful wedding* of the external Word inspired by the Holy Spirit and the internal correction of the intellect, will, and emotions by the Holy Spirit according to their proper order and manner/function.

Contemporary Significance and Application

What do we make of this traditional Reformed doctrine? Is it, in fact, the case that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God in and of itself? Are we saddled with an archaic notion of the importance of preaching? I would argue that we are not saddled with an archaic notion if by archaic we mean untrue. The age of a doctrinal formulation speaks not one whit directly to its truth value and practical usefulness. Our brief consideration of three biblical texts should make us sufficiently aware of the fact that to say that the preaching of the Word of God is itself the Word of God was not the mere personal opinion of Heinrich Bullinger or the Westminster Divines, but actually captures the warp and woof of the fabric of the biblical witness to itself. We could considerably expand the foundation of this doctrine if I had the time and space. This is not merely an archaic leftover that needs to be abandoned quickly. On the contrary it is a doctrine we need to recall, reaffirm, and put into immediate practice if we do not

11 Emphasis mine.

so embrace it already.

Bullinger and the other Reformers understood that the Word of God was the *viva vox Dei* and the public proclamation of the Word partook of that very *living voice of God*. Have we lost faith in the power of the Word of God? Do we, instead, invest man-made stratagems with divine efficacy? While we rightly recognize that the Holy Spirit must illuminate the minds of both saints and sinners so that they would rightly receive, understand, and apply God's Word, that does not negate the necessity of the external Word. That Word, at the bare minimum, supplies the grist for the spiritual mill that the human soul becomes through the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. We grievously err when and if we pit the internal work of the Holy Spirit (the so-called *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*) against his external work of producing and sustaining and using the Scriptures and in his use of the public proclamation of that same Word.

While it is true that God can work apart from the means of his Word (his *potentia absoluta* or absolute power), under ordinary circumstances he uses the reading, but especially the public preaching, of the Word as the means of bringing sinners to faith in Christ and saints to a deeper faith (the *potentia ordinata* or ordained power). God both brings about the new birth (regeneration and/or effectual calling) and the further growth in grace (illumination and sanctification) by means of the preaching of his Word. The Word is not optional. Its public proclamation is not optional. The new birth is not optional. Growth in grace is not optional.

Conclusion

The preaching of God's Word is itself God's Word. Jesus addresses us in the public proclamation of his very own Word. God uses means. He used human authors to write the Bible. He used human heralds to proclaim the gospel in the days of the early New Testament church. He uses human heralds now. The Holy Spirit is at work in his Word *now*; not just back "then." Every time a duly gifted and appointed minister steps into the pulpit

and expounds the Scriptures, Jesus is addressing his people through him. The preaching of the Word of God *is itself* the Word of God. There is no hope without it.¹² ©

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12 I have assumed throughout this essay that the minister has done his due diligence in preparation for the public proclamation of the Word of God. So, to be technical, the long form of my thesis would then be, assuming the minister has properly prepared his sermon, the public proclamation of that portion of the Word of God he is expounding is itself the Word of God. I trust my readers know that the minister *is to* both diligently prepare for his preaching and at one and the same time, *he is not to* rely upon that preparation in the sense of expecting that the mere human preparation of a sermon is sufficient to convince and convert sinners or build them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. That is God the Holy Spirit's work.

✦ Servant Worship

The Importance of Stagecraft for Worship Services

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by Jonathan Looney

Several years ago, a fellow ruling elder in our church asked me if we could stop sitting in front of the congregation when serving the Lord's Supper. As we discussed it, and he tried to explain the reasons for his request, he finally said, "I never know where I am supposed to look." He was simply uncomfortable being in front of a large crowd in that situation. Quite frankly, his discomfort may be appropriate: it is correct to take leadership in a public worship service seriously. And, any time we are on the platform² (or, arguably, any time an elder is present in a worship service, regardless of his seating location), we are leading the congregation in worship.

A worship service is a dynamic stage. Like the best dramas of the theater, elders invite the congregation to join us in what is occurring on the platform. As we worship, we want to draw

God's people to worship God with us. Like a stage drama, we work with emotions that are a natural part of our worship. (And, more than in a stage drama based in fiction, the emotions in worship are a genuine response to profoundly important matters.) As we marvel at the wonder of God's glory, we invite the congregation to marvel with us. As we are utterly saddened by the seriousness of our own sins, we invite the congregation to grieve with us. And, as we feel the incredible joy of knowing God's forgiveness for those sins, we invite the congregation to rejoice with us.

There are a few principles that are worth reviewing. First, what we do on the platform *does* matter; therefore, it is important that our facial expressions, dress, tone of voice, and actions be intentional (not occurring without thought) and be intentionally designed to lead the congregation in worship. Second, we can have a positive or negative impact. Our goal is not just to avoid making mistakes; rather, our goal is to have a positive impact in encouraging the congregation to worship. Third, our goal is to *lead* the congregation in *genuine* worship. We can aid this by modeling our genuine worship for them.

Stagecraft can be learned. I am deeply indebted to many over the years (particularly, Bruce Montgomery, director of my college's glee club) who taught me the basic skills I use to this day. I hope to pass along some of those skills to you through this article.

Preparation

As you walk up to the microphone (or even just sit on the platform), many questions may go through your mind: "What am I supposed to say? Who is that man staring at me from the fourth row? Did I remember to zip my fly? Did I remember my notes for the prayer? Did I remember a bulletin so I know what songs to announce?" Which of these questions is supposed to prepare your mind for worship?

It is critical that you spend adequate time preparing for the worship service so that you will not be distracted by extraneous things. Moreover,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=626&issue_id=125.

2 Different congregations have different physical arrangements. Sometimes there is a platform on which the worship leaders stand. Sometimes there is no platform, but the worship leaders stand at the front on ground level. I have even attended one worship service where the worship leaders stand in the middle and are surrounded on all four sides by the congregation. You know when you are in the location where those leading worship usually stand, whatever the physical arrangement may be. I am using "on the platform" as a simple way to refer to this location.

I would recommend that you adopt a routine to ensure you do this preparation every time. The routine will both ensure that you actually are prepared, and also may provide some comfort for you.

Your preparations should cover these general areas: dress (make sure your dress is appropriate and is properly buttoned/zipped/tied), personal care (go to the restroom prior to the service; take any necessary medicine; and, drink/eat enough to fuel yourself), tools (ensure you have any necessary notes and a Bible; ensure that you will have access to a song book while on the platform; ensure you know how to use the microphone; and ensure you have any other “tools” you will need), mental (review what you will do; identify and address any areas where you are unsure about your role), and emotional (free your mind of outside emotions or distractions; recognize, and take steps to address, your anxieties).

This list probably seems long, but I assure you it is just a summary. If you think about your own circumstances, you may find items you want to add. If it helps, make an actual checklist that you use in your preparations. In my opinion, the greater danger for many people is in under preparing, rather than over preparing.

Suffice it to say that adequate preparation is (humanly speaking) a prerequisite for intentionally making a positive impact on the worship service. But, of course, in God’s gracious providence, I have gotten through worship services where I was under-prepared. So, we must not despair when we realize our preparations have fallen short.

Facial Expression

Have you ever been to a choir concert and thought, “Those people aren’t enjoying themselves?” Instead, it actually may be the case that they simply paid too little attention to their facial expression. Our inner emotions are not always displayed in our facial expressions when we are in front of a large group of people.

It is hard to have a good facial expression while leading a congregation in worship. Our tendency is to be so focused on not making a mistake

(or, to put it positively, so focused on the thing we are doing), that we pay too little attention to our facial expression. And, yet, this is so critical to getting people in the congregation to participate with us in the natural emotions of the worship service.

The very first thing we must do is to look interested. Even if we can’t express any other emotion, we must express that one. Otherwise, the people in the congregation may wonder (whether consciously or subconsciously) why they should be interested in worship. Note that it is not enough to *be* interested in the worship service; rather, you must also *express* this emotion. And, contrary to what you might think, your facial expressions do not automatically express the reality of your emotions (and, this may be especially true when you are in front of a large group of people).

Thankfully, it is *easy* to look interested. You convey most emotion with the eyes,³ and this one is no different. Simply raising both eyebrows a slight amount can convey interest. Look in a mirror and try this. Get a second opinion from your wife or another elder. And, then, use a mirror to practice this for a while. (And, you do need to practice this. Your eyebrow muscles may hurt if you try to do this for an hour straight with no previous practice.) Ideally, you should reach the point where you instinctively put on your “interested face” at the start of the worship service and don’t release it until the end. Even if you allow your mind to wander, you don’t want to model that mind-wandering for people in the congregation. Practice is essential in maintaining that “interested face” in all circumstances.

Once you have mastered showing interest, you may want to practice other emotions, as well. Remember that the aim is not to convey false emotion; however, when there is genuine emotion, we must be able to convey it to the congregation. How are they to rejoice with us when they don’t

³ As an experiment, try having someone crop some photographs of people so you can only see the area around their eyes. See if you can accurately guess the emotions shown in the full photographs from the images of the eyes. Another interesting experiment is to try showing emotion without involving the eyes. I think you will find it is very hard to do that.

see us rejoicing? How are they to sorrow with us if they don't see us sorrow? Leading the congregation in worship includes leading them in appropriate emotional responses to the content of the worship service.

If you usually rehearse the things you will speak in the worship service, you should include your emotions as part of your rehearsal. We tend to do things the way we practice them, so it is important that you include the critical element of emotions when you practice speaking. Spontaneous emotions are good and should not be suppressed—that is not the goal of the practice I suggest. However, it is important that you prepare for this particular facet of leading the people in worship and not merely rely on the emotions that come to you (or may fail to come to you) in the moment.

Singing seems to present some interesting challenges in showing emotion. Certainly, that is not because songs are void of emotions. (For example, what Christian can sing “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” without being moved to sorrow, thankfulness, and, perhaps, even wonder?) And yet many people seem to have trouble showing emotion while they sing. The answer to this is practice.

I think many people have trouble showing emotion while they sing because they are trying to show the emotion in their mouths—the same mouths they are trying to use to sing. However, recall that you convey emotion in your eyes, so it is possible to convey emotion with your eyes while your mouths are fully engaged in singing.

It also should be easier to show emotion while you sing if you are familiar with the song. If you are concentrating on a new tune or unfamiliar words, you may be so focused on merely getting the words or notes correct that you completely miss the emotion of the song and are not able to model any emotion for the congregation other than concentration. This is yet another way in which good preparation can help you.

Focus

Anytime someone else is speaking, you should

focus on the speaker. By doing so, you both draw the congregation's attention to the speaker and subconsciously communicate to them that you think it is worth paying attention to the speaker. By contrast, if you look away from the speaker, others may try to follow your gaze to see what you found more interesting than the speaker. Or, if you simply stare into space, others may subconsciously assume that you find what the speaker is saying to be uninteresting or boring, and you may lead them to have similar thoughts.

Because of the arrangement of our church, when I am on the platform, I am often situated where I cannot easily see the pastor's face when he is speaking. During the Lord's Supper (when the elders sit in front, facing the congregation), he is behind me enough that I would need to turn my body to be able to see him. In these cases, I imagine an invisible line extending forward from his nose and I focus on that line. I am not actually looking “at him,” but the effect on the audience should be similar. Other times when I am on the platform, he may be in front of me. Again, I simply pretend that I can see his nose through his head and focus on that. In these cases where you cannot actually see the speaker's face, it seems easier to become distracted. Therefore, it is that much more important to focus on showing proper emotion (beginning with “interest”).

When you are the speaker, you should focus on what you are doing. It is good to make eye contact with the congregation, shifting your gaze from person to person. If possible, it is good to cover the entire width of the sanctuary so no one feels like they are in an isolated part of the congregation, or are somehow disconnected from the worship.

Obviously, none of this changes the fact that the actual focus of the worship service is God. It is up to the session to order the worship service such that the focus of the service is the worship of God. When that is done, drawing the congregation to focus on those leading the worship service should in turn draw them to focus on the worship of God (and, therefore, to God himself, who is the object of our worship).

Distractions

Distractions are an inevitable part of life. When they occur in a worship service, it is often best to acknowledge them, deal with them, and then return to worship (as best you are able).

Distractions can be big or small. I have been in a worship service where someone fainted and we had to call the paramedics to help her. In another worship service, a man who was experiencing a bad reaction to a recently prescribed medication and began to talk during the sermon. Those qualify as “big” distractions. Your instincts will probably already guide you on what to do in those circumstances: you need to address the distraction and assess what path forward will produce the result most conducive to the worship of God. In some cases, the best choice may be simply to break into a prayer service.

However, other distractions can be subtler. Perhaps, the classic example of this is when everyone knows that something is wrong and they are waiting for someone to address it. Things dropped on the platform can also serve as distractions. If the speaker drops his handkerchief, a pencil, or a notecard, you will likely find that people keep looking at it, waiting for someone to pick it up. Even though this seems like a minor thing, it can distract people’s attention, so it should be resolved quickly—even if that means that someone goes to the platform to pick up the dropped item.

Microphone or other audio-visual problems can also be distracting. While the situation is unresolved, people may be distracted as they wait to see what will happen. In these cases, it is probably better just to address the situation head on and quickly announce a resolution than to leave it unresolved or to search too long for a solution. So, if your microphone stops working, it may be better just to say, “We’ll continue without microphones for the rest of the service, so please move forward if you are having trouble hearing.” This will probably produce a better result than trying to speak while someone continues to search for a solution.

It is almost inevitable that distractions will happen. When they do, you should address them,

“resolve” them (even if the resolution is that you will simply work around the problem), and then, if appropriate, return the people’s focus to the worship of God.⁴

Microphones

Microphones are worthy of special mention because of their ability to be a very prominent distraction. Remember that microphones can always be on, so you should always treat them that way. If wearing a lapel or over-the-ear microphone, take it off (or, if that is not possible, at least double-check that it is completely disabled) before going to the bathroom. Likewise, be careful about having private conversations anywhere near a microphone (whether a lapel microphone or a fixed microphone).

If using a microphone with batteries or a wireless microphone, it is good to have an easily accessible backup microphone (hand-held or on a stand) which you can easily start using if the batteries on your primary microphone stop working or the wireless microphone encounters interference. Advanced planning like this can help minimize the distraction that occurs when these devices encounter problems.

Final Thoughts

It is normal to feel nervous in new situations, but I fall back on my practice to get through them. (Note that word “practice.” You should practice these skills.) On the other hand, it is also possible to become complacent when you are too comfortable. This can cause you to appear to lack interest in what is occurring around you, whether that is accurate or not. Again, the antidote is practice. It may be helpful to ask someone (such as your wife or another elder) to keep you accountable for expressing appropriate emotions in a worship service.

You must also be intentional about directing the focus of the people to the speaker. And, try to

⁴ Obviously, distractions caused by people in the congregation (for example, talking on a cell phone during the sermon) may require some discretion or delicacy. Use your best judgment in addressing these.

plan ahead to minimize distractions, and do not let distractions that do occur (no matter how seemingly insignificant) go unresolved for long.

When done well, these things really can make a difference. Whether on the platform or in your seat, and whether you are speaking or not, you can help lead the congregation in the worship of God by showing appropriate emotions, directing their attention to the speaker, and preventing (or minimizing) distractions.

And these things aren't just important for your normal congregants. The next time you are in a worship service, ask yourself this question: If I were an outsider and knew nothing about Christianity, what would I think about this worship service? Does it look like this is an interesting, emotional, and profoundly important meeting? Or, does it appear that this is merely a matter of rote obligation? We know the reality is the former. Let's all aim to show that. ☺

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Servant Missions

The Ministry of the Regional Home Missionary

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by DeLacy A. Andrews, Jr.

I was thinking it was a good day when my telephone rang in early January 2000. In the first place, the world as we know it had not come to a tragic end as many dooms-day prognosticators had predicted; and second, the new Presbytery of the Southeast of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was about to be born. I was excited about the kingdom prospects that the new presbytery afforded.

When I heard the happy greeting from my dear friend Jim Heemstra, I was delighted. Jim had served for many years as Regional Home Missionary (RHM) of the Presbytery of the South and was instrumental in my coming into the OPC in 1994. I had already anticipated calling him later in the day. We had much planning to do.

In late fall 1999 the ministers and elders of the churches that would comprise the new presbytery met in Matthews, North Carolina, to adopt standing rules and to elect and organize all committees. We wanted to “hit the ground running” at our first official presbytery meeting after the New Year. I was elected to the Home Missions Committee and appointed as chairman. I eagerly accepted the position, having a zeal for church planting, but I also had an ace in the hole. I was willing to serve as chairman of the committee because everyone

involved assumed that Jim Heemstra would serve both presbyteries.

I was shocked when I heard his words, “Lacy, I don’t want the job.”

“What job?” I asked, not believing what I was hearing.

“It’s just too big,” he stated flatly. “I believe I need to continue to work only in the Presbytery of the South.”

“But, you live within the bounds of the new presbytery,” I countered, knowing he was residing in Maryville, Tennessee, helping in the mission work there.

“Sandy and I plan to move back to Florida shortly,” he said.

My mind was reeling. This was not what I had signed up for in the new presbytery. We were inheriting a number of mission works from both the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic and the Presbytery of the South. We had mission works in Mount Airy and New Bern, North Carolina; London, Kentucky; Marietta, Georgia; and Bristol, Cookeville, and Maryville, Tennessee. How was the newly elected committee, of which I was chairman, supposed to care for so many mission works without a Regional Home Missionary?

“Why don’t you become *our* Regional Home Missionary?” I blurted out, grasping for straws.

Jim was insistent that he needed to continue his labors in the Presbytery of the South and that we would be fine without him.

I made one more attempt to dissuade him, “Jim, we’re going to need a Regional Home Missionary.”

“I know you are,” he replied.

He hesitated for a moment before he continued, “Let me give you some advice.”

“Okay,” I said, looking for any reassurance I could find.

“When you call a man, don’t call a young man,” he said firmly. “I don’t care how gifted he is, RHMs need to have wisdom that is only gained over time and through experience.”

I was mentally taking notes thinking, I need to remember this advice after we hang up the telephone.

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=631&issue_id=126.

“Second, don’t go outside the presbytery. It needs to be a man the churches know and trust.”

I remember little else from that conversation. I do recall thinking of all the older men in our presbytery who might be able to serve as our Regional Home Missionary. My heart started pounding when I finished going through the potential list of names. At the end of my calculation there was only one name that remained on the list. It was *my* name.

Later that evening I told my wife about my conversation with Jim, and also about my conclusion.

I shrugged it off by saying to her, “It can’t be me. Our church is nowhere near ready for me to leave. We’ve got to get the church out of the rented facility we’re in and into a more permanent meeting place. That may be five years down the road. By then we will already have a Regional Home Missionary.”

As we often learn, God has his own plans. In less than two years, on January 1, 2002, I began my labors as the Regional Home Missionary of the Presbytery of the Southeast.

At my first Regional Home Missions Conference as an RHM in November 2002, I immediately realized I’d become a member of a very interesting brotherhood. I recall looking around the table at the more seasoned RHMs, such as Jim Bosgraf, Jim Heemstra, and Don Poundstone. There were also men closer to my age such as Gary Davenport and the newly installed RHM of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic—my old friend Dick Ellis.

The thing that struck me most was how differently we conducted our ministries. Jim Bosgraf flew from mission work to mission work in two different airplanes. Jim Heemstra hauled his trailer from place to place, spending six months to a year in each location. Gary Davenport was a very efficient administrator and seemed always to be thinking of new strategies for church planting. Dick Ellis conducted his work in the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, while continuing to pastor his congregation in Frederick, Maryland. I have to admit I thought Dick had lost his mind. We were all very different, with varying gifts, serving presby-

teries that had unique needs and opportunities. It was clear to me that God had given the right men to the right presbyteries. However, these men all had certain things in common—a love for Christ, evangelism, and church planting, and a love for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

To consolidate the different approaches of our RHMs would be an impossible task, so this article will view the RHM ministry through my own spectacles.

Finding a Biblical Model

I remember an encounter I had with a charismatic Christian a few years ago.

When she asked me about my ministry, and I tried to explain it to her, she exclaimed as her eyes widened, “You’re an apostle!”

I was startled by her reply and quickly said, “No, not really; well, only in a very broad sense.”

Some may consider our work to be like that of the apostles. We are missionaries and church planters. Our ministries are regional, rather than confined to a single congregation. The apostles clearly did this kind of ministry. Yet, they were commissioned directly by the risen Lord Jesus Christ and had an authority that cannot be duplicated. They were foundational to the church, and once that foundation was laid, the office ceased. Their authority continues in the inscripturated Word.

Titus has also been suggested. His work was regional, among the churches on the island of Crete. Yet, I’m convinced his labors resemble the work of our church planters more than our Regional Home Missionaries. RHMs often serve as the initial gatherers in mission works. It is later that a church planter is called. The churches in Crete had already been founded by the apostle Paul. Titus was commissioned to “put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5). Convinced of this, I have often preached through Titus in our mission works to prepare for the calling of a church planter. We even call him “Titus” in our prayers until God reveals his actual name to us through the search process and the work of the presbytery.

However, I do believe we have a biblical example that closely mirrors the work of our Regional Home Missionaries. That man is Epaphras. He is mentioned in both Paul's letter to the Colossians and his letter to Philemon.

The first instance is in Colossians 1:7–8: “. . . just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.”

He is also mentioned in Paul's final greetings in Colossians 4:12–13: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.”

Finally, we read of him in the concluding greetings of Paul's letter to Philemon, verse 23: “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you.”

This servant of the Lord was a resident of Colossae and must have heard the gospel from Paul while visiting Ephesus, the chief city of Asia Minor. While there, Paul preached for two years in the hall of Tyrannus. Luke tells us in Acts 19:10 “that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”

Most in Asia did not hear the Word directly from Paul's lips, but rather from those who heard Paul in Ephesus. Epaphras appears to have been one of these evangelists who were converted under Paul's ministry, and he returned to his home town with the gospel.

Many years later, we learn that Epaphras not only took the gospel to Colossae, but to the entire Lycos Valley. In fact, Paul commends him to the Colossians by saying, “For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis” (Col. 4:13). Epaphras's ministry was regional, and churches were planted in three cities due to his hard labors.

Epaphras is commended by Paul for his prayers, “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers” (Col. 4:12). RHM's recognize that church planting is a spiritual endeavor. We must trust

that Christ is the one building his church (Matt. 16:18). This conviction drives us to prayer and to lead the congregations in prayer. Epaphras gives us this clear example. The work of the RHM is in the trenches of spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12). I always tell a new core group early in the process, “As soon as we put our hands to the plow to establish a new OPC church, we come into the crosshairs of the enemy.” This burden drives us to our knees, and there we latch onto Christ.

It is a joy to watch Christ build his church. I often think of how blessed I am to be able to see what God is doing throughout the presbytery. Christ is surely at work. Yet, it is the church militant where we labor, and our warfare is spiritual. It is often painful, and there are casualties.

Promising starts sometimes come to naught, destroyed by divisions within. Meager beginnings, which even discourage us overly optimistic RHM's, sometimes blossom by the hand of God and become robust congregations. It is Christ's work and we are reminded of this again and again, both in our successes and failures.

Things We Have Learned

Over the past fifteen years, God has taught me some lessons about church planting. When I began in 2002, I jumped eagerly into the middle of every potential core group without much evaluation of the group or its background and motivations. They wanted to start an OP church, and I wanted to help them do it. We learned as a Home Missions Committee to be more circumspect.

We had groups fail because we didn't see serious issues underneath the surface. Closer scrutiny and asking hard questions in the beginning would have been wise. However, this can be a double-edged sword. We've had groups in the past that God has blessed richly and are now thriving congregations. If those same groups came to us today, they might be rejected. Objective criteria only go so far.

My friend Jim Heemstra also said to me, “I'll take the right three families over the wrong ten families every time.”

I believe this is true. We don't ignore objective analyses, but subjective criteria, such as the godliness, motives, and gifts within the group are also considered. Making the call about whether to move ahead is often ultimately a matter of the heart.

At first in my work I was seen only as the initial gatherer, until we were ready for our Titus and he was found. Then I was on to the next work. When serious problems began to develop within some mission works as they entered this new chapter, I realized that I needed to stay closely involved for a much longer period of time. By the time our Titus comes, I have the hearts and ears of the congregation. I've learned to stay involved in order to try to discern troubles before they grow.

I had to fight for this with my committee, who cared about me and tried to protect my time and energy. Now I routinely stay on provisional sessions until the works are organized. Sometimes that means I'm serving on five or six sessions at a time. This can be overwhelming, but the Home Missions Committee trusts me to manage that time commitment well. Some works need more attention, and others need less. I'm constantly praying for wisdom in the distribution of my energies. Still, we have learned to start better, continue better, and to end well. This approach has paid dividends.

We've learned to be more intentional as a committee. Several years ago, we divided our Home Missions Committee into subcommittees to do demographic work. Each subcommittee examined the region of our presbytery where they lived and ministered. We looked at eastern North Carolina; central and northern North Carolina; Georgia; the Tidewater Region of Virginia; the Tri-Cities area of Tennessee and Virginia; Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee. We gathered and evaluated the data and now have a mission work in the Tidewater Region of Virginia, a Bible study in eastern North Carolina, and plans soon to investigate opportunities in Nashville, Tennessee.

More Recent Reassessment

A couple years ago, our committee reconsidered my job description. Initially, my priority was

to respond to inquiries from potential mission works, but we came to believe that we needed to emphasize a more proactive approach. I still respond to these inquiries when they come. This is one benefit to a presbytery that has an RHM. He is able to respond quickly and more efficiently than a committee can.

Still, we believe we need to be more proactive in our church planting. Groups that come to us often have baggage. Sometimes we find that we have the right demographic, but the wrong group, or conversely, the right group, but the wrong demographic. Demographics do not drive our church planting, as demonstrated in our now vibrant work in the rural/small town area of Royston, Georgia. However, we do take note of them. This was true in our work in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

The Virginia Beach work began with prayer over several years. Steve Doe, Regional Home Missionary of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, Pete Stazen, pastor of Grace OPC in Lynchburg, Virginia, and I met for prayer on several occasions, specifically targeting the Tidewater Region. In summer 2012, Steve and I combined our list of contacts and organized an informational meeting. That led to a Bible study in Virginia Beach, then to worship services, and now to a thriving mission work.

For our committee the biggest issue with targeting Virginia Beach was the distance. Without the aid of Steve Doe, the work would have struggled to get off the ground. I live 400 miles away, but Steve lives 160 miles from the work, even though he serves a different presbytery. The Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic graciously permitted their RHM to work with us. It has been one of my greatest joys as an RHM to partner with my brother in this endeavor.

Still, the committee wanted to focus on a mission work within a workable distance, two hundred miles, from my residence. We wanted to duplicate what we had done earlier in Gastonia, North Carolina, and call this our R-200 plan.²

In 2009, I met with two families in Gastonia

² RHM within a 200-mile radius of home.

to consider the possibility of beginning a mission work. Quickly, we had three families and began a Bible study. In God's providence, all our other mission works had organizing pastors in place, enabling me to devote my primary attention to the work in Gastonia. That investment paid off, and God has richly blessed the work. Reformation Presbyterian Church is now an organized congregation.

Our mission work in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is our present R-200 work. I typically preach three Sundays out of each month at Harvest. God is blessing the work, and we hope to begin searching for our Titus soon.

When our committee began reassessing our ministry, we had great interest in a targeted church-plant approach. Hoping to avoid some of the pitfalls that come with ready-made core groups, we wanted to target a good demographic and begin with the right man. The big obstacle was resources. Typically, there are two sources of income for mission works: subsidies from the presbytery and general assembly, and the tithes and offerings from the mission work itself. When beginning with the man, all the initial resources would have to be supplied by the committees. Considering larger markets with higher costs and experienced ministers, who need higher salaries, this task became daunting to us.

In God's providence, I was unable to attend a meeting of our committee, which gave them an opportunity to think through our approach in my absence. Afterward I met with our committee chairman, Nathan Trice, to discuss their thoughts. It was another one of those defining conversations with a dear friend.

He told me that the committee remained keen on the idea of an intentional church plant and that they wanted me to consider being *the man*. They were essentially offering me the opportunity to go to any larger metropolitan area of my choice, within the bounds of our presbytery, with full financial support. What we all realized was that the presbytery didn't have the resources to do this kind of church plant and also have a Regional Home Missionary program.

I weighed their offer carefully, talked it over

with my wife, and prayed. I was pleased that they trusted in God to use me in such a way, but I loved my present labors. After a few weeks, neither my wife nor I had a zeal to start again in a new place. However, more than that, I was concerned about abandoning a ministry the presbytery had established a dozen years before. I wrote out my thoughts and sent them to the committee, and then we met to discuss them.

I asked them to consider what we would have in five or ten years if we did this. If God blessed our labor, we would have another strong church within our presbytery to help with our regional mission. However, how many lost opportunities would there be? I was very frank with them, telling them that a committee cannot duplicate what an RHM is able to do. He has expertise from experience that they don't have. I was also concerned about redirecting our resources to the intentional plant and away from the RHM program. There is a reason why most presbyteries that can afford an RHM have one, and why most who can't afford an RHM want one. God has blessed this ministry and the many men who have served in this capacity for decades in our denomination.

The committee heard me out and unanimously agreed to continue the RHM program and my service in it. We have not abandoned the desire to intentionally plant a church beginning with the right man in the right place, but recognize that God will make extraordinary provision when that opportunity arises.

Having said this about RHM ministry and the men who have served, I remain convinced of one thing: the ministry of the Regional Home Missionary is not the highest ministry in the church. That distinction belongs to our organizing pastors and pastors of our churches—to those men who live among the people and the communities they serve, often for many years. The role of RHMs is to help mission works get ready to receive their Titus and then to assist Titus in his ministry. ©

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✦ Servant Realms

Cultivating Christ-Honoring Speech in Church Courts (Proverbs 15:1–4)

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by Ryan M. McGraw

It is important to be mindful both of what we say in church courts and of how we say it. John Kitchen wrote of two models of speech, “Speech has the potential to quiet a riot or to fan the embers of anger (Prov. 12:18; 15:18; 25:15).”² On this side of glory, Christians, including presbyters, often display a mixture of both models. While through sanctification of the Spirit we shine in Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18), we can often unintentionally set our light under a basket by shading it through indwelling sin in our speech. Proverbs 15:1–4 can set healthy parameters around how we should conduct ourselves in debates in church courts. The burden of this essay is to show, in light of this text, that we must learn as presbyters to moderate our speech so as to honor Christ and to edify his church. Doing so will enable us better to promote the glory of our Savior and the peace and purity of the church. In order to explain and to illustrate these principles, I have

extracted the parts of Proverbs 15:1–4 into a list of positive exhortations and negative injunctions, highlighting distinctly the principle of accountability found in verse three. Since no man spoke as Christ did (John 7:46), and because the Pharisees condemned themselves out of their own mouths (John 9:41), both examples are useful to illustrate vividly the principles taught in this text. This article concludes with some directions designed to help presbyters speak well in church courts.

Speech to Cultivate

“A soft answer turns away wrath.” (v. 1)

Cultivating a “soft answer” is vital in promoting the church’s well-being. It is not enough to be right. We must cultivate what Kitchen calls “a conciliatory tone.”³ A soft or gentle answer yields great fruit. Kitchen notes, “A ‘gentle answer’ can quench even white hot anger.”⁴ All of the principles given in Proverbs 15:1–4 presuppose disagreements. What would a presbytery or a general assembly be without healthy disagreement and debate? This is not wrong in itself, but it can be either helpful or hurtful, depending on how we conduct ourselves as presbyters. We have watched movies or read books where a levelheaded and calm mentor brings a hotheaded student into check. The mentor puts his pupil to shame and reins him in by responding patiently and gently in the face of angry retorts. While presbytery and general assembly debates are not simply about winning, it is rare for someone who is visibly angry, and who uses inflammatory words, to win many votes. Remember that “with patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone” (Prov. 25:15).

“The tongue of the wise commends knowledge.”
(v. 2)

This proverb concerns the form of our speech more directly.⁵ How we say what we say is as im-

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=625&issue_id=125.

2 John A Kitchen, *Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2006), 325. Kitchen will serve as a useful and simple guide to this passage throughout the material below.

3 Kitchen, *Proverbs*, 325.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

portant as what we say. This strengthens the point made by verse one. It includes when we speak, what words we use, and our tone of voice.⁶ Sometimes it is not the right time to speak. We can apply this principle by hearing out others' arguments fully before responding to them. Our words must always be full of wisdom as well. This involves saying the right thing, at the right time and in the right way. Even Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor both with God and men (Luke 2:52).

We may, however, speak at the right time and use the right words, but say them with the wrong tone. To illustrate, I once took a seminary student to his first meeting of a particular presbytery. Within the first hour of the meeting, a presbyter spoke to an issue over which he was particularly agitated. Without knowing the man or his background, the student was surprised by the man's red face, breaking voice, and vigorous gestures. We must be more self-aware than we often are regarding how others perceive our speeches in church courts. Having the right thing to say and knowing an appropriate way to say it still may not suffice to say it well. If one cannot do so, then one should remember the biblical adage, "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (Prov. 17:28). While we cannot remain silent over moral issues, we should consider both how we speak to issues and whether we are in a fit state to do so wisely. You may need to speak regardless of these considerations, but sometimes it would be better to let someone in a better state of mind do it instead. In the OPC, chances are that someone else will speak to the issue. Remember that our aim is Christ's glory through the peace and the purity of his church. Whether or not we communicate wisely can help or hinder our efforts to reach these goals.

"A gentle tongue is a tree of life." (v. 4)

A "gentle tongue" is a "soothing" tongue. This verse adds the idea that a gentle tongue has healing power. A verbal parallel to the Hebrew

6 Ibid., 326.

text is Jeremiah 8:15: "We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror."⁷ Our speech in church courts should aim to heal divisions rather than to justify them on the pretense of a good cause. Remember that this does not touch on the substance of a debate, no matter how serious it may be. It reminds us instead of our goals in a debate and how such goals affect the words that we use and how we use them.

The effect of a gentle or healing tongue is a clear allusion to the tree of life in the garden of Eden. While the angel with the flaming sword teaches us that man can never regain access to the tree of life through keeping the covenant of works, Christ both merits and purchases for us the promise embodied by the tree (Rev. 22:2). In relation to our text, however, this reminds us of Jesus's warning that by our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned (Matt. 12:37). In theological terms this entails the justification of our works rather than that of our persons (James 2:17–18). Nevertheless, such good works are found in the way to life.⁸ In the context of Proverbs, Kitchen reminds us that wisdom of speech (Prov. 3:18)⁹ is related organically to righteousness of life (Prov. 13:12).¹⁰ Life results from right desires and hopes, which stem from right faith and practice (e.g., Ps. 37:3–6).

Healing words can promote the life of others as well.¹¹ Surely this is part of what Paul had in view when he wrote, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). Personal godliness and sound doctrine are twins. They are born together and they grow up together. James applied explicitly his teaching on works justifying the faith of justified persons to how we speak to and about our brothers

7 Ibid., 327.

8 See Westminster Confession of Faith 16.2, 6.

9 "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed."

10 "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." See Kitchen, *Proverbs*, 327.

11 Kitchen, *Proverbs*, 327.

(James 3:1–13). Aim prayerfully to promote spiritual health and personal godliness with your speech in church courts.

Illustrations from Christ

Christ is both the foundation of our justification and the pattern of our sanctification. This includes our speech, even when dealing with others who are in error or who simply disagree with us. Jesus dealt gently with Martha before raising Lazarus by responding with the right words, at the right time and in the right way, even when she implicitly questioned his actions and motives (John 11:21–27). Jesus answered her gently, and he wept with her and her family (John 11:35). When his disciples found it unthinkable for him to go away, even though it proved necessary for their salvation and for ours, Jesus explained what he was doing and how to follow him (John 14:1–11), what they should do after he left (vv. 12–14), and how the Spirit would enable them to do it (vv. 15–31). Upon his ascension into heaven, when his disciples still fostered false hopes that Christ would liberate the nation of Israel from the Romans, he patiently told them that such things were not for them to know, but that they must wait for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:6–8). Jesus urged the multitudes, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). If Christ spoke so wisely in the midst of such confusion, then let us imitate his soft answer, wise speech, and life-giving words in our church courts. Let us not make church courts laborious and our fellow presbyters heavy laden.

Speech to Avoid

“But a harsh word stirs up anger.” (v. 1b)

To face the facts, presbytery and assembly debates can become tense. All of us have likely been guilty at some point of attributing wrongful motives to others or of assuming the worst outcome at a meeting. Pregnant suspicions and

emotions often give birth to harsh words. Kitchen observes, “Unguarded words escalate any ill will that may be already present.”¹² While wise words are designed to promote debate and to add clarity to issues, harsh words are designed to wound the other person. We should guard our hearts, so as not to take disagreements personally. Losing a debate, even an important one, is also rarely the end of the ecclesiastical world.

This warning applies poignantly to the particular words we use. Kitchen adds, “How many arguments, rifts and fights could have been avoided by simply refraining from a single word!”¹³ Avoid saying things such as, “in response to Bob,” “this course of action is thoughtless or foolish,” “this is unloving,” “no one doubts the innocence of the accused,” etc. Such responses are harsh in that they can come across as attacking people instead of arguments, imputing wrongful motives, and bullying those who oppose your position.

“But the mouth of fools pour out folly.” (v. 2b)

Kitchen’s summary of this clause is apt: “The fool simply opens wide his mouth and lets flow whatever comes to his lips.”¹⁴ This is a weakness that can grow out of a healthy concern in the OPC to let everyone have a say. Instead of speaking because we can, we need to ask whether our speech is helpful and adds to the current discussion. I once witnessed a presbytery “debate” in which there were roughly ten speeches in a row in favor of an action. The ensuing vote was unanimous. This appears to be an example of unintended folly because it is hard to see how this “debate” was not a waste of time. Such practices give the impression that we are more concerned that our voices are heard than that the action is approved. Remember: “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19).

Conversely, we can act foolishly in a debate

12 Ibid., 325.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 326.

due to thoughtlessness and a lack of prayer before speaking. Kitchen says of the man in view here, “He speaks whatever comes to his mind and cares not for those who don’t like it.”¹⁵ The intent of the speaker is not in view in this proverb as much as the attraction or repulsion that each kind of speech described brings. If we need to say things that are unattractive or unpopular, then let us at least aim to say them in an attractive way to the body we are addressing.

“But perverseness in it breaks the spirit.” (v. 4b)

Perverseness involves twisted or crooked speech. This is possibly the worst abuse listed in these verses. “Twisting words to serve our own evil intent ‘crushes the spirit’ of those we are in relationship with.”¹⁶ This kind of speech aims to achieve our own ends without regarding Christ’s glory or the edification of others. While we should never assume or imply that others are doing this during a debate, is any of us above temptation in this area?

For instance, if you have had a long-standing doctrinal or personal dispute with another presbyter who is brought under moral charges, could you not be tempted to use the occasion to try to “get rid of him”? In such circumstances some assume guilt before hearing the details of the case. Whether such a man is guilty or innocent may or may not be connected directly to the doctrinal dispute that you have with him. We are liable to show our prejudice against a man in how we speak to an issue related to him. This example can go the other way. We can defend the actions of a presbyter because of an established friendship with him, blinding us to the evidence relevant to the debate at hand. We must not show partiality, nor be respecters of persons. Isaiah’s verbal parallel, in which he addresses God’s enemies, illustrates strikingly the result of this kind of speech: “Behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit” (Isa.

65:14).¹⁷ This counsel demands becoming self-aware before weighing in on an issue. Let us grieve neither the church nor the Spirit through perverse speech, whether intentional or not.

Illustrations from the Scribes and Pharisees

The Pharisees were masters of harsh and foolish words, as well as of perverse speech. Strikingly, this led them to refuse to hear evidence, as well as to twist evidence in a debate. When the blind man whom Christ healed presented the evidence of what the Lord had done, the Pharisees concluded, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” (John 9:34). The disciples had asked whether the man was born blind for his own sin or that of his parents (John 9:1–2). Jesus told them that it was neither (v. 3). Based on the evidence, the formerly blind man concluded that Christ was from God (vv. 30–33) and later that he was the Christ (v. 38). Yet the Pharisees would hear none of this. They determined the outcome of the case before hearing the evidence. It should not surprise us, therefore, that they later hurled insults at Nicodemus when he urged them to give Jesus a hearing before rejecting his teaching (John 7:51). Taken to its extreme, this led them to distort evidence when they had none to go by. They voted to crucify Jesus on the pretense that he threatened to destroy the temple and raise it in three days (Matt. 26:59–62), even though he spoke of the temple of his body (John 2:19). After the resurrection, their persistent prejudice against Christ led to bribery and outright lying when they instructed the guards at the tomb to tell people that Christ’s disciples stole his body at night (Matt. 28:11–15). Lest these examples seem to be outlandish and beyond us, remember that they witness to the fact that lesser sins give birth to greater sins. Harsh words promote foolish speech and foolish speech gives rise to perverse speech. “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 327.

A Principle of Accountability

“The eyes of the LORD are in every place.” (v. 3a)

The children’s catechism teaches us, “I cannot see God but he always sees me.” The author of this proverb draws the implication from divine omniscience that if God sees all things, then he also hears all that one says.¹⁸ God knows all that we do and why we do it. He is more aware of us and of our motives than we are of ourselves. We must labor to speak with a good conscience before God and men (Acts 24:16).

“Keeping watch on the evil and the good.”
(v. 3b)

God examines the speech of all kinds of people. God’s knowledge is a terror to the evil and a comfort to the good.¹⁹ God’s knowledge of all should alarm the evil and bring the good to repentance and obedience. Paul applied this idea to the evil when he said,

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30–31)

He applied it to the good when he wrote, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others” (2 Cor. 5:10–11a). No man is justified on the ground of his works before God (Rom. 3:20), but those who are justified must give an account of their service to God in Christ.

God’s knowledge of us should help us participate in church courts rather than paralyze us from participating in them. David exemplified this in Psalm 139:

¹⁸ Ibid., 326.

¹⁹ Ibid.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. (Ps. 139:1–6)

We will never be entirely free of sinful speech on this side of glory, but we have the potential to do much good with our speech when we speak in God’s presence, through faith in Christ, with the Spirit’s help.

Illustrations from Christ and from the Scribes and Pharisees

Two statements from Christ serve to illustrate this principle of accountability. Christ said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Later in the same gospel, he said, “And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). Note the connection our Lord makes between maintaining God’s presence and doing God’s will.

The Pharisees, by contrast, did their righteous deeds to be seen by men (Matt. 6:1). They made sure that everyone was aware when they gave alms to the poor (Matt. 6:2–4). They prayed so that men would notice and help them promote their reputation for piety (Matt. 6:5–6). They disfigured their faces and maintained a sad countenance when they fasted (Matt. 6:16–18). They neither did God’s will nor enjoyed his gracious presence.

How can we apply these examples to how we speak at presbytery? We should ask ourselves several pointed questions: Am I speaking on the floor simply because I want my voice heard, or does my speech add to the substance of the debate at hand? Am I afraid to speak when others expect me to take their side in a debate and I disagree with them? Am I persuadable, listening to the arguments of others, or do I simply plan to vote as others expect

me to? We should seek to do good through speaking in church courts, rather than simply enjoying the good privilege of speaking.

Concluding Directions for Presbyters

Kitchen's conclusion to this section of Proverbs is a fitting summary of the content of this article. He wrote, "We are endowed by our Creator with the capacity to bring either genuine, substantive help to those around us or to inflict incalculable lasting harm upon them—all of that by simply opening our mouths!"²⁰ A few directions can help us apply further the teaching of Proverbs 15:1–4 in church courts:

1. Don't take things personally, and don't make things personal. Speak to the moderator and leave previous speakers anonymous. *Robert's Rules of Order* requires this procedure for good reasons.

2. Beware of imputing wrongful motives to your brothers in debate. Assume the best of them rather than the worst.

3. Pray throughout debates, asking the Lord not only for what to say but how to say it well. It is alleged that during the Westminster Assembly debates over church government, George Gillespie, who was a heavy hitter in those debates, wrote repeatedly on his paper, "da luce domine," which means, "Lord give light." Whether this story is real or apocryphal, it is a useful reminder to pray at all times.

4. Remember that those with whom you disagree are not scribes and Pharisees, but fellow presbyters and brothers in Christ. Love Christ by speaking the truth to them in love.

5. "Let your gentleness be evident to all, for the Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5).²¹ Reformed Christians have not always cultivated the fruit of gentleness well, but our Lord did. Let us imitate his character by grace even as we long to see his face in glory. Let us be gentle in our speech. ©

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²⁰ Ibid., 327.

²¹ ἐπιεικής ("gentleness") bears the connotation of yielding, gentleness, or kindness.

✦ Servant Living

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

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by **Andy Wilson**

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

renewing of our minds, we will inevitably be conformed to this present evil age.

The Habit of Sabbath Keeping

In several recent books, James K. A. Smith has made a compelling case for the formative power of habitual practices that he describes as “pedagogies of desire.”² In Smith’s words, “If the heart is like a compass . . . we need to (regularly) calibrate our hearts, tuning them to be directed to the Creator, our magnetic north.”³ An emphasis on the shaping power of Christian practices is also a significant element in Rod Dreher’s much-discussed “Benedict Option,” which says that Christians need to look to the traditions of their distinctive communions for the cultivation of Christian identity if we are going to be able to set forth a genuine alternative in our witness-bearing.⁴ This stands in sharp contrast to a characteristic tendency in American Christianity: the tendency to think that the way to reach our culture with the gospel is to develop ministry strategies and practices that will appeal to those who are outside the church. The problem with this approach is that when the church’s ministry is shaped by the culture and its concerns, the culture ends up shaping the church and those who belong to it. We need to pay careful attention to the fact that the way we practice and promulgate our faith plays an important role in shaping what we believe and who we are. Think of a swimmer using training drills to imprint the elements of a particular swimming stroke into his muscle memory. Through disciplined repetition, motions that are at first unnatural become second nature. But this will only result in a better swimming stroke if the drills are in continuity with the whole stroke. In the same

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

3 Smith, 20.

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

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=618&issue_id=124.

way, our practices will best calibrate our hearts to God and his truth when they are in continuity with the tradition that we believe to be the best embodiment of biblical Christianity.

One practice from the Reformed tradition that can be of great help in cultivating Christian identity is Sabbath keeping. The Sabbath is about much more than taking one day off from work each week. God instituted the Sabbath as a sign pointing to the completion of his purpose for the world. The Sabbath essentially functions as a sign of the gospel. John Calvin expresses as much when he says that the Sabbath is a day when “believers are required to rest from their own works so as to allow God to do his work in them.”⁵ The Sabbath calls us to stop trusting in our own performance so that we can receive God’s gracious provision of spiritual rest in the gospel of his Son.

When God tells us to “remember the Sabbath day” (Ex. 20:8), he is not just talking about mental recollection. In Scripture, the word “remember” often has to do with being faithful to one’s covenant commitments. Remembering the Sabbath is about letting it shape us as those whom God has set apart to be his holy people (see Ex. 34:13). In the words of Meredith Kline, “Observance of the Sabbath by man is thus a confession that Yahweh is his Lord and Lord of all lords. Sabbath keeping expresses man’s commitment to the service of his Lord.”⁶ In other words, the Sabbath helps reorient us by reminding us that we live in this world as pilgrims whose ultimate allegiance is to another King and kingdom. As such, we strive to enter the final Sabbath rest that awaits the people of God (see Heb. 4:9–11).

As the residual influence of the Christian view of Sunday continues to fade in our post-Christian culture, the habit of Sabbath keeping will be increasingly disruptive to the work and activities that we do alongside non-Christians in the common

sphere. This will sometimes raise questions about various aspects of our cultural involvement, and Christians who are committed to observing the Sabbath may not always agree about how to answer all of these questions. Nevertheless, we should never grow weary of the disruption that the Sabbath brings to our this-worldly pursuits. The habit of Sabbath keeping helps us remember that we belong to a kingdom that is infinitely more valuable than anything that this world can offer.

The Historical Development, Diminishment, and Recovery of the Lord’s Day

The Sabbath is an important overarching theme in biblical theology. David VanDrunen points out its prominence in the creation account when he writes:

Genesis 1:1–2:3 presents God as working toward and attaining an eschatological goal. The text is permeated with a sense of historical movement that is capped by a scene of arrival. This sense is produced most prominently by the sabbatical pattern that frames the narrative . . . patterns of sevens or multiples of sevens absolutely pervade Genesis 1:1–2:3.⁷

Everything in the creation account is oriented toward day seven, when the Lord of the Sabbath sits down to reign over his creation-kingdom. The Sabbath is also a key theme in the Gospels, where Jesus’s Sabbath activity announces the arrival of the reality that the day signifies (see Matt. 12:1–21; Luke 4:16–21) and where Jesus invites people to come to him and find rest for their souls (Matt. 11:28–30). Another New Testament book that makes significant use of the Sabbath theme is the epistle to the Hebrews, which speaks of striving to enter God’s rest and living as sojourners until we receive the unshakeable kingdom (see Heb. 4:1–11; 11:10, 13, 16, 38; 12:18–29). This is especially significant when we remember that the main theme of Hebrews is to demonstrate how the new

5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 ed., trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 139.

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

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

covenant is the fruition and fulfillment of the old covenant. Lastly, the sabbatical pattern also figures significantly in the book of Revelation. The book's structure and message rely heavily on the symbolic use of the number seven, and the saints are exhorted to persevere in faith until they enter into the rest that will characterize the new creation (see Rev. 6:11; 14:12–13).

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

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

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

our Saviour rose from the dead on the same day."⁸

In the early fourth century, the conversion of Constantine and the outward Christianization of the Greco-Roman world resulted in the official declaration of Sunday as a public holiday and day of rest. Unfortunately, it also resulted in the church making various concessions to the pagan mind. One such concession was the adaptation of pagan festivals and holidays for Christian purposes. This marked the beginning of the medieval church's development of its elaborate liturgical calendar of holy days, fast days, and days recognizing various saints. As increasing emphasis was placed upon these days, particularly upon the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent, the Christian Sabbath was overshadowed.⁹

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

With an appeal to the fourth chapter of Hebrews, Capito claimed that the old Sabbath was a sign of the rest and salvation that would begin with the resurrection of Christ. The old Sabbath was a promise of a day of rest that the Jews under the law had not yet experienced (Heb. 4:8). While that day of rest was the final day of consummation at the end of history, it is, even in this life, already experienced in the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection, which clearly, according to the Gospels, is the first day of the week.¹⁰

Through the efforts of Capito and other Reformers, the focus of the church calendar in Reformed

8 "First Apology of Justin, the Martyr," §67, ed. Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 287.

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

10 Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition*, 35–36.

churches shifted back to the weekly observance of the Lord's Day. Furthermore, the Puritans' success in promoting Sabbath observance in seventeenth-century England resulted in most of the English-speaking world being Sabbatarian up until the middle of the twentieth century.

No Place for Fun?

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

The dominant media of our technological society are powerful forces for socializing people into modes of thought and action that are often inconsistent with, if not absolutely hostile to, Christian faith and practice. In America today, churches . . . have access to comparatively little mindspace. . . . If we are to form strong Christians, people with robust commitment to and robust understanding of the Christian life, then we need to shift the balance of ideological power towards Christian formation.¹¹

11 "Questions for the Critics of the Benedict Option," Alan Jacobs, accessed October 9, 2016, <http://blog.ayjay.org/>

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

Sabbath observance clearly requires a cessation from activities that would interfere with our gathering together with God's people in covenant assembly for public worship (see Lev. 23:3; Heb. 10:25). One matter that has been debated within the Reformed tradition is the question of whether or not any kind of recreational activity should be permitted on the Sabbath. This disagreement stretches back to the formative period of our tradition, with the Synod of Dort (1618–19) and the Westminster Assembly (1643–49) providing slightly different answers to the question. While Dort said that recreation was permitted as long as it did not interfere with public worship,¹² Westminster said that we must abstain from recreation so that we can use the whole day for the exercises of public and private worship.¹³

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

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

uncategorized/questions-for-the-critics-of-the-benedict-option/.

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

13 See WCF 21.8.

the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 58:13–14)

Is this a rebuke for failing to devote the entire Sabbath day to the exercises of public and private worship? While the Westminster divines thought so, the problem with this interpretation is that it is difficult to see how earlier generations of Israelites could have known of such a requirement, since there is no mention of it in the Mosaic law. For this reason, Isaiah 58:13–14 is best interpreted as a rebuke for conducting business and oppressing workers on the Sabbath, which is consistent with the way the term “pleasure” is used earlier in the same chapter (see Isa. 58:3). That being the case, there is no biblical warrant for a prohibition against recreation on the Sabbath and we are free to engage in enjoyable and relaxing activities on Sundays as long as they do not interfere with public worship. Of course, we should also remember that reverent participation in public worship involves preparation beforehand and reflection afterward, a consideration that should give shape to our overall focus each Lord’s Day.

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

Since the Sabbath is a sign of sanctification marking that which receives its imprint as belonging to God’s holy kingdom with promise of consummation, the Sabbath will have relevance and application at any given epoch of redemptive history only in the

holy dimension(s) of the life of the covenant people. Thus, after the Fall, not only will the Sabbath pertain exclusively to the covenant community as a holy people called out of the profane world, but even for them the Sabbath will find expression, in a nontheocratic situation, only where they are convoked in covenant assembly, as the *ekklēsia*-extension of the heavenly assembly of God’s Sabbath enthronement. That is, Sabbath-observance will have to do only with their holy cultic (but not their common cultural) activity.¹⁴

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

Making the Most of the Sabbath

When we organize our lives around the Sabbath as the temporal symbol of the new creation, we experience a weekly rhythm that consistently points us back to the eternal heritage that is being kept for us in heaven. One of the ways we can make the most of the Sabbath is by bookending the day with morning and evening worship services, a practice that has deep roots not only among the Reformed but in the entire Christian tradition.¹⁵ While this practice is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, it is noteworthy that Psalm 92, which is identified as “A Song for the Sabbath” in its title, speaks of worshipping the Lord “in the morning” and “by night” (v. 2). Also of significance is the fact that in Israel’s regular burnt offerings, a lamb was

¹⁴ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 81.

¹⁵ See R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 338.

offered in the morning and another in the evening (see Num. 28:1–8). Attending morning and evening worship services each Lord’s Day helps us to order the entire day around the gathering of God’s people in covenant assembly.

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

I can testify to the benefits of attending morning and evening worship each Lord’s Day. While I grew up in the church, evening worship did not become a regular habit for me until our session made the decision a number of years back to add a Sunday evening service to our weekly schedule. I doubt that I am fully aware of the extent to which this practice has been of help to me, my family, and our congregation. I can say that having to preach twice as many sermons has improved my preaching and forced me to be more disciplined with my time throughout the week. I also know that those who attend both of our Sunday services benefit from double exposure to the preached Word, something that is especially significant,

given the low level of biblical literacy among professing Christians in our day. Lastly, I am grateful that my children are growing up without knowing anything other than the practice of bookending the Sabbath by declaring God’s steadfast love in the morning, and his faithfulness by night.

Conclusion

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

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Servant Witness

Behavioral Apologetics

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by **Brian L. De Jong**

You may have encountered them yourself—I know that I have. They are neither the “Thoroughly Reformed” nor the “Barely Reformed.” These are the “Pugnaciously Reformed.” Whether by the chip on their shoulder, or the curl on their lip, they are not difficult to spot. Such folk are theological wrecking balls out to demonstrate that they are *right*. Sadly, they sometimes employ the tools of presuppositional apologetics to win argument after argument as they vanquish their foes. Their rude air of intellectual superiority and their self-congratulatory manner upset, offend, and insult their victims.

What ought never to be, is at times distressingly common in the Reformed community. As arguments are won, people are lost. In the name of apologetical correctness, the reputation of the Savior is dragged through the mud by overeager advocates of truth. Never pausing to consider the damage they are doing, these apologists are missing a key ingredient to biblical/covenantal apologetics—the behavioral component.

Good behavior is an indispensable ingredient for sound apologetical practice if one wishes effectively to defend the faith. This is true in a general sense, and it is particularly the case in our apologetical methodology. In this article, I wish to explore how good behavior fuels our defense of

the faith. I also would give special attention to how Dr. Cornelius Van Til and his successors have recognized the behavioral aspect of apologetics. I conclude with some thoughts on how to use your good behavior to your apologetical advantage.

Our basic calling as Christians is to be a holy people, even as the Lord our God is holy. We must share in his holiness if we hope to see the Lord. God has given his law of liberty to guide us in godly living. The “third use” of the law is vitally important for our spiritual development as believers. James reminds us in the first chapter of his epistle that it is not enough merely to hear the Word. We must do what it says if we would live the righteous life that God desires.

This directly relates to the process of sanctification—that slow but steady growth in grace, as we put off the old man and put on the new man. By the inward work of the Holy Spirit, we are being increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. The more we resemble our Elder Brother, the more our lives are distinct from the world around us. The gap between our conduct and that of the pagan culture should be increasing, not decreasing. The fact of being set apart unto God is gradually manifested in our experience. The concept of a disobedient Christian is really a contradiction in terms, albeit a sadly common occurrence.

This general obligation intensifies when we focus upon church officers, and especially upon ministers of the gospel. According to 1 Timothy 3, the overseer must be above reproach, temperate, prudent, respectable, not pugnacious, but gentle and peaceable. This does not hold true only for relationships within the church. The overseer must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Paul echoes these expectations in Titus 1:7–9, saying that the overseer

must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=609&issue_id=123.

give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

If a man does not possess these qualities, he is not fit to be ordained for service. If a minister lacks these attributes, his ministry will be undermined and give cause for the unbeliever to dismiss the truth. So while good behavior is generally needful for all Christian apologists, it is doubly necessary for ordained apologists.

Looking at that classic passage on apologetics in 1 Peter 3:15–16, we find this behavioral emphasis woven through the context. Reaching back into the previous chapter, we find these words: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

Good conduct on the part of Christians has two effects. First, it blunts the criticism of the Gentiles. They speak against Christians as evildoers, and the honorable behavior of the Christian gives the lie to their accusations. More importantly, the excellent conduct of believers will cause the Gentiles to glorify God on the day of visitation. Having observed the good deeds of those whom they slander, they will be forced to admit that God is true, and that his servants have lived holy lives.

This emphasis comes up a few verses later in 2:15–16 when Peter says, “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”

Again, it is good behavior that silences the ignorance of foolish people. When God’s children use their liberty to serve the Lord, God is glorified. Were they to exploit their freedom as a cover-up for evil actions, God’s name would be dishonored among the heathen.

This call to good behavior includes situations where suffering ensues. While it is not commendable to suffer for our sinful conduct, it is laudable to patiently endure ill treatment for doing what is right. Through the remainder of chapter 2, Peter shows us the example of Christ. Jesus suffered for

no cause in his own personal conduct. His behavior was pristine, yet he did not revile in return for the ill treatment he received. In this he purposefully left an example for believers, so that we might follow in his steps.

Moving into chapter 3, Peter counsels wives to embody respectful and pure conduct (v. 2). Likewise husbands must behave honorably toward their wives. He then sums up with these words in verses 8–9: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” What is all this but a call to good behavior?

Peter’s summary is then reinforced with a quotation from Psalm 34, which states that the believer must “turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). The quotation concludes with a promise and a solemn warning: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (v. 12). All of that revolves around the concept of behavior—either doing good or practicing evil.

A rhetorical question in 3:13–14 continues to drive the point home: “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” This is the immediate context for the charge to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense to everyone. Notice how seamlessly Peter moves from good conduct to defending the faith.

If the connection is not obvious enough from the context, it can’t be missed in these words in verse 16: “Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” The manner of our apologetical ministry must be “with gentleness and respect.” More broadly, we must maintain a good conscience in our apologetical work. Why? Because our opponents will slander and revile us for our good behavior in Christ. But this false

charge will lead to their shame when our excellent conduct becomes unmistakably obvious. No honest person will believe their wicked reports because our good behavior has been observed by witnesses who can attest to our purity. So if you suffer for doing what is right in your efforts to defend the faith—well and good.

Van Til and His Successors

For Van Til, the need to be gentle and reverent in apologetics was important. John Frame, in his book analyzing Van Til's thought, states, "Van Til was fond of the slogan *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*: gentle in the manner of presentation, powerful in substance. As we have seen, his writings are not always *suaviter in modo*, but this one [*Why I Believe in God*] is a good example of that principle."²

In his pamphlet entitled *Toward a Reformed Apologetics*, Van Til references his motto when he says:

Finally, it is my hope for the future, as it has always been my hope in the past, that I may present Christ without compromise to men who are dead in trespasses and sins, that they might have life and that they might worship and serve the Creator more than the creature. Rather than wedding Christianity to the philosophies of Aristotle or Kant, we must openly challenge the apostate philosophic constructions of men by which they seek to suppress the truth about God, themselves, and the world. To be sure, it is the grace of God which we proclaim to men, and we must proclaim the gospel *suaviter in modo*, but nevertheless, we have not been true to Christ if we do not say with Paul: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save

them that believe (I Cor. 1:20–21). We are children of the King. To us, not to the world, do all things belong. It is only if we demand of men complete submission to the living Christ of the Scriptures in every area of their lives, that we have presented to men the claims of the Lord Christ without compromise. It is only then that we are truly biblical first and speculative afterwards. Only then are we working toward a Reformed apologetic.³

In an unpublished manuscript on the Ten Commandments, Van Til applies the ninth commandment particularly to officers when he writes:

For office-bearers and especially for ministers it is necessary to remember at this juncture that in order to develop truthfulness they must seek to elicit confessions of untruthfulness by a friendly tactful method. To be *suaviter in modo* benefits him who himself lives in a glass house. Any pretense at perfection in accomplishment will repel instead of attract. Thus one does not develop but rather retards the development of truthfulness.⁴

In the tenth chapter of *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, Van Til links this gentle methodology to Calvinism, saying:

If one follows Calvin there are no such troubles. Then one begins with the fact that the world is what the Bible says it is. One then makes the claims of God upon men without apologies though always *suaviter in modo*. One knows that there is hidden underneath the surface display of every man a sense of deity. One therefore gives that sense of deity an opportunity to rise in rebellion against the oppression under which it suffers by the new man of the covenant breaker. One makes no

2 John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R, 1995), 331.

3 Cornelius Van Til, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895–1987*, ed. Eric H. Sigward (New York: Labels Army Co., 1997), CD-ROM.

4 Cornelius Van Til, "The Ninth Commandment: Truth," in *The Ten Commandments* (unpublished manuscript, 1933).

deal with this new man. One shows that on his assumptions all things are meaningless. Science would be impossible; knowledge of anything in any field would be impossible. No fact could be distinguished from any other fact. No law could be said to be law with respect to facts. The whole manipulation of factual experience would be like the idling of a motor that is not in gear. Thus every fact—not some facts—every fact clearly and not probably proves the truth of Christian theism. If Christian theism is not true then nothing is true. Is the God of the Bible satisfied if his servants say anything less?⁵

This is not to say that Van Til always practiced this gentle and reverent approach, as Frame recognized. In the pamphlet already mentioned, there is a remarkable section entitled “Retractions and Clarifications.” With transparent honesty, Van Til critiques himself on this score:

Have I been consistent with myself in the writings mentioned in this pamphlet? Should not I now retract certain statements made in earlier days? Would not I approach the subjects on which I have written differently now, if I could? When I ask myself such questions as these, I think that as far as the manner of presentation is concerned, I have often not lived up to my own motto on this point of *suaviter in modo*. I beg forgiveness of those whom I have hurt because of this sin of mine. Then, so far as content is concerned, I have often not lived up to my own motto on this point either. I have not always made perfectly clear that in presenting Christ to lost men, we must present Him for what He is. He has told us what He is in the Scriptures. Apparently I have given occasion for people to think that I am speculative or philosophical first and biblical afterwards.⁶

5 Cornelius Van Til, *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895–1987*, ed. Eric H. Sigward (New York: Labels Army Co., 1997), CD-ROM.

6 Ibid.

Two scholars who have followed in Van Til’s footsteps also saw the need for a gentle and reverent method in confronting unbelievers. Greg Bahnsen comments on this in his massive work, *Van Til’s Apologetic, Readings and Analysis*:

Thus, Peter, aware of the different ways an argument can be conducted, specifically reminded his readers to offer their reasoned defense “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul wrote: “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting those who oppose themselves” (2 Tim. 2:24–25). The proponents of conflicting viewpoints can trade arguments and engage in intellectual dispute in a manner that exhibits or leads to being puffed up—something that Paul censures in a multitude of ways throughout 1 Corinthians (especially as it stems from a lust for persuasive words of worldly wisdom, 2:4–5). However, there is nothing in the nature of the case which requires argumentation to be conducted in a proud and unloving fashion. Apologetics can be pursued with a humble boldness, one which displays true concern for the error of the unbeliever’s thinking and the destructiveness of his ways. This does not mean giving even an inch on any issue of truth over which we disagree with the unbeliever. But it does mean, as Dr. Van Til would always say, that we keep buying the next cup of coffee for our opponent.⁷

Likewise, K. Scott Oliphint interacts with this methodology in his *Covenantal Apologetics*:

In 1 Peter 3:15, as Peter commands the church to be ready to defend her faith, he is careful to note the ethos in which such a defense must be given. Defend your faith, Peter is saying, “with gentleness and respect.” This reminds us that our defense is not a defense that depends on us; it is not something that is

7 Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic, Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 32.

successful only to the extent that our oratory is polished. Rather, it is a defense that recognizes that Christ is Lord, that it is he who accomplishes the purposes that he desires in that defense. We need not, therefore, be hostile or abrasive or pugnacious in our defense. Christ reigns. We serve him. Our defense should reflect Christ's sovereignty and our willing service to him. To be gentle and respectful does not, of course, obviate boldness. Paul knew that he might have to display such boldness to the Corinthians, even as he implored them with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. But boldness is not caustic or harsh. It stems from our confidence in Christ and his lordship. Boldness, we could say, is meek and gentle confidence in what we have to say. What should also be obvious concerning the ethos of persuasion and what we have not broached to this point, is that in our defense of Christianity, as in the entirety of our Christian lives, we are to be a holy people. We are to mirror the holiness of our Father in heaven. We cannot and should not expect that anyone in our audience will be anxious to listen to us, or be persuaded by us, if our own character is obviously and explicitly immoral or otherwise suspect.⁸

So what can we conclude about this connection between excellent behavior and the defense of the faith? First, our apologetical commitments should exist within the larger context of personal holiness. The would-be defender of the faith should make a long-term commitment to growing in his sanctification. There is simply no substitute for personal holiness, and personal holiness cannot be conjured up in a moment. True piety gradually develops over years of ordinary, faithful Christian living.

Second, that process of sanctification should manifest itself in how we treat others—whether believer or unbeliever. Showing kindness, patience,

gentleness, and earnest concern can become habitual as we work to display these graces toward our fellow man. We must learn to love our neighbors as ourselves, if we would be of any spiritual assistance to them. This is crucial if we hope to persuade them of the truth we advocate. Persuasion involves more than just proving that “I am right, and you are wrong.” Persuasion is far subtler and more nuanced than winning an abstract intellectual argument. As Oliphint reminded us above, “We cannot and should not expect that anyone in our audience will be anxious to listen to us, or be persuaded by us, if our own character is obviously and explicitly immoral or otherwise suspect.”

Third, we should recognize that our manner will impact our message, either for good or for ill. If we live holy lives, we recommend the truth that we defend. Our lifestyle of godliness becomes a silent confirmation of the truth. But if we live scandalously, then our behavior actually contradicts the very truth we defend. Furthermore, we give fodder to the skeptic, who will predictably dismiss our message because of our personal hypocrisy. An absence of personal holiness will cripple the Christian apologist while emboldening the unbeliever in his rejection of the gospel.

As we grow in godliness, we should cultivate an ability to speak to unbelievers in nonthreatening ways. This includes going onto their turf and taking an interest in their lives. Waiting for them to come pouring through the doors of our churches will prove to be a fruitless approach. The task of making disciples presupposes that we are “going.” Whenever we go, wherever we go, as we go, we are to make disciples. In this effort to engage the unbelievers in our communities, we ought to discover where they congregate and find out what interests them. Becoming all things to all men suggests that we take something of an interest in what matters to them. This is Paul, strolling through the streets of Athens, seeing all of the various altars to the gods that the Greeks worshiped, and taking special note of their altar to the “Unknown God.” Paul could then speak intelligently to the Athenians about the Unknown God they claimed to worship.

As we cultivate conversations with our unbe-

8 K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 144.

lieving neighbors, we need to respect their feelings and not trample carelessly upon them. We should never misrepresent their positions or belittle them for their unbelief. Question-and-answer dialogue is invaluable as we not only respectfully answer their questions, but we pose our questions to them.

As conversation develops, we should “buy the next cup of coffee.” Picking up the check at a lunch discussion can convey friendly engagement and genuine respect. Doing those things while maintaining the give-and-take of ideas will stimulate deeper disclosure. Thus, our gentle approach can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring unbelievers to understand and accept the truth—to become convinced of that gospel which we defend and proclaim. ☺

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Postmodernism, Post-truth, Generation Z: What’s It All Mean?

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by **Stephen D. Doe**

The title of a recent class I took was intriguing: “Skating to Where the Puck Will Be.”² The title came from hockey great Wayne Gretzky, who

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=632&issue_id=126.

² Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, DC, November 17–19, 2016, taught by Rev. Randy Lovelace, lead pastor of Columbia Presbyterian Church (OPC) and Dr. Michael Metzger, founder and president of the Clapham Institute based in Annapolis, MD, www.claphaminstitute.org.

said, “I skate to where the puck is going to be not where it has been.” If the movement of the “puck” is our culture, the society in which the church finds itself, how does the Lord of both history and the church guide us in his Word to faithfully navigate these times?

The intensity with which cultural shifts are challenging the church is reflected in some of the books being written to try to make sense of what we are seeing:

- *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*—Ross Douthat
- *Culture Shift: The Battle for the Moral Heart of America*—R. Albert Mohler Jr.
- *The Devil’s Pleasure Palace: The Cult of Critical Theory and the Subversion of the West*—Michael Walsh
- *The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness*—R. Albert Mohler Jr.
- *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity*—Thomas E. Bergler
- *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*—James K. A. Smith
- *It’s Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies*—Mary Eberstadt
- *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*—Charles Chaput
- *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*—James Davison Hunter
- *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong*—R. Albert Mohler Jr.
- *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*—James K. A. Smith

No, this is not your reading list for the next year (and it is only a sampling), but it demonstrates that many people are thinking, discussing, and writing in books, articles, and posts, about what is perceived as an age of challenge.

God has certainly always given the church some men of Issachar to understand the times³ in an especially pointed way, but all the people of God are also given the wisdom to learn how to live in a culture where the puck always seems ten yards ahead of us. The Scriptures do not simply make us wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15); they are the means by which the Christian must “reframe” the torrent of information which a culture, unmoored to any transcendent truth, flings at us. For example, as I write this, thousands of young people, hoping for the experience of a lifetime, have just flown to an expensive musical festival in the Bahamas, only to discover that the hype covered poor planning and execution, leaving them desperately trying to get home. What happening? The promise of “an experience” pushed away all thoughts of caution. The believer is told how to see such promises, how to reframe in light of God’s Word the near obsession with “experience” over clear thinking.⁴ The promise of experience must be weighed in light of what is unchanging. Asking, “Is this worth it in light of what is eternal?” can challenge us when we are tempted to click on that website or give into the anger that swells in our hearts.

The church itself must think about how to “skate to where the puck will be,” that is, how to proclaim the gospel in the age in which it finds itself, without marrying the spirit of the age.⁵ It is inescapable that we live in a time of cultural change more rapid than any of us has ever faced before. Born after the Second World War and growing up in the relatively stable 1950s and early 1960s, I know the sense of dislocation that many people in the church feel. We might be tempted to take comfort in the fact that the percentage of professing believers in the United States may stay

at the same level, as pollsters prognosticate. The changes taking place around the church, however, are also forcing their way into the church, simply by virtue of the fact that Christians live in, and are subtly affected by, this culture.

Here is one example: If you had asked churchgoers just twenty years ago if homosexuality was a sin, they would have said yes, although they might have been vague about the biblical reasons for saying so. Accepting current data, if you are to ask millennials or Generation Z⁶ (those born after 1995) the same question, the number of those saying yes would be much smaller and perhaps more tentative, as they look around to see if their friends approve. What’s going on? Is the difference due to age? Is it the result of poor teaching in their churches? I would suggest that Christians of twenty years ago and those of today are in fundamentally different places. Twenty years ago it was socially acceptable to be opposed to homosexuality, even if one didn’t have a clear idea of why it was sinful. Today, however, as Carl Trueman has pointed out, the challenge Christians face is not simply that of being out of step, but that of being offensive by their very existence.⁷ This is especially difficult for those living in a peer-driven culture. As sojourners and exiles (1 Peter 2:11), we are not “idiots” but “bigots” in our current cultural climate.⁸ And what young person (or older person for that matter) wants to be thought of as a bigot?

That is only one of the challenges facing the church in a ceaselessly secular age. Even if the portion of the American population that self-identifies as “Christian” will be 24–25 percent over

3 “Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do . . .” (1 Chron. 12:32).

4 For example: “We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

5 Cf. William Ralph (Dean) Inge’s quote: “Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next.” BrainyQuote website, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/william_ralph_inge.html.

6 James Emery White, “Meet Generation Z,” Church and Culture (blog), August 28, 2014, <http://www.churchandculture.org/Blog.asp?ID=6368>. See also, Jonathan Merritt, “Forget millennials. How will churches reach Generation Z?” Religion News Service, May 1, 2017, <http://religionnews.com/2017/05/01/forget-millennials-how-will-churches-reach-generation-z/> and “Generations X, Y, Z and the Others,” WJ Schroer Company, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://socialmarketing.org/archives/generations-xy-z-and-the-others/>.

7 Carl Trueman, “Issues for the Western Church in the Twenty-First Century,” Grace Theological College, NZ, video recording of lecture, published July 3, 2015, <http://www.gtc.ac.nz/news/issues-for-the-western-church-in-the-21st-century/>.

8 Ibid.

the next few years, the same as it is presently, how is the church to reach the other 75 percent, especially if that 75 percent is becoming increasingly disconnected from biblical Christianity? How is the church to bring the gospel to bear on a society and culture which are decidedly secular, and only growing more so? Given our doctrinal commitments to the centrality and infallibility of the Word of God, how does the church speak the gospel into this secular society?⁹

The foundational paradigm is that our thinking must be shaped by the Word of God if we are to speak clearly to our culture. Scripture must speak louder, and have more influence, than anything else. When we check our emails or newsfeeds first thing in the morning, is our understanding of what we read filtered by the Scripture? Do the doom-saying headlines of our news feeds shape our view of the world, or do we live with eschatological confidence in the power of God to glorify himself in all things?¹⁰ We can be seduced by the promises of a culture that wants us to live for the (next) experience of food, car, house, movie, or relationship. The young people flocking to an island, at the cost of thousands of dollars for an immersive experience of music, tropical paradise, and great times found instead ham and cheese sandwiches and muggings. Their experience was one of a world that promises much but cannot deliver, and yet comes back to promise more the next time.

Many people are pointing out that the current mania for transgender rights is the archetypical picture of a culture which is unwilling to let anything besides personal preference define our personhood. Our often-fleeting desires, rather than something as robustly real as chromosomes, and as profoundly transcendent as Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:18–25, win the day. Beyond postmodernism’s questioning of objective truth is post-truth’s¹¹ focus

9 This was the thrust of the seminar at RTS-DC.

10 Romans 11:33–36.

11 “Post-truth” was the 2016 Oxford Dictionaries “Word of the Year”: “post-truth *adjective*, relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the->

on truth being determined by how we feel about something. For instance, “I feel like a female, though I have male parts, and you can’t deny my feelings.” The church’s answer, compassionately given to those captured by this confusion, is that what we are as image-bearers of God, is determinative because the Creator knows what he intended when he created us. Again, as we look to where the puck is moving, we must be grounded in what the Scriptures teach.

People might say, “I went to your church, and I didn’t feel anything, so why should I believe that what you say is true?” When believers try to talk to “Nones”¹² and “Exiles,”¹³ we can find that we are like “ships passing in the night.” We are speaking a language that Nones and Exiles do not understand. Our task is to speak biblical truth to those for whom the very category of truth is suspect, while trying to listen to them to see what lies beneath their words. We do this because we too were once disobedient, led astray until the goodness and lovingkindness of God appeared.¹⁴ We must recognize that, in terms of postmodernism, a claim of having *the* truth is an act of oppression. We cannot surrender the gospel and cannot be ashamed of it, but how do we address unbelievers in the time in which God has placed us?¹⁵

It is because people, postmodern, millennial, or secular, are God’s image-bearers that we always have a communication bridge. Just as we have DNA that determines eye color, height, etc., so God has written into our hearts ways of thinking which, however distorted or twisted by sin, are still there. The pleasant young person waiting on

year-2016.

12 “Nones” are those who claim that they don’t fit into the categories of religious preference, and therefore don’t go to church, though they may consider themselves “spiritual.”

13 “Exiles” are those who consider themselves “Christian” but are not connected to any organized body because they don’t see any that “work” for them; hence they see themselves as exiles from the church.

14 Titus 3:3–7.

15 We shouldn’t naively think that our young people in our churches are not being affected by these cultural shifts. The percentage of “churched” young people who think homosexuality is okay because they have friends who are gay, is significant.

me at the store may be male or female—neither the dress, hair style, or voice gives me a clue, but leaves everything ambiguous. He or she¹⁶ is inescapably an image-bearer, and I should treat “them” as one. My discomfort or puzzlement needs to be replaced by a biblical viewpoint, that that person is created to be a worshiper, and is called to be a worshiper of God the Creator. In this way we are to love both our God and our neighbor (Matt. 22:34–40).

Because of the language Christians speak, we are oftentimes not being heard, so we need to think harder about not only what we are saying, but how we are saying it, and whether our words are reflected in our living. How are believers to see themselves? Though there are those in our society who see themselves as “exiles” from the church, Christians themselves are the exiles. This world is not our home, yet we are placed here to show forth the glories of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). While exiles long for home (Ps. 137:1–6; Heb. 11:13–16), God commands his exiled people to live here to show forth his glory. We must learn to speak to those around us and raise as few barriers as we can. In how many of our churches do we fail to recognize the enormous challenge a non-Christian experiences in walking through the door and sitting through a service? It is assumed that people will know how to find a hymn in a hymnal or sing a hymn projected on a screen, or understand that it is okay to put nothing in the plate when the offering is received. Do we realize how our Calvinist jargon is like a foreign language to many people? Do we expect people to simply understand things because it is second-nature to us?

People might be willing to risk coming to worship if we exhibited Christlike words and deeds—and if we were willing to admit, when we fall short, that this is why Christians need the gospel, too, and need it all the time. We might ask ourselves: “Do I love the world too much or perhaps not love my true home enough? We cannot change the

content of what we say—the gospel is the gospel—and we can’t change the fact that it is propositional truth (Rom. 10:5–17) that must be communicated. But the way we communicate it, in our words and lives, must take into account how it is being received.

People, whether Nones, Exiles, or those openly hostile to the gospel, are probably unlikely to be argued into the kingdom. The experience-oriented culture in which we live, with its rejection of absolutes, is perishing because it lacks the truth. The trajectory calls us to think differently about how we communicate the unchanging truth. Are we willing to grapple seriously with the question of the church’s faithful proclamation of the gospel in a society increasingly unwilling and unable to hear what we are saying? Christ is building his church, and no cultural shifts can stop that. I believe that we need to talk to and interact with others who are thinking about these things—even if we don’t buy everything they say. This will challenge us to ask ourselves whether we are understanding things rightly. The OPC is committed to being a confessional, Word-and-sacrament church. We are already countercultural in that way, and God can use us; but we shouldn’t be contrarians for the sake of being contrary. Do we really want to see the OPC shrink while we say that we are being faithful? If we believe what we say we believe, that God is sovereignly calling a people to himself, what is our part in that? How will we communicate the message of the gospel not only in 2017, but in 2030? We can only do so if we are ever more shaped by the Word of God and are not conformed to the thinking, culture, language, and secularism of our age (Rom. 12:2). ☉

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¹⁶ The preferred pronoun is actually “they.”

✦ Servant Work

The Spiritual Nature of the Office of Deacon

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by Carl Carlson

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Every Sunday, during morning worship, the saints of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church sing the doxology after giving their tithes and offerings to the Lord. Additionally, one Sunday each month, they make deacons' offerings immediately following the Lord's Supper. We can readily overlook the intentional nature of taking these offerings during worship. After all, we could just as easily mail checks directly to the treasurer or initiate a regular automatic withdrawal from our bank accounts.

But, before we treat our financial obligations to God as if they were a utility bill, we would be wise to consider the importance of our giving as part of worship and how this has a profound impact on how we view the nature of the diaconate. The deacons are charged with managing both these offerings in order to take care of the temporal affairs of the church. Given that the foundation of diaconal duty is bound up in the offerings that are an act of worship, their use must fulfill God's calling for the church: to spread the good news

of Jesus Christ. The implication of this is that all financial decisions of the church must support this calling. Given the diaconate's role in managing these funds, it is incumbent upon the deacons to appreciate the spiritual nature of their duties and undertake them as such.

So, how does the deacon approach his office? He recognizes that while his duties may be temporal in nature, they cannot be fulfilled properly without understanding that the very mission of the church undergirds all that he does.

The Office

When considering Acts chapter 6 as a foundational text for the office of deacon, it is important to recognize how Acts 2 through 5 set the context. The apostles are preaching Christ and performing miracles in his name. The growth of the church is breathtaking, with three thousand baptized in one day (2:41); more are added daily (2:47). As the church grows, the Sanhedrin becomes concerned. Admonition, arrest, and beatings follow, but the apostles carry on with their mission. They admonish the Council, "We must obey God rather than men" (5:29). Meanwhile, the believers devote themselves to the church, including combining their wealth to help those in need (2:45).

We can imagine a large congregation—moved by the teaching, signs, and wonders of the apostles—demonstrating their thankfulness for God's grace by being generous with their own possessions. The connection to Deuteronomy 15:7–11 could not be clearer:

If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, "The seventh year, the year of release is near," and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against

¹ http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=638&issue_id=127.

you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, “You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.”

The deacons enter against this backdrop. The role of these men is to allow the apostles to fulfill their duties in teaching and praying. Right away, the deacon has a purpose: free the apostles from tasks that take away from their primary duties. The immediate need was for men who could administer the daily distribution for the widows. Perhaps the deacons even took over the task of accepting the offerings that were previously laid at the apostles’ feet (5:37).

But these first deacons are not just administrators of a social security office. They are fulfilling a duty established in the law, rooted in the Ten Commandments. The congregation’s offerings are freewill, not compulsory. The apostles take care to instruct the congregation to choose men of high character with appropriate spiritual qualifications. The men chosen were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3). Stephen sets an example of the deacon’s character by being a defender of the faith to the point of martyrdom.

The new deacons are effective. In 6:7 we learn that “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

As we move along in church history, Paul’s church plants are instructive. He did not record a book of order that we can follow. But when we study his ministry, both in the book of Acts and through his epistles, a framework of church government with elders (bishops, overseers, presbyters) and deacons (servants) becomes evident. Paul echoes Acts 6 when he lays out the qualifications for deacons, emphasizing character over skills or abilities. Paul provides more details than the broad

“full of the Spirit and wisdom” from Acts 6. In 1 Timothy 3:8–13 he instructs:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

There is much here to consider, but a good summary would be that a deacon’s life must show evidence that it is formed by the gospel. For the deacon to be a good servant of the Lord, he must show that he is obedient to him.

The Duties

With spiritual *qualifications* as the background, it is incumbent on the deacon to see his office being fulfilled by the performance of spiritual *duties*. It is here that we encounter the biblical concept of stewardship. Stewardship is a key concept in the Christian life. We are called to be good stewards of all that God has given us.

The “Cultural Mandate” of Genesis 1:28 could just as easily have been named the “Stewardship Mandate.” It makes clear that mankind is to subdue and rule over the earth, but it also implies that ownership is still God’s. He hasn’t gifted it to us to dispense as we wish. We have been given possession of his gifts to use them only as he directs. He alone sets the requirements for how we may use his goods and his world. All wealth and possessions that God puts under our oversight are to be used for his glory. Consider these three passages from Matthew:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where

thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (6:19–21)

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (6:31–33)

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (16:24–26)

Jesus is telling his disciples to make choices. Is their master God or money? Is their guide in life faith or anxiety? Is their ultimate place in this world or the next? These are powerful contrasts that show us what a good steward does with his wealth, how he makes life decisions, and what is most important to him.

Stewardship is governed by the Ten Commandments. When we summarize them by saying, “Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself,” we have a concise statement of how our lives are to exhibit good stewardship. But, how do people hear about God’s demands for stewardship? Through the church. The first deacons freed the apostles so that the church could fulfill its central duty to teach and pray.

Stewardship is given a central role in the life of the believer, and it is the deacon’s role to promote good stewardship. As the Word is taught from our pulpits, faith liberates the believer to a new life of obedience. Out of obedience good stewardship naturally flows. The deacons are inspired by the

same teaching to stimulate obedience in everyone. They are the lead stewards of the congregation. As the elders call the congregation to good works, the deacons channel these efforts to the particular needs of the congregation: cash offerings to provide assistance where needed, in-kind help where appropriate, physical work to care for the building, calling upon individual talents and abilities where they can be used. In short, the deacon must be a good steward of the congregation’s money and talents.

The Details

The deacon’s duties can be divided between two main areas: church financial management and ministry of mercy. In the carrying out of duties in both categories, exercising biblical stewardship is central. If the deacons do not support their work with sound principles of stewardship, they will be prone to poor judgment, missteps, omissions, and confusion.

Financial Management

Under session oversight, the deacons have authority over the financial management of the congregation. This means managing both the cash and the assets of the congregation. For most churches the primary asset is its building and all the furnishings, equipment, and supplies in it. Even churches without a building may have assets of considerable value. An effective diaconate harnesses the value of all these assets to ensure that the mission of the church is accomplished.

For example, the purchase or construction budget of a building must take into account the congregation’s ability not only to pay the mortgage, but to have sufficient funds remaining to pay a pastor and fund all the ministries of the church. The building’s purpose is to have a place for the church to meet in order to worship God. Without a pastor to teach and preach, it is useless. What good is a building with no room in the budget for a full-time pastor? Decisions for building upgrades require the same scrutiny. Why fund expensive upgrades to furnishings if it takes away from the ability to fund the presbytery’s home missions fund?

This logic drills down into the details of yearly budgeting. The line-by-line minutiae of the budget are the diaconate's domain. The details of budgeting are a statement of a congregation's priorities of stewardship. The deacons must take their role as stewards with all due care. All areas of spending, however indirectly, must come to bear on the church's mission of proclaiming and spreading the gospel. Questionable items must be considered thoroughly, so that unnecessary spending is eliminated and the funds are used more efficiently for God's glory. If the diaconate takes this role lightly, the church can easily be led astray in all kinds of worldly ways.

Ministry of Mercy

The diaconal mercy ministry is affected profoundly by stewardship. Mercy ministry should be carefully dispensed in Christ's name. The deacons must balance delicately the principle of Matthew 25:45 ("as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me") with the need to be discerning. This is a difficult task. It is no wonder that Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 demand that deacons exhibit strong character. Without it, they will wither under fire.

The OPC has spent considerable effort over the past several years offering training and materials to deacons that emphasize principles of mercy ministry. One main theme coming out of these efforts is the division of diaconal aid into three main categories: (1) response to crisis or disaster; (2) helping a person or family become self-sufficient; (3) helping a person or family develop plans to deal with future crises or disasters without the need for diaconal aid.

This is, in essence, teaching biblical stewardship. Supporting the temporal focus of diaconal aid is a foundation of spiritual ministry: encouraging the person or family to address the stewardship issues that all sinners face, while recognizing that material want and financial hardship exacerbate those challenges. This is a recognition that it can be "easy" to be a good steward when you are not facing financial hardship, but also that financial hardship can be caused by poor stewardship.

Again, wisdom by the deacons is essential here. These are not issues that can be dealt with in short meetings or by emails. The deacons are called here to dig deep, spend much time, and devote themselves to the people's lives.

As the deacons encounter mercy ministry opportunities, they must look for and encourage good stewardship from the potential recipient. The deacon's fund can be a powerful tool for good or ill, so cash or other assistance cannot be distributed without taking the time to assess the recipient's level of stewardship. If the potential recipient of the diaconal aid wastes his gifts, the church rightly expects that he will be denied funds that would merely subsidize his misuse. Wisdom here is essential, and who has it but a deacon who has been instilled with biblical stewardship?

By exploring and probing the level of stewardship of a potential recipient, the deacons are testing the person. While the deacons are called to use the means of creation to relieve suffering, they have a more urgent duty to fulfill before bringing temporal relief: guarding against trusting the means of creation over trusting the power of God. The resurrection comes to mind here. Fear of the world shows lack of faith in the power of the resurrection (death does not win). Ministry of mercy must reflect resurrection glory, not worldly fear. We cannot act as if death wins.

This ties into another purpose of mercy ministry: repentance. While teaching stewardship is more appropriately administered to church members, encountering mercy opportunities with non-members is an occasion for witnessing. While we may never come to know what effect our contact has had on someone, we must always act with a call to repentance in mind.

Jesus spent a great deal of his earthly ministry performing miracles of healing. While a cursory look at these works could leave one thinking that Jesus merely had people's basic health in mind, it is important to remember that Jesus was performing them so that they would know that he was their Messiah and that the kingdom was coming. Knowing this fact was to bring about repentance. We can make the same analogy to mercy ministry.

We bring mercy in Christ's name so that the recipients will know Christ's love, admit their need of a savior, and repent. Deacons must also strive to be as patient as Jesus was. Many healing miracles did not produce repentance, and neither will much diaconal aid. Luke 17:11–19 is instructive:

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

If a deacon finds that one of ten recipients of his church's mercy ministry repents and confesses Jesus, he should rejoice that his work has accomplished what he intended, praising God for his saving grace in at least one sinner.

Conclusion

The deacon is marked by strong character, combined with a servant's heart. He gains biblical wisdom instilled by listening to the Word preached, studying the Word, and participating in training. Then he brings those things together in carrying out his duties to the church. He is not a mere business manager or case worker, but a steward of all the church's temporal gifts. He uses those gifts to enable those under his care to fulfill their chief and highest end: glorifying and enjoying God. ☉

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✦ Servant History

Union with Christ and Reformed Orthodoxy: Calvin vs. the Calvinists?

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by John V. Fesko

In the twentieth century, some historians claimed that Calvinists distorted the theology of their founder, John Calvin (1509–64), but they have been ably refuted through primary-source evidence. Reformed Orthodoxy, the label applied to post-Reformation Reformed theology, stands in doctrinal continuity with the theology of the Reformation.² But despite this trenchant critique of the Calvin versus the Calvinists thesis, the claim persists. In earlier versions of the Calvin versus the Calvinists argument, scholars pitted Calvin’s supposedly Christ-centered theology against the supposed central dogma of predestination (the principle from which the Reformed deduced their entire system of theology). Calvin had no such

central dogma because he did not treat predestination under the doctrine of God, as the Reformed Orthodox did, but in book three of his *Institutes*, under the doctrine of soteriology. In these versions of the argument, Calvin looks a lot like Karl Barth (1886–1968) rather than an Early Modern Reformed theologian. Nevertheless, Charles Partee suggested that union with Christ, not predestination, was Calvin’s “central affirmation.”³ Partee presses this point in his later book on Calvin’s theology with a twofold claim. First, though many Reformed theologians contributed to the complex development of the tradition, Partee believes “we can still affirm John Calvin as the greatest systematic thinker among them.”⁴ Second, in line with his earlier claim, Partee claims that union with Christ is Calvin’s central teaching.⁵ Partee argues that Reformed Orthodoxy departed from Calvin’s teaching: “To put the point briefly and sharply, Calvin is not a Calvinist because union with Christ is at the heart of his theology—and not theirs.”⁶

In this essay, I argue the antithesis of Partee’s twofold claim: (1) that Calvin is neither the normative nor the greatest theologian of the Reformed tradition, and (2) that union with Christ lies at the heart of the soteriology of Reformed Orthodoxy as much or even more than Calvin. To prove this twofold thesis, I briefly survey the views of three Reformed theologians: Girolamo Zanchi (1516–90), William Perkins (1558–1602), and Edward Leigh (1602–71). Each of these theologians places great emphasis upon the doctrine of union with Christ, revealing that it lies at the heart of his soteriology. But we will see that when they expound their doctrine, the overly simplistic rubric of Calvin versus the Calvinists inadequately explains the relationship between them and Calvin. Contrary to the claims of Partee, the Reformed tradition never made Calvin normative in any

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=594&issue_id=121.

2 See, e.g., Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); R. Scott Clark and Carl R. Trueman, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011); Willem Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

3 Charles Partee, “Calvin’s Central Dogma Again,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, no. 2 (1987): 191–99, esp. 194.

4 Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 3.

5 Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 16, 27.

6 *Ibid.*, 27.

sense. Rather, Scripture and the confessions have always been normative. No one theologian ever gained ascendancy within early modernity, unlike the Lutheran tradition in which Martin Luther (1486–1546) serves as a fountainhead figure. The essay concludes with summary observations about the nature of the Reformed tradition and the doctrine of union with Christ.

Zanchi, Perkins, and Leigh

Girolamo Zanchi

Zanchi presents an excellent test case to demonstrate the inaccuracy of Partee's claims regarding Calvin and the Reformed tradition because of his reputation as a theologian as well as his direct interaction with Calvin. Zanchi was initially converted under the ministry of Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and was trained by him, but he also studied with Calvin at Geneva for ten months.⁷ In fact, Zanchi prepared a compendium of Calvin's 1543–45 *Institutes* for his personal use, which means he was intimately familiar with Calvin's theology.⁸ In Zanchi we have a theologian known for his Thomistic Scholastic precision, but who also studied with Calvin at Geneva. Granted, Zanchi was a transitional figure as an Early Orthodox (1565–1630/40) theologian, but at the same time exhibits the characteristics that Partee finds incompatible with Calvin's theology. Zanchi employed the Scholastic method characteristic of High Orthodoxy (1630/40–1700).

Because of Zanchi's Scholastic tendencies, one might expect the doctrine of union with Christ to suffer atrophy in his theology, given Partee's claims, but in fact the opposite is true. Calvin never gave the doctrine of union with Christ explicit structural significance in his theology. There is no locus, for example, dedicated to the

7 Philip McNair, *Peter Martyr in Italy: An Anatomy of Apostasy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 229; John Patrick Donnelly, "Italian Influences on the Development of Calvinist Scholasticism," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 7, no. 1 (1976): 88.

8 Girolamo Zanchi, *Compendium praecipuorum captivum doctrinae christianae*, in *Opera Theologica*, vol. 8 (Geneva, 1605), 621–828.

doctrine in any of the editions of his *Institutes*. Theologians have constructed synthetic treatments of his doctrine of union based upon the various things that Calvin says about it as they lie scattered throughout his writings.⁹ Now while Zanchi never produced his own systematic treatment of doctrine like Calvin's *Institutes*, he nevertheless wrote a confession of faith that was supposed to supersede the widely accepted Second Helvetic Confession (1566), written by Zurich's Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75).

In one sense Zanchi's confession looks very similar to other comparable confessions of the period, such as the Gallican (1559), Belgic (1563), or the Second Helvetic. But on the other hand, Zanchi's confession stands out because he devotes a specific article exclusively to the doctrine of union with Christ. In chapter XII of his confession, Zanchi provides the following title: "Of the true dispensation of the redemption, the salvation, and life, which is laid up in Christ alone, and therefore of the necessarie [*sic*] uniting and participation with Christ."¹⁰ Zanchi then elaborates the doctrine in nineteen paragraphs. This chapter on union with Christ acts as the gateway to his soteriology, from which he discusses the gospel, the sacraments, faith, repentance, justification, free will, and good works, among other topics.¹¹ So Zanchi's emphasis upon union with Christ is arguably greater in comparison with Calvin's own confession-writing efforts. Calvin contributed to the authorship of the Gallican Confession, but union with Christ does not feature as one of the structurally significant doctrines.¹²

In addition to Zanchi's confession, he devoted

9 So, e.g., Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 40–43.

10 Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione christiana fides—Confession of Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), XII (vol. I, p. 231). Note, this is a Latin-English edition that provides the 1588 and 1601 Latin editions and the 1599 English translation. I cite the 1599 English translation in this and subsequent quotations.

11 Zanchi, *De religione*, XIII–XXI (vol. I, pp. 253–370).

12 See French Confession (1559–71), in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 372–86.

significant time to exegesis. Among his exegetical labors his commentary on Ephesians stands out because he wrote a number of doctrinal excurses throughout the work, including an excursus on union with Christ.¹³ A translator deemed Zanchi's excursus worthy for publication as a stand-alone work and published it in 1599 as *An Excellent and Learned Treatise of the Spiritual Marriage Between Christ and the Church*.¹⁴ Once again, Zanchi stands out in comparison to Calvin. The second-generation Genevan reformer never produced a treatise or wrote a dedicated doctrinal locus or excursus on union with Christ. This is not to say that Calvin was therefore deficient, but rather raises the question of whether Partee's analysis of Calvin's devotion to the doctrine is accurate, especially when we see the amount of attention Zanchi gives it. Moreover, it also dispels Partee's characterization of Reformed Orthodoxy, or in Partee's term, Calvinism. According to Partee, Reformed Orthodoxy manifested the inappropriately confident spirit of Scholasticism, which produced enhanced logical rigor at the expense of theological insight.¹⁵ In other words, the Reformed Orthodox paid greater attention to system and less to exegesis and Christology. But Zanchi's excursus arose during his exegetical labors, which presents *prima facie* evidence that Zanchi's Scholastic precision did not diminish his exegetical fidelity or his theological insight. In fact, the opposite is true—his Scholasticism drove him to expound the doctrine with greater historical depth, theological clarity, and exegetical precision.

What is interesting about Zanchi's excursus on union with Christ are the sources that he quotes. The impression one gets from some historians such as Partee is that Calvin forged the doctrine of union with Christ on the anvil of his own biblical

exegesis and doctrinal insight and subsequent generations cast aside his work.¹⁶ To be sure, traces of Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ appear in Zanchi. In his confession, Zanchi explains: "That we cannot be united unto Christ, unlesse [*sic*] he first unite himself to us."¹⁷ This sounds like Calvin's famous statement from book III: "So long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race is of the least benefit to us. To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us."¹⁸ But at the same time, Zanchi looked beyond Calvin to construct his own doctrine of union with Christ. He cites many patristic theologians, including Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 378–444) and Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 300–ca. 368).¹⁹ Zanchi's citations demonstrate that union with Christ was not a doctrine unique to Calvin but was rather part of their common catholic heritage. Moreover, Zanchi refined his doctrine of union with Christ in the fiery disputes over the Lord's Supper between the Reformed and the Lutherans during his time in Strasbourg.²⁰ Zanchi appealed to multiple sources to prove that the Reformed understanding of the supper and its broader doctrinal context of union with Christ was catholic rather than unique to Calvin and did so by supporting his doctrine both from Scripture and ancient sources.

William Perkins

Similar patterns unfold in other Reformed theologians, such as William Perkins. Perkins was a leading theologian in the late sixteenth century and wielded significant influence among the students he instructed while at the University of Cambridge and through the publication of his

13 Girolamo Zanchi, *De conjugio spirituali inter Christum et Ecclesiam*, in *Commentarius in epistolam Sancti Pauli ad Ephesios*, 2 vols., ed. A. H. de Hartog, Bibliotheca Reformata, vols. 5–6 (Amsterdam: Joannes Adam Wormser, 1888–89), 6:332–82.

14 Girolamo Zanchi, *An Excellent and Learned Treatise of the Spiritual Marriage between Christ and the Church* (Cambridge, 1592).

15 Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 14.

16 Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 19n65.

17 Zanchi, *De religione*, XII.iv (vol. I, 233).

18 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 3.1.1.

19 Zanchi, *Spiritual Marriage*, 78–82.

20 Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, eds., *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 212–14.

works.²¹ In our own day Perkins is probably better known for his famous ocular catechism, or his chart that illustrated the causes of salvation and damnation. Some have characterized this chart as a graphic to explain the doctrine of the decree while others have more accurately described it as a schematized order of salvation.²² Even then, if it is a schematized order of salvation, in a similar fashion to Partee, some have claimed that the introduction of the *ordo salutis* represents a significant Scholastic deviation from and vitiation of Calvin's theology of union with Christ.²³ Reformed Orthodoxy traded the gold of Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ for the fool's gold of the *ordo salutis*. But I personally wonder how many critics have carefully examined Perkins's infamous chart.²⁴

Perkins's chart is admittedly visually cluttered, but the one thing that confronts the reader is the importance of union with Christ. Perkins lists the golden chain: the decree of election, the love of God to the elect in Christ, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, glorification, and eternal life. In a second column, he connects effectual calling to faith, justification to the remission of sin and imputation of righteousness, and sanctification to mortification and vivification. But in the third and central column he lists the person and work of Christ: Christ the mediator of the elect, the holiness of his manhood, the fulfilling of the law, his accursed death, burial, bondage under the grave, resurrection, ascension, session at the right hand of God, and ongoing intercession. Perkins connects faith to every element of the central Christ-column and then other benefits to select elements of Christ's work. He connects the remission of sins,

for example, to Christ's death, burial, bondage under the grave, and resurrection, whereas he links the imputation of righteousness to the holiness of his manhood and his fulfillment of the law.²⁵ Regardless of the visual complexity of Perkins's chart, we should not lose sight of the fact that every benefit of redemption comes from the believer's union with Christ. This fact has not been lost on older scholarship, as Heinrich Heppe (1820–79) in his *History of Pietism* claimed that for Perkins, the Christian life had to be directly connected to the crucified Christ and possession of him through fellowship and mystical union.²⁶ Similarly, R. Tudur Jones (1921–98) describes union with Christ as the “existential nerve of Puritan piety,” and he too draws attention to the patristic and medieval origins of the doctrine.²⁷ Once again, though derided as a distorter of Calvin's theology, Perkins does not fit Partee's description as one who abandoned the doctrine of union with Christ. Moreover, union and the order of salvation are not competing alternatives, but rather different sides of the same coin.

Edward Leigh

A third noteworthy example appears in the theology of Edward Leigh, a polymath educated at Oxford University under William Pemble (1591–1623). Leigh published on numerous subjects including theology, and he served as a Member of Parliament during the Westminster Assembly.²⁸ In similar fashion to Zanchi, Leigh treats applied soteriology under the rubric of union with Christ: “Of Our Union and Communion with Christ, And our Spiritual Benefits by him, and some special

21 W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

22 So, rightly, Richard A. Muller, “Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (1978): 69–81.

23 William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 43–83, 264–66; Julie Canlis, “Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (2004): 169–84, esp. 174–82, 183n55.

24 <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html?mainframe=/calvinism/perkins.html>.

25 William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or The Description of Theologie* (London: John Legate, 1597).

26 Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformirten Kirche* (Leiden: Brill, 1879), 224–26; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 131–32.

27 R. Tudur Jones, “Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 186–208, esp. 187, 191.

28 “Edward Leigh,” in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXXII, ed. Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 432–33.

Graces.”²⁹ In his opening comments, Leigh rejects two different versions of the doctrine: “Some make our Union with Christ to be only a relative Union, others an essential personall Union, as if we were Godded with God, and Christed with Christ.” Leigh rejects these erroneous views, which characterized union with Christ as merely associative or the opposite extreme that he absorbed sinners into his divine essence.³⁰ Instead, Leigh argues the union is real, mutual, spiritual, operative, intimate, and inseparable.³¹

In the chapters that follow, Leigh treats common elements of applied soteriology: effectual calling, which is the inception of our union with Christ, faith, communion with Christ, justification, and sanctification.³² Leigh treats each of these categories, and many others, as different aspects of our union with Christ. Leigh’s exposition bears similarities to Perkins’s ocular catechism as he relates the aspects of our salvation to the various facets of Christ’s person and work. Justification, for example, “is a Judicial Act of God the Father upon a beleeving [*sic*] sinner, whereby his sins being imputed to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness to him, he is acquitted from sin and death, and accepted righteous to eternal life.”³³ Sanctification, according to Leigh, “is a continued work of the Spirit flowing from Christ as the Head, purging a man from the image of *Adam*, and by degrees conforming us to the image of Christ.”³⁴ Both benefits flow from union with Christ, but in a different manner—in justification we receive Christ’s imputed righteousness whereas in sanctification we receive the Spirit, which flows from Christ as our head. Christ never recedes from the picture, but is the source from which all the blessings of redemption stream.

Equally notable in Leigh’s treatment of union

29 Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London: William Lee, 1654), VII, 485.

30 *Ibid.*, VII.i, 487.

31 *Ibid.*, VII.i, 487–88.

32 *Ibid.*, VII.ii, 489ff.; iv, 499ff; v, 510ff; vi, 512ff.; xi, 530ff.

33 *Ibid.*, VII.vi, 512.

34 *Ibid.*, VII.xi, 531.

with Christ are the numerous sources he cites: William Pemble, his tutor at Oxford, the Acts of the Synod of Dordt, André Rivet (1572–1651), John Cameron (ca. 1579–1625), George Carleton (ca. 1557–1628), William Twisse (ca. 1577–1646), John Davenant (1572–1641), Augustine (354–430), George Gillespie (1613–48), Pierre Du Moulin (1568–1658), Jacob Alting (1618–79), Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641), Martin Luther, Anthony Burgess (d. 1664), Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Daniel Featly (1582–1645), Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), John Cotton (1585–1652), Thomas Cartwright (1534–1603), Thomas Manton (1620–77), George Downname (ca. 1563–1634), Dudley Fenner (ca. 1558–87), and Andrew Willett (ca. 1561–1621). There are too many to list, but this sample sufficiently illustrates the point that there were numerous theologians contributing to the discussion, on-going development, reception, and refinement of the doctrine. Calvin, therefore, was not normative for the tradition. In fact, Calvin’s name appears only once in Leigh’s treatment of union with Christ.³⁵

Calvin as Normative?

Partee might respond that this proves his contention, namely, “The problem, as it seems to me, is that ‘later Reformed theologians’ imitate each other, not Calvin.”³⁶ On the contrary, Leigh’s citation patterns reveal several things. First, why would Leigh and other Reformed theologians assume that Calvin was normative for the tradition apart from any type of ecclesiastical sanction? The Lutheran tradition, for example, holds Luther as normative not because the tradition bears his name but because the Lutheran church enshrined some of Luther’s writings in the *Book of Concord* (including the Smalcald Articles [1537] and his Small and Large Catechisms [1529]), commended his commentary on Galatians, and regularly invokes

35 *Ibid.*, VII.iii, 495.

36 Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 14n46.

his name as an authority.³⁷ No major Reformed confession ever does this with Calvin's name or works.³⁸ One may certainly esteem Calvin as a great theologian and even believe that he is the brightest luminary of the tradition, but one's subjective opinion is different from the objective facts of history. To prove Calvin's greatness or influence, one must provide objective data such as the number of copies of Calvin's works that were sold in the Early Modern period, as well as quotations, allusions, or echoes of Calvin's ideas in the works of other theologians.

If the tradition formally established Calvin as the norm, then Leigh's citations of other writers might indeed prove the devolution of the Reformed tradition—its break with its founder. But on the other hand, has doctrinal development and dialogue ever stood still? Leigh's citations and references point to the fact that the High Orthodox Reformed theologians continued to debate, discuss, and explain the doctrines of the Reformation. As others contributed to the on-going dialogue, subsequent theologians interacted with the growing body of literature. True, Leigh's citations may not always indicate which works represent the cream of the crop, but they do reveal which works were likely most important at the time, at least in Leigh's mind. But the citation patterns in Leigh's work were not an anomaly.

The same pattern appears in one of the seventeenth century's greatest debates over union with Christ, namely, the communion controversy between John Owen (1616–83) and William Sherlock (ca. 1641–1707). In short, Sherlock, a leading figure in the Church of England, had great contempt for nonconformist theologians and churchmen like Owen. He lobbed a theological grenade against Owen's doctrine of mystical union with Christ and derided it as novel and heretical.

37 Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 297–328, 345–480, 573.

38 Carl R. Trueman, "Calvin and Calvinism," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 225.

If Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ was as great and normative as Partee claims, then one might expect that Owen and other nonconformists would appeal to him to vindicate their doctrine from the charges of novelty and heresy. During the controversy between 1674 and 1675, Sherlock and nonconformist theologians spilled an ocean of ink and published some four thousand pages in various books defending their respective positions. In my count, Calvin's name appears four times among a total of twenty-five other theologians from the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation periods. In fact, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), a medieval theologian noted for his doctrine of union with Christ, is cited three times.³⁹ His sermons on the Song of Songs are featured as one of many key texts in the debate. Calvin never published anything on this book of Scripture, a book commonly cited in support of the doctrine of union with Christ.⁴⁰ These citation patterns reveal that Reformed theologians never saw themselves as disciples of any one man, but as Reformed catholics, and as such, regularly drew upon a wide body of knowledge from every major period of church history in the construction and articulation of their doctrines of union with Christ.

Conclusion

In summary, we must set aside the claim that Calvin was no Calvinist because Calvinists rejected his doctrine of union with Christ. The claim fails on two counts. First, the Reformed tradition never established Calvin as a norm. Rather, Scripture and confession always served as

39 For the list and tabulation of sources, see J. V. Fesko, "The Communion Controversy: Owen and Sherlock on 'Union with Christ,'" in *In Christ Alone: Perspectives on Union with Christ*, ed. Stephen Clark and Matthew Evans (Fearn: Mentor, 2016), 138–39.

40 Cf., e.g., John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (1850–53; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 125; Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, 4 vols. (Trappist, KY: Cistercian, 1971–80); Theodore Beza, *Master Bezaes Sermons upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1587); the "argument" of the book in the 1560 Geneva Bible (*The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* [Geneva: Rouland Hali, 1560], 280).

the norms for the tradition. No one man was ever granted fountainhead status. Second, the surveyed evidence clearly demonstrates that Reformed Orthodox theologians never abandoned the doctrine of union with Christ. Rather, it was an integral part of their soteriology. Scholasticism, exegesis, union with Christ, and the order of salvation all happily coexist in Reformed Orthodox theology. Hence, Calvin is but one bright light in a sky littered with many other great stars.⁴¹ ©

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Presbyterians and the American Mainstream

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

Mainline Presbyterianism is making a comeback. Michelle Alexander, a civil rights attorney who dented national discussions of race with her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*,² recently decided to leave Ohio State University Law School to teach and study at Union Seminary in New York City. She admitted that her choice to work at arguably the most liberal of mainline Presbyterian seminaries was an odd one, since she had not been reared a Presbyterian or in any church. But she has also become convinced that the difficulties surrounding race relations in the United States will not find a measure of resolution in better law or policy. Instead, Americans need to pay attention to the “profound moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of justice work.”³ That explanation works at one level, but can anyone imagine Alexander leaving Ohio State for Fuller Seminary, Gordon-Conwell, or even Westminster Theological Seminary? Chances are that these institutions were not on her radar, thanks to Union’s location in New York City, but also to the much closer proximity of Union to the people, institutions, and finances that go into the leading secular law schools. In other words, for all of Union’s challenges of late—with enrollment,

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=597&issue_id=121.

2 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

3 Paul Caron, “Michelle Alexander Resigns from Ohio State Law Faculty for Seminary, Valuing ‘Publicly Accessible Writing over Academic Careerism’; Law without ‘A Moral or Spiritual Awakening’ Cannot Bring about Justice,” *TaxProf Blog*, September 25, 2016, http://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof_blog/2016/09/michelle-alexander-resigns-from-ohio-state-law-faculty-for-seminary-valuing-publicly-accessible-writ.html, accessed November 28, 2016.

41 Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 161–243; J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

finances, building maintenance, and institutional identity—it is still much more likely to attract public intellectuals than an evangelical or confessional academic institution is.

In the “world” of U.S. Presbyterianism, the PCUSA is still the largest and the most American. Of the largest denominations—with the PCUSA topping the list at roughly 1.6 million, the PCA at almost 400,000, the EPC at 170,000, and then the also rans—the Associate Reformed at 40,000, the Orthodox Presbyterians at 31,000, and the Covenanters (RPCNA) at 6,000—denominational identity seems to be closely calibrated to a communion’s social location. Whether size is a product of proximity to the mainstream is another question. But even in the little and opinionated OPC, communicants and pastors have a sense that Orthodox Presbyterianism is closer to the American mainstream than either the Associate Reformed (which is slightly larger) or the Covenanters. Here, as much as Orthodox Presbyterians might hate to admit it, their denomination’s roots in the PCUSA account for whatever sense of cultural superiority the OPC can muster with a straight face. The ARPs and the Covenanters were—and still remain—predominantly ethnic communions where loyalties to defining moments in Scottish church history loom much larger in denominational identity than mainstream Presbyterianism’s participation in the narrative of U.S. history. Both the Seceders and the Covenanters had theological and political reasons for cultural isolation in the United States that never occurred to Orthodox Presbyterians, for whom the general expectations of the mainline churches about the place of Protestantism in national life have only been questioned at certain flashpoints in the denomination’s history. One of my favorites was the OPC general assembly’s 1956 report on the Boy Scouts. Here an institution about as American, religious, and wholesome as they come, failed to measure up to the OPC standards. The Boy Scout’s god was too generic and moralistic for the God revealed in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

The desire to be mainstream may be hard to shake for Presbyterians who trace their origins

to the PCUSA or think of the United States as a Christian nation, but David Hollinger’s recent and much invoked argument that mainline Protestants did not lose but actually prevailed over evangelical Protestants in the culture wars should come with warnings.⁴ In a rebuke to the historical literature of the last three decades that has featured evangelical Protestantism and the Religious Right as the dominant if not mainstream of white American Christianity, Hollinger observes that the United States has actually become what liberal Protestants in the mainline churches wanted—secular, inclusive, and cosmopolitan. Rather than viewing the decline of mainline Protestantism simply from the perspective of “Christian survivalism”—whether the mainline survives among members and institutions—Hollinger proposes that a better perspective is to regard mainstream Protestantism as a “halfway house” to secularism. “The diversity-preoccupied aspects of public American life today,” he asserts, “look much more like what the editors of *The Christian Century* in 1960 hoped it would look like than what the editors of *Christianity Today* were projecting as an ideal future.”⁵ He explains that individualism, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, democracy, and intellectual inquiry were all goals of Protestant ecumenists, and those ideals’ triumph in the wider culture depended partly on the churches’ advocacy. Much of what the churches advocated has taken root in the United States, and so observers and scholars have been slow to give proper credit to mainstream Protestantism. Hollinger points to the YMCA’s removal of “Christian” from its name and going simply by “the Y” as evidence of the mainline’s “cultural victory.”

Here an organization that began in the nineteenth century as fervently evangelical and then in the twentieth century became increasingly ecumenical and egalitarian has, in the twenty-first century, proclaimed itself to be

4 David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

5 *Ibid.*, 46.

virtually secular and in the name of diversity.⁶

The problem with this interpretation—aside from giving Protestants more reason to take credit for creating the United States (a progressive version of America founded as a Christian nation, as it were)—is its Whiggish understanding of the modern era. Whether Hollinger intends or not, his point suggests that the *telos* of Protestantism was modern multicultural America. Why Hollinger does not examine Americanism and Protestantism as distinct identities with the churches becoming increasingly liberal as they became more American is not clear. If Hollinger’s point is that Protestantism was the chief carrier of American norms until the arrival of full-blown multicultural America, he would be employing a form of Protestant exceptionalism that rivals the old Religious Right’s claim that the United States began as a Christian nation. It is as if the Protestant Reformation were chiefly an on-ramp to the highway of liberal society with the United States as the fulfillment of Ulrich Zwingli’s Zurich and John Calvin’s Geneva.

Another way of assessing mainstream Presbyterianism is not to use American political norms as the standard but the teachings of European churches that implemented ecclesiastical reform. In other words, what if American Presbyterianism was not the gleam in the eye of Martin Bucer, Zwingli, and Calvin back when they were persuading Swiss city councils to embrace and defend the true religion? Did they imagine that removing papal authority and the Mass from the Western Church was simply a warm up for creating a society in which the churches would underwrite a nation with resources to end two world wars and defeat Soviet Communism and that made a creed of individualism, freedom, pluralism, tolerance, democracy, and intellectual inquiry? Another way of asking this is to wonder why rejecting the confessional state and established churches of early modern Europe for the modern liberal order that separated church and state was insufficient for

Presbyterians to become American. Why could American Presbyterians not retain beliefs about limited atonement or the eternal decrees while also affirming a federal government that was silent about God and that severed ties between church and state?

When the PCUSA held its First General Assembly, this was precisely what happened—namely, revising the church’s creed in a way that made sense of the American experience. The heart of the 1787 revision was to alter the twenty-third chapter on the civil magistrate. In paragraph three of the original, the divines asserted that the civil magistrate has

authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses of worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.

In addition, the magistrate’s authority included calling synods, being present at them, and insuring that “whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.” In 1640s England, with a state church still the rule and with Christendom the assumption, granting Parliament such broad power made sense.

But ecclesiastical establishment did not make sense in the British colonies soon to be the United States of America. Consequently, the American divines changed the twenty-third chapter so that the magistrate became merely a “nursing father” whose duty was

to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest in such a manner, that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging, every part of their sacred functions, without violence or danger.

In addition to encouraging all the churches, the magistrate should not “interfere with, let, or

⁶ Ibid., 49.

hinder, the due exercise” of any Christian denomination. The American revisions added that the magistrate should protect “the person and good name of all their people” such that no one, “upon pretense of religion or of infidelity,” should endure any “indignity, violence, abuse, or injury.” From this change to the twenty-third chapter followed relatively minor ones in chapters twenty and thirty-one which had also granted the magistrate power within the internal affairs of the church. This was Presbyterian-styled Americanism.

In contrast, Americanism was a problem for Roman Catholics, and in 1899 Leo XIII condemned it mildly as a heresy mainly because Roman Catholicism was a package. With popes standing supreme, not only over all bishops, but also over all princes, republics, and city councils—in theory, to argue as Americanist bishops did that the church should adapt to U.S. forms of government, democracy, individual freedom, and the separation of church and state was to break with a social theory that popes had developed at least since the High Middle Ages and then went into overdrive after the French Revolution. Consider, for instance, when John F. Kennedy told Texas ministers in 1960:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

When he said that, he was not following church teaching on politics. Neither was he being a good Roman Catholic when he added,

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the

National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.⁷

The Second Vatican Council revised the underpinnings of Roman Catholic political theory, but as late as 1962 a Roman Catholic who favored republican secular governments over throne and altar arrangements was deviating from orthodoxy.

In contrast, when American Presbyterians revised the Westminster Confession’s chapter on the civil magistrate, they were breaking with both the Covenanters’ understanding of monarch, Parliament, and church, as well as the Church of Scotland’s status within the United Kingdom’s ecclesiastical establishment. But few suspect that John Witherspoon or Charles Hodge or William G. T. Shedd were heretical Presbyterians for abandoning European patterns of church-state relations. So why did mainstream Presbyterianism’s affirmation of the United States’ political order lead to an embrace of America’s later cultural pattern as incoherent and chaotic as American moral, educational, sexual, and aesthetic standards may be?

For a long time, mainstream Protestants took pride in receiving the kind of credit that Samuel P. Huntington attributed to Calvinism when he wrote as recently as 2004 that “the unique creation of the American creed” owed to Reformed Protestants known as Puritans.⁸ But somewhere around the 1960s, with political debates about sex, race, and war, mainstream Protestants backed away from that kind of Christian nationalism and let evangelicals and Rush Limbaugh have it. The problem was that Presbyterians were also abandoning their religious

7 John F. Kennedy, Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, September 12, 1960, available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600>, accessed November 28, 2016.

8 Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to American National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 68.

identity—being Presbyterian added value to being American. Once being Presbyterian or mainline Protestant became largely indistinguishable from going to an elite secular college or university and voting for Democrats for the White House, people wondered why they should be Presbyterian. What value does it add to what an American can do by some other state or nongovernmental agency?

Milton J Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks were aware of the problem when they wrote the last volume in the major analysis of *The Presbyterian Predicament*. Almost twenty-five years ago they observed:

The central challenge before mainstream Protestants is to recognize our cultural and religious displacement and the need to recover our identity as Christians and bearers of particular traditions that contribute to the richness of the Christian family. We are being thrown back on our own resources and on God, who steadfastly sustains and guides us through all the predicaments in which we find ourselves.⁹

That recognition prompted the authors' recommendation of a "theological agenda" that would prompt the church to recover its identity. The problem for Presbyterians who inhabit (or want to inhabit) mainstream American circles is that theological agendas are impolite. In the 1920s, J. Gresham Machen understood the conflict that was opening between Presbyterian theology and mainstream American culture. Modernism was, after all, the self-conscious adaptation of Christianity to modern culture. Machen understood that if Presbyterians were to preserve the faith they confessed, they would have to do more than sing, as they did every Reformation Sunday, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also." Now that the bankruptcy of such adaptation is apparent, American Presbyterians are understanding how alien and sideline Reformed Protestantism is to mainstream

9 Milton J Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *The Re-forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 287.

American society. ©

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Calvin on the Sabbath: A Summary and Assessment

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by **Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.**

Calvin's teaching on the Sabbath, or Lord's Day, finds its fullest expression in his treatment of the Fourth Commandment in the final 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Two, Chapter 8, "Explanation of the Moral Law," sections 28–34. That treatment is virtually identical to the 1539 edition,² with minor additions subsequently appearing along the way in intervening editions. The 1539 edition, in turn, is a lengthier restatement of the view found in the first 1536 edition. In other words, there is no significant development in viewpoint between the first and

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=617&issue_id=124.

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

final editions of the *Institutes*. Relevant material is also found in the Catechisms of 1538 and 1545, as well as in commentaries and sermons on pertinent biblical passages. I would encourage reading of the sections in the final edition of the *Institutes* noted above before continuing with this article.

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

1. The Decalogue is a transcript of God's immutable moral law and is binding on humanity in all ages.

2. The Fourth Commandment, being one element in the Decalogue, is one of God's immutable laws and binding on humanity in all ages; in that sense the Sabbath institution (though not necessarily weekly Sabbath observance) is a creation ordinance.

3. The Sabbath day required under the old dispensation by the Fourth Commandment was a type or figure of spiritual rest.

4. Spiritual rest is ceasing from our own sinful works, mortifying our old nature, so that God may perform his sanctifying work in us; it may also be defined as conforming to God's will or imitating him.

5. Observing the weekly Sabbath in the Old Testament did not simply involve ceasing from the labors of the other six days. That rest was to be used for public worship and private meditation on the promised reality that such rest typified.

6. Since God was pleased to provide his people with a foretaste of the reality still only prefigured, the weekly Sabbath was a sign of an invisible grace. It was, therefore, a sacrament of regeneration.

7. At the coming of Christ, the light in whose presence all shadows disappear, spiritual rest became a full reality; consequently, the weekly Sabbath as a type and sacrament was abrogated.

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

9. Christians, strictly speaking, are no longer obliged to keep a weekly day of rest; the relaxation

of that demand, however, should not be understood as abrogating the Fourth Commandment but as intensifying and elevating its demands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Assessment

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

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

In addressing that question certain deficiencies emerge. It should be noted that limiting

attention to those deficiencies, as I do here for the most part, does not do justice to the value of what Calvin says for the church today in the course of his treatment of the Sabbath.³

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

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

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

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

Consequently, to attribute to any one of the Ten Commandments the comprehensive force that belongs to Christ's summary effectively deprives that particular commandment of its intended place in the Decalogue. That is what happens when Calvin discusses the Fourth Commandment. The notion of spiritual rest that he finds there gives to it a basic force that it cannot have biblically; a part of the Decalogue receives the meaning intended for the whole. Jonathan Edwards, for one, already grasped this point. In commenting on Calvin's views, he says, "And if it [the Fourth Commandment] stands in force now

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

only as signifying a spiritual, Christian rest, and holy behavior at all times, it doth not remain as one of the ten commands, but as a summary of all the commands.”⁴

2. A basic error is Calvin’s failure to reckon adequately with the Sabbath institution as a creation ordinance. Other deficiencies in his views stem from this fundamental defect. He did recognize that the Sabbath and, correlatively, the Fourth Commandment, are mandated at creation and are perpetually and universally binding. For instance, in his commentary on Genesis 2:3 he concludes: “. . . but inasmuch as it was commanded to men from the beginning that they might employ themselves in the worship of God, it is right that it should continue to the end of the world.” But the creation Sabbath is not given sufficient attention. Its meaning does not have the controlling place it ought to have for determining a fully biblical notion of the Sabbath institution.

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

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

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

mind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two New Testament passages preeminently point to typology before the Fall and specifically to the pre-Fall weekly Sabbath as a type. In 1

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

The teaching of these passages yields the following four considerations: (1) Creation was from the beginning and continues to be oriented toward eschatology; by its very constitution (“natural”) it anticipates the eschatological (the “spiritual”). (2) Since the original creation thus implies the eventual emergence of the new creation, typology is inherent in the original creation and therefore antedates the Fall; the natural is typical, prefiguring and anticipating the spiritual. (3) Given the Fall, redemption becomes the essential means for the natural order to come to its full realization in the spiritual order; redemption, made necessary only because of the Fall, leaves its imprint on the eschatological state. (4) The weekly Sabbath is a type; it points to the rest that marks the eschatological order as a whole. Calvin in his own way recognizes this eschatological significance in quoting Isaiah 66:23 to show that the Sabbath will not be fully celebrated until the Last Day.

The typology inherent in the original creation and the eschatological reference of the Sabbath give the following picture of the pre-Fall Sabbath. Genesis 2:2–3, together with the commentary on them in the Fourth Commandment, shows that the weekly Sabbath given to Adam served a function in the creaturely realm similar to the seventh day of the creation week for the Creator. As God rested from his completed work of creation, so man would enter into his rest after completing his God-given tasks as vicegerent over the creation. This analogy between Creator and image-bearing creature, however, involves an important differ-

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

ence. The creating work of God had been completed and his rest begun (Heb. 4:3b–4). The task entrusted to Adam/man had yet to be performed; his rest lay in the future. Eschatological Sabbath rest was a still future goal (cf. Heb. 4:9).

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

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

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

In light of the significance of the Sabbath instituted at creation, we should appreciate that the

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

This is not at all to imply that cultic elements do not have a proper, even integral, place on the Sabbath. Indeed, such worship is crucial and ought to be prominent, especially in the post-Fall Sabbath, when believers must focus attention on Christ, rather than themselves, as the one who for them has fulfilled the command for six days of labor and in whom, based on his fulfillment and by the power of his Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9–10), they are obeying that command (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 14:13; 19:7–8). Where the Sabbath institution is properly appreciated and functions as it should, cultural concerns and avocations, on the one hand, and cultic activities, on the other, are neither confused nor polarized.

Geerhardus Vos is worth quoting at length here:

From what has been said about the typical, sacramental meaning of the Sabbath it follows that it would be a mistake to base its observance primarily on the ground of utility. The Sabbath is not the outcome of an abnormal state of affairs in which it is impossible, apart from the appointment of a fixed day, to devote sufficient care to the religious interests of life. On such a view it might be maintained that for one sufficiently at leisure to give all his time to the cultivation of religion the keeping of the Sabbath would no longer be obligatory. Some of the continental Reformers, out of reaction to the Romish system of holy days, reasoned after this fashion. But they reasoned wrongly. The Sabbath is not in the first place a means of advancing religion. It has its main significance apart from that, in pointing

forward to the eternal issues of life and history. Even the most advanced religious spirit cannot absolve itself from partaking in that. It is a serious question whether the modern church has not too much lost sight of this by making the day well-nigh exclusively an instrument of religious propaganda, at the expense of its eternity-typifying value. Of course it goes without saying that a day devoted to the remembrance of man's eternal destiny cannot be properly observed without the positive cultivation of those religious concerns which are so intimately joined to the final issue of his lot. But, even where this is conceded, the fact remains that it is possible to crowd too much into the day that is merely subservient to religious propaganda, and to void it too much of the static, God-ward and heavenly-ward directed occupation of piety.⁶

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

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

The impact of the history of redemption on the Sabbath institution is apparent in the theocracy, an impact that Calvin readily saw. What is

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

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

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

Accordingly, we may properly speak of the abolition of the *Jewish* Sabbath at the coming of Christ—as Paul does in Galatians 4:10–11 and Colossians 2:16–17—in the sense that the *typical* element that had become associated with it under the old covenant has been abrogated. Present spiritual rest, as it has already become a reality in Christ, is no longer typified by the weekly Sabbath. But the weekly Sabbath, instituted at creation as a type of eschatological rest, points to that rest in its perfect finality. It therefore continues to serve that typical

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

function until the eschatological consummation it prefigures is realized. That consummation, as 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear, will not be until the resurrection of the body (vv. 42–49).

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

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

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

Specifically, Christ's resurrection is the signal event of this achieved certainty, so that the day of the week on which it occurred is now appropriately the day of rest. The rest day pointing to that still future consummate state is now enjoyed at the beginning of the week rather than at the end, an

indication that the goal of creation is now certain and no longer a matter of unresolved probation.

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

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

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A Peaceful Conscience by Faith Alone

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by Dan Borvan

John (Johann) Krause, counselor of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz and friend of Martin Luther, committed suicide in December 1527. Krause had been favorable to the Reformation when it had first reached Halle, Germany, but later aided the Archbishop in suppressing it. Luther wrote that Krause had been “taken captive by the tricks of the devil” in his belief that Christ was standing in the presence of the Father and accusing him because he had denied the Savior.² The devil had deceived Krause by turning the gospel into law and by causing him to focus on the sin he had done and the good that he had left undone, rather than on what Christ had done for him.

Krause was one of many in Luther’s day driven to despair by the condemnation of the law. The law is a ministry of sin, said Luther, and a ministry of wrath and death. The law reveals sin, then “strikes the wrath of God into a man and threatens him with death.” The man’s conscience concludes that God is angry with him due to his sin and, therefore, he shall die. Luther concluded, “This is why many who cannot endure the wrath and judgment of God commit suicide by hanging or drowning.”³

Luther himself suffered spiritual distress from the law, which produced fear and dread. He stated:

I know how I sometimes struggle in the hours of darkness. I know how often I suddenly lose sight of the rays of the Gospel and of grace, which have been obscured for me by thick, dark clouds. In other words, I know how

slippery the footing is even for those who are mature and seem to be firmly established in matters of faith.

When we lose our focus on the gospel, the law rushes in and “shakes our insides in such a way that it makes us forget justification, grace, Christ, and the Gospel.”⁴

Many Christians today suffer from troubled consciences and a lack of assurance, even members of Presbyterian and Reformed churches. These struggles are often the result of a lapse into a covenant of works mind-set. We are hard-wired for law; it is written on our hearts (Rom. 2:14–15). It is our default setting. The gospel is external to us. It must be preached into us (Rom. 10:14). If we do not receive a regular reminder of the gospel, we easily can revert to thinking that keeping the law is the only path to God’s approval. Most do not slip so far as to lose sight of justification by faith alone, but many fall into the misguided understanding of God’s love and favor as directly commensurate to our obedience. The inevitable failure to maintain perfect obedience can produce anxiety and even a lack of assurance of salvation.

My purpose in this brief article is to address Martin Luther’s teaching that only the gospel, specifically justification by faith alone, can calm a troubled soul. A peaceful conscience and assurance of salvation are by faith alone, not by works.

Due to the immensity of Luther’s body of work (The German edition of *Luther’s Works* numbers 127 volumes), I restrict the focus to Luther’s lectures on Galatians and some selections from his Table Talk.⁵ Luther’s lectures on Galatians are perhaps his clearest expression of the relationship between the law and the gospel. He first lectured on Galatians in 1519, when his Protestant theology was still in development. A more mature Luther delivered another set of lectures on Galatians in 1531, which were published in 1535. Around the time when he gave the lectures, Luther said, “The

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=645&issue_id=128.

2 J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86), 26:195.

3 *Luther’s Works*, 26:150.

4 *Luther’s Works*, 26:150.

5 I quote Luther as often as possible in order to capture his incomparable style.

Epistle to the Galatians is my dear epistle. I have put my confidence in it. It is my Katy von Bora [Luther's wife].”⁶

The Christian's Troubled Conscience

The story of Luther anguishing over his sin during his time in the Augustinian monastery is well known. Relief for his tormented soul arrived in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Receiving and resting in the righteousness of Christ finally brought Luther peace. Luther's spiritual struggles did not disappear after his conversion, however. He fought to mortify the innate inclination toward self-righteousness and to preserve his understanding of a gracious God. In his comments on Galatians 2:20, Luther said:

It is very hard for me, even in the great light of the Gospel and after my extensive experience and practice in this study, to define Christ as Paul does here. That is how much this teaching and noxious idea of Christ as the lawgiver has penetrated into my bones like oil.

This teaching shaped him from his boyhood, such that “even at the mention of the name of Christ I would be terrified and grow pale, because I was persuaded that He was a judge.”⁷ Luther informed his auditors that he had to strive to unlearn the idea of Christ as lawgiver and replace it with the understanding of Christ as justifier and Savior.

Luther experienced spiritual distresses throughout his life. In 1533, he disclosed to friends that he was suffering from melancholy (Latin: *tristitia*), which had produced headaches and stomach pains. He explained, “My temptation is this, that I think I don't have a gracious God. This is [because I am still caught up in] the law. It is the greatest grief, and, as Paul says, it produces death.”⁸ More than fifteen years after producing the Ninety-five Theses, Luther still struggled to trust in the graciousness of God.

6 *Luther's Works*, 54:20.

7 *Luther's Works*, 26:178.

8 *Luther's Works*, 54:75.

Luther believed that a struggle rages within every Christian between “the hearing of faith and the works of the law, because the conscience is always murmuring and thinking that when righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal salvation are promised solely on the basis of hearing with faith, this is too easy a way.”⁹ The law unites with reason, the enemy of faith, to drag us toward self-righteousness and away from the righteousness of Christ. Our flesh, seeking to be autonomous, cannot accept the free gift of God.

Although Luther taught that the law is the cause of the Christian's troubled conscience, he certainly did not promote antinomianism, despite the accusations of his critics. He affirmed, “We say that the Law is good and useful, but in its proper use.”¹⁰ The law restrains sin in the civil realm and reveals sin and the need for a Savior in the spiritual realm. Luther did not expressly state the law's third use, but he certainly taught that Christians must respond to faith with good works. He said, “When Christ has thus been grasped by faith and I am dead to the Law, justified from sin, and delivered from death, the devil, and hell through Christ—then I do good works, love God, give thanks, and practice love toward my neighbor.”¹¹ The problem is not the law; the problem is losing sight of the gospel and feeling the condemnation of the law, even after we have been redeemed. Christians must not forget, even temporarily, that there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

Luther famously taught that the Christian is simultaneously saint and sinner and is divided in this way. He said, “To the extent that he is flesh, he is under the Law; to the extent that he is spirit, he is under the Gospel.”¹² Because sin is always present Christians should maintain a fear of God. But fear without faith is the servile and despairing fear of Cain, Saul, and Judas. This faithless fear

9 *Luther's Works*, 26:215.

10 *Luther's Works*, 26:312–13.

11 *Luther's Works*, 26:161.

12 *Luther's Works*, 26:342.

remains transfixed on the law. Faith in God's Word of grace focuses on Christ, and "fear becomes sweet and is mixed with nectar, so that [the Christian] begins not only to fear God but also to love him."¹³

Despite the internal battle between flesh and spirit, Christians can know that they are in a state of grace. Luther said:

It is extremely profitable to the pious to know that they have the Holy Spirit. I am saying this in order to refute the dangerous doctrine of the sophist and the monks, who taught and believed that no one can know for a certainty whether he is in a state of grace, even if he does good works according to his ability and lives a blameless life.

This corrupt teaching "utterly ruined the doctrine of faith, overthrew faith, disturbed consciences," and much more.¹⁴

The Gospel Calms a Troubled Conscience

Look to Christ

Christians who face spiritual distress or a troubled conscience can find hope in Christ. He is the object (and source) of our initial faith, through which we are justified, and he is the sustainer of our faith thereafter. The same Savior who justified us now sanctifies us. We look to him, not the law, to calm our distress and ease our conscience. Christians need not feel condemned by the law. When despair sets in, we must turn away from the law and its accusations. Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf and liberated us from the law's curse (Gal. 3:13). Luther said:

Therefore when your conscience is terrified by the Law and is wrestling with the judgment of God, do not consult either reason or the Law, but rely only on grace and the Word of comfort. . . . Ascend into the darkness, where neither the Law nor reason shines, but only

¹³ *Luther's Works*, 26:343.

¹⁴ *Luther's Works*, 26:377.

the dimness of faith (1 Cor. 13:12), which assures us that we are saved by Christ alone, without any Law.¹⁵

Christians must trust God's promise to conform them into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) and maintain confidence that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Luther was convinced of Christ's transforming work, particularly regarding his fears and anxieties. He wrote, "Christ is eternal Peace, Comfort, Righteousness, and Life, to which the terror of the Law, sadness of mind, sin, hell, and death have to yield. Abiding and living in me, Christ removes and absorbs all the evils that torment and afflict me."¹⁶

Luther advised his hearers to narrow their focus on Christ to specific doctrines as a means of calming their anxious souls. In contrast to those who claim that an emphasis on doctrine inevitably leads to cold, dead orthodoxy, Luther taught that the doctrine of imputation "brings firm consolation to troubled consciences amid genuine terrors."¹⁷ It comes as no surprise that Luther also stressed the doctrine of justification for dealing with the struggles of the flesh. He wrote, "Therefore let every faithful person work and strive with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and meditation on the Word."¹⁸ Focus on justification and the righteousness of Christ frees us from the temptation to attempt to pull ourselves out of despair by means of our own righteousness. Luther concluded, "A Christian says, 'I wish to do as much as I can, but Christ is the bishop of souls. To him will I cling, even if I sin.' It is thus that one has assurance."¹⁹

Devour the Word

When the conscience is assaulted by the flesh,

¹⁵ *Luther's Works*, 26:113.

¹⁶ *Luther's Works*, 26:167.

¹⁷ *Luther's Works*, 26:134

¹⁸ *Luther's Works*, 26:65.

¹⁹ *Luther's Works*, 54:87.

Christians must turn to Scripture for refuge. The flesh “cannot believe for sure that the promises of God are true.”²⁰

Therefore, we attack the flesh with the unbreakable truth of the Word. Luther said, “As God creates faith, so He preserves us in it. And just as He initially gives us faith through the Word, so later on He exercises, increases, strengthens, and perfects it in us by that Word. Therefore the supreme worship of God that a man can offer, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is to practice true godliness, to hear and read the Word.”²¹

The Word is the antidote for Satan’s accusations and our doubts about God’s favor toward us. “We have nothing to strengthen and sustain us against these great and unbearable cries except the bare Word,” said Luther, “which sets Christ forth as the Victor over sin, death, and every evil.”²² We cling to Scripture in the midst of trial and distress because it reveals Christ. “Christ does not become visible to any of our senses. We do not see Him, and in the trial our heart does not feel His presence and help.”²³ We are anchored in Scripture, not in our experiences, emotions, or our own reason. As Peter said of his own experience, “We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed” (2 Peter 1:19). Rejecting the Word is a surefire path to despair. Luther said, “Nothing is more dangerous than to become tired of the Word. Therefore anyone who is so cold that he think he knows enough and gradually begins to loathe the Word has lost Christ and the Gospel.”²⁴

Mortify Human Reason

In addition to the positive actions of looking to Christ and devouring the Word as means of calming the troubled conscience, Christians

must put to death human reason. Luther charged that reason regards Scripture “as heresy and as the word of the devil; for it seems so absurd.” Reason, therefore, “is the greatest and most invincible enemy of God.”²⁵ Our confidence in God’s Word and the finished work of Christ is attacked by reason. The Christian must respond with faith, for faith “slaughters reason and kills the beast that the whole world and all the creatures cannot kill.”²⁶

The mortification of reason is one of the Christian’s two daily sacrifices. According to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, every Christian is a priest. As part of their priestly duties, all Christians must offer the daily sacrifices of the New Testament. Luther wrote, “The evening sacrifice is to kill reason, and the morning sacrifice is to glorify God.”²⁷ The great comfort for the troubled Christian is a world outside of reason, in which

the issue is not what we ought to do or by what sort of works we may merit grace and forgiveness of sins. No, here we are in a divine theology, where we hear the Gospel that Christ died for us and that when we believe this we are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us.²⁸

The Gospel Carries Us through Death

A primary cause of spiritual distress and anxiety for many Christians is the inevitability of death. Luther’s confidence in the gospel enabled him to approach death without fear. Thinking he was on the brink of death in 1538 due to kidney stones, Luther said, “I’m subject to the will of God. I’ve given myself up to him altogether. He’ll take care of everything. I’m sure that he won’t die because he is himself life and resurrection.”²⁹ When he finally faced death in 1546, he spoke his last recorded words: “We are beggars. That is true.”³⁰

20 *Luther’s Works*, 26:64.

21 *Luther’s Works*, 26:64.

22 *Luther’s Works*, 26:380.

23 *Luther’s Works*, 26:381.

24 *Luther’s Works*, 26:64.

25 *Luther’s Works*, 26:228–29.

26 *Luther’s Works*, 26:228.

27 *Luther’s Works*, 26:233.

28 *Luther’s Works*, 26:234.

29 *Luther’s Works*, 54:294.

30 *Luther’s Works*, 54:476.

Conclusion

Spiritual distress and a troubled conscience can affect every Christian, from the most immature to one of the heroes of the faith. The source of our anxiety and worry often is God's law and our lack of conformity to it. When our flesh reminds us of our failure to keep the law perfectly in thought, word, and deed, we must flee to the gospel for relief. By looking to Christ, devouring God's Word, and mortifying human reason, we can find rest for our weary souls. Martin Luther suffered from an uneasy conscience throughout his life. A steady diet of the gospel, though, sustained him through every spiritual consternation, even to the point of death. ©

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✦ Servant Literature

John Updike and Christianity

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by Danny E. Olinger

In 1989 the acclaimed author John Updike wrote *Self-Consciousness*, a memoir that contained six autobiographical essays.² Updike's ordering of the essays, as much as the memories he shared in them, revealed two of the themes that framed his fiction. The first of the six essays, "A Soft Spring Night in Shillington," focused on the importance of the sense of place in his writings. The last essay, "On Being a Self Forever," focused on Updike's belief that his Christian faith, as he defined it, had enabled him to proceed with confidence as a writer.

The fact that *Self-Consciousness* was not a standard autobiography has allowed Adam Begley to fill in the gaps in *Updike*, the first full scale biography of Updike since his death in 2009.³ Following Updike's lead in *Self-Consciousness*, Begley expertly picks up on how Updike's sense of place functioned in his fiction. Begley chronicles how what was happening in Updike's life paralleled what Updike was writing in his books and short stories. That aspect of Begley's biography is excellent.

However, Begley's appreciation of the Chris-

tian thread running throughout Updike's literary corpus is not as strong. That is not to say that Begley fails to recognize that faith permeates Updike's writings. He acknowledges Updike's belief that faith in Christ freed him to write boldly about life. But Begley writes with sparse insights about the Christian themes that marked Updike's fiction. It is as if Begley knew it was mandatory to say something, but agreed in principle with Harold Bloom's criticism that the religious aspects were the weak link in Updike's fiction.⁴

Understandably, many Christians react in the opposite direction when measuring Updike as a writer. They struggle with the legitimacy of Updike's faith claims because his fiction contained graphic sexuality. Ralph Wood describes the reaction:

The first thing that nearly everyone remarks about Updike's work is its obsession with sex. It is either the silent undercurrent or the rippling concern of almost every story and scene that Updike has ever written. His fascination with the genital—and hence the spiritual—difference between men and women has put many critics off. They regard Updike as an arrested adolescent, a brilliant stylist who has squandered his talent on the obvious: the fact that we are carnal creatures.⁵

Examples abound of the tension that resulted for those interested in studying the Christian aspects of Updike's writings, but were put off by his sexual realism. When a prominent Reformed seminary held a special class examining Updike's novels, the students nicknamed it "the dirty books class." Reportedly, Updike once accepted an invitation to speak about his books from the English department at Gordon College, the evangelical

4 Bloom opined, "John Updike, perhaps the most considerable stylist among the writers of fiction in his American generation, is one of the group of contemporary novelists who are somewhat victimized aesthetically by their conventional religious yearnings. His is the Protestant case." Harold Bloom, ed., *John Updike* (New Haven: Chelsea House, 1987), 1.

5 Ralph Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 179.

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=633&issue_id=126.

2 John Updike, *Self-Consciousness* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989).

3 Adam Begley, *Updike* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

institution located near where Updike lived in Massachusetts. However, when the Gordon president found out, he revoked the invitation, saying that he didn't want "that pornographer" to speak to the students.⁶

Updike himself recognized the discomfort that his sexual frankness created for many Christian readers. He said, "My art is Christian only in that my faith urges me to tell the truth, however painful and inconvenient, and holds out the hope that the truth—really—is good. Good or no, only the truth is useful."⁷ He also understood that literary critics like Bloom would always see the theological nature of his novels as a hindrance. Updike said, "As to critics, it seems to be my fate to disappoint my theological friends by not being Christian enough, while I'm too Christian for Harold Bloom's blessing. So be it."⁸

In what follows, I will examine the tension that Updike created for a Christian audience, particularly at the beginning and end of his literary career. On the one hand, Updike deliberately placed Christian themes at the center of his stories. On the other hand, his commitment to realism left his writings with little regard for decency, almost openly flaunting his indifference to the legal character of Scripture, much less the seventh commandment. Mark Buchanan summarizes the tension well when he writes of Updike, "Even when you know he's up to something—that his sexual explicitness has a cultural critique, even a theological agenda, behind it—it's pretty hard to swallow."⁹

6 See, Jon Busch, "Getting Over Updike," *Curator*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.curatormagazine.com/jonbusch/getting-over-updike/>.

7 Jeff Campbell, "Interview with John Updike," in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. James Plath (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 104.

8 See, Stephen H. Webb, "John Updike the Blogger: Reading Karl Barth with John Updike," *First Things*, August 15, 2014, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/08/john-updike-the-blogger>.

9 Mark Buchanan, "Rabbit Trails to God," in *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/july/4.42.html>.

Early Updike: The Influence of Karl Barth

During his adolescent years, Updike was terrified of death and for comfort he created a logical syllogism of the existence of God.

1. If God does not exist, the world is a horror show.
2. The world is not a horror show.
3. Therefore, God exists.¹⁰

Updike admitted in retrospect that the syllogism was flawed, and that his faith was often small, but he also claimed that he never stopped believing in God. Updike said that when he battled the inevitability of death in early adulthood, he would read the Reformed theologian Karl Barth and fall in love with other men's wives.¹¹ According to Updike, Barth showed him how saving faith could overcome the nothingness of life. In his autobiographical poem, "Midpoint," Updike penned the line, "Praise Barth, who told how saving Faith can flow / from Terror's oscillating Yes and No."

Updike's first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*, written in 1957 when Updike was reading Barth daily, shows this influence. *Poorhouse Fair* looked at America's future, with Updike asking, "What will become of us, having lost our faith?"¹²

Set in the early 1980s, the elderly residents at a nursing home are preparing for the annual summer fair where they sell crafts and other goods. With the threat of rain coming, Conner, the young prefect running the home, cancels the event. Hook, a ninety-four-year-old Christian, objects. Hook, who represents the past, places his hope in God. He views death positively, believing that it is the very thing that gives meaning to life. Conner is a prophet of the emerging new faith, secular humanism. He places his hope in mankind and views death negatively, as it doesn't contribute anything to the service of humanity.

But Conner's daily actions at the Diamond County Home for the Aged reveal the emptiness of his claim about the service of humanity. He

10 Begley, *Updike*, 39.

11 *Ibid.*, 223.

12 *Ibid.*, 175.

doesn't care about people. The elderly grasp his indifference to them, and following his encounter with Hook, they stone him with pebbles. The pebbles bouncing off him, Conner spreads his arms mocking Christ on the cross and says, "I will forgive them." Conner's statement rests in the belief that he and his fellow moderns will bring about a utopian future where planned cities will be clean and the poor will be no more.

The residents know better. There is nothing optimistic about the future with Conner in control. He is not the Savior, but Pontius Pilate, the representative of another world, young and secular, set over against them. They rage because they know that their mortality is near, that death is approaching, and Conner's gospel offers no way to overcome it.

On the twentieth anniversary of the publishing of *The Poorhouse Fair*, Updike wrote that the book was his answer to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the atheistic Orwell argued that the ultimate fruit of the future is nonexistence. Clues that Updike is writing an anti-Orwell novel are not only Hook's faith, but also Hook's background. Hook's schooling indicates that his birth was around 1890, which would have placed the time frame for the story around 1984.¹³

Begley sees *Poorhouse Fair* as exhibiting traits that would characterize Updike's fiction. He agrees with Whitney Balliett's verdict in his review of *Poorhouse Fair* in *The New Yorker* that Updike "is a writer's writer," a prodigious talent who exhibits a poet's care and sensitivity in choosing every word. He also sees it as projecting onto paper Updike's spiritual struggles, particularly, his anxiety about death. But, given the "yes, but" nature of the story—Updike saying yes to the joy of persistent existence and no to social homogenization and the loss of faith¹⁴—Begley finds great value in Balliett's parenthetical comment that reading *Poorhouse Fair*, "curiously, one never thinks of liking it or

disliking it."¹⁵

What Begley underplays with Updike's early writings was that Updike agreed with Barth's criticism of liberal theology. Updike's stinging criticism of liberal theology can be seen in his short story that followed *The Poorhouse Fair*, "Pigeon Feathers."

In "Pigeon Feathers," young David Kern reads H. G. Wells's dismissal of Christianity. According to Wells, a myth developed around the man Jesus, who had survived his own crucifixion before dying a few weeks later. Shaken in his faith, David goes to his pastor for assurance that Wells has wrongly maligned Jesus. In particular, David asks him if he believes that heaven is real. Reverend Dobson replies, "David, you might think of heaven this way: as the way the goodness Abraham Lincoln did lives after him."¹⁶ David realizes he has been deceived, that Dobson's answer "amounts to saying that there isn't any heaven at all."¹⁷ His pastor is a fraud who doesn't believe the words that he uses in worship.

Thrown into a spiritual crisis of not knowing whom to trust, David's faith wavers until his grandmother orders him to rid the family barn of the pigeons nesting in it. Shooting the pigeons with his rifle, he felt like a beautiful avenger. But then, when collecting and burying the pigeons, he looks with amazement at the color and shape and texture of the feathers, no two being alike, and has an epiphany that restores his faith. He believes the God who lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would also care for him eternally.

Later, Updike commented that "Pigeon Feathers" was the most important ecclesiastical fiction he ever wrote. David reflected Updike's own shock when he found out that the nice liberal Lutheran minister in Shillington who was confirming him didn't really attach any factual reality to Christian doctrines.¹⁸ Updike's conclusion was that liberal

13 John Updike, "Introduction to the 1977 Edition," in *The Poorhouse Fair* (New York: Random House, 2012): xi.

14 George Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things: Sex, Religion, and Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 20.

15 Begley, *Updike*, 178.

16 John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," in *Olinger Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1964).

17 *Ibid.*, 37.

18 Jan Nunley, "Thoughts of Faith Infuse Updike's Novels," in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. James Plath (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi, 1994), 249.

theology with its message of social uplift could not confront the problem of nothingness. Only the historical reality of Christ bodily rising from the dead could confront nothingness and give meaning to life. Updike exclaimed, “Perhaps there are two kinds of people: those for whom nothingness is no problem, and those for whom it is an insuperable problem, an outrageous cancellation rendering every other concern, from mismatching socks to nuclear holocaust, negligible.”¹⁹

Updike returned to writing about David Kern in his short story, “Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car.” David, now living around Boston as an adult, finds out that his father has been hospitalized. Driving back home, David warmly recalls his youth, when he and his friends would play daily, creating worn paths to their favorite play places before being summoned home. David reflects, “The earth is our playmate then, and the call to supper has a piercingly sweet eschatological ring.”²⁰

When he arrives at the hospital, David learns that his father, though greatly weakened, will recover. What has been lost is his father’s Christian faith. David doesn’t say anything in reply because he has lost his own faith as well.

Faith’s place in his father’s life has been usurped by attending movies and doting on his car. David tells his mother, “It worries me the way he talks about the movies all the time. You know he never liked them.” But, what is most obvious is the place of worship his father’s car now holds. David’s father says to him:

“The only thing that worries me is that *she*” — he pointed at my mother — “will crack up the car. I don’t want anything to happen to your mother.”

“The car, you mean,” my mother said, and to me she added, “It’s a sin, the way he worships that car.”

19 Updike, *Self-Consciousness*, 228.

20 John Updike, “Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car,” in *Olinger Stories*, 154.

My father didn’t deny it.²¹

Rabbit, Run and The Centaur

At the same time that Updike was publishing “Pigeon Feathers” and “Packed Dirt,” he was also writing the novels that would establish him as a major literary talent, *Rabbit, Run* and *The Centaur*. Updike saw the novels as opposites, a contrast between a rabbit running loose and seeking self-gratification and a horse steadily doing its duty.

In *Rabbit, Run*, Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom laments his position in life. Feeling trapped in a stale marriage and a menial job, Rabbit wants to feel as alive as he once did playing high school basketball. In search of this feeling, he leaves his pregnant wife, Janice, and moves in with Ruth, a part-time prostitute.

The authority figures in Rabbit’s life, his old basketball coach, Marty Tothoro, and the liberal Episcopalian pastor, Jack Eccles, are totally ineffective in persuading Rabbit to do the right thing. Tothoro is the one who first introduces Rabbit to Ruth. Eccles has nothing useful to say to Rabbit because as Rabbit observes, Eccles doesn’t really believe in anything.

Eccles, though, has opinions, and mainly dislikes the Lutheran pastor in town, Fritz Kruppenbach. Eccles sees Kruppenbach as rigid in creed and a bully in manner. Kruppenbach, for his part, criticizes Eccles in trying to help Rabbit by playing golf with him and not telling Rabbit he is sinning. He asks Eccles, “What do you think it looks like to God, one childish husband leaving one childish wife? Do you ever think any more of what God sees?”²²

21 Ibid., 178–79.

22 Updike later commented that Kruppenbach was “meant to be Barth in action” and the touchstone of the novel. Picking up on this insight, Hunt observed, “Like Evangelist in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it is Kruppenbach who offers thematic direction and delineates the issues of the novel’s ongoing debate. Kruppenbach’s appearance is unusual in that he is the only character that Rabbit does not encounter directly in the novel; he appears, instead, from off stage as it were, entering like a Greek chorus to add clarifying comment upon the dramatic proceedings, thus embodying that ‘main beam’ of the Apostles’ Creed that supports all else.” Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things*, 43.

When Rabbit does attend worship services, Eccles's preaching is so lacking force that Rabbit scarcely listens. Still, Eccles's preaching allows the narrator to express the faith problem that confronts Rabbit. "Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out."²³

Rabbit only returns to Janice after she gives birth to Rebecca, their second child, but he remains restless. He demands that Janice act like Ruth. Janice accuses him of treating her like a prostitute, and he leaves. Distraught over her situation, Janice begins drinking and accidentally drowns baby Becky in the bathtub. At Becky's funeral, Rabbit proclaims his innocence but continues running—literally, away from Eccles in the graveyard, and figuratively, from caring for either Janice or Ruth.

Updike said that he meant to show that Rabbit's saying yes to his urgent inner whispers results in the social fabric collapsing murderously.²⁴ And yet, tellingly, Updike refuses to condemn Rabbit at the story's end. James Schiff writes, "Harry never returns home, and Updike provides no moral to placate the reader. It would be as if Peter Rabbit were to end with Peter running panicky into the night."²⁵

With Updike concluding the book in an ambiguous manner, Wood argues that Updike was matching Barth's view of what a novel should be. Barth believed fiction should not educate, but rather should leave the reader questioning what had just happened. Wood writes, "He [Rabbit] is a protagonist who poses a problem rather than a solution, who queries us more than he teaches us a lesson."²⁶

The theological nature of *Rabbit, Run*, how-

ever, played a secondary role for many to Updike's raw language. When British publisher Victor Gollancz read the original manuscript, he believed that the book might be labelled obscene, and that legal punishment might ensue for him and his American counterpart, Alfred Knopf, if they went forward with publication. Updike said, "My theory was not so much that I was trying to make a point about censorship, but I did feel that this particular hero lies so exclusively in the realm of the present and the sensational that, once sport was gone, sex was about the realist thing left to him."²⁷

What is lost today, in light of the fame that *Rabbit, Run* brought for Updike is that his next novel, *The Centaur*, was more critically praised at the time, even winning the 1963 National Book Award. Updike wanted to present a counterpart to *Rabbit, Run* that would also serve as a record of his father. Rather than a rabbit running towards instant gratification, Updike's father always performed his duty with the reliability of a plodding horse.

Updike encourages a theological reading of *The Centaur* by placing a quote from Barth's *Dogmatics in Outline* as the epigraph: "Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth." To emphasize the interplay of heaven and earth, Updike utilizes Greek mythology. The protagonist, George Caldwell, a general science teacher at Olinger High School, is also in alternating chapters a centaur with the head of a man and the body of a horse. When asked why he chose the mythic form for *The Centaur*, Updike said, "I was moved, first, by the Chiron variant of the Hercules myth—one of the few classical instances of self-sacrifice, and a name oddly close to Christ."²⁸

George, the son of a Presbyterian minister but now turned Lutheran, looks around and comes to a conclusion that he believes is irrefutable—things, cars, people never fail to fail. Doctrinally,

23 John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 197.

24 Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things*, 20.

25 James A. Schiff, *John Updike Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 36.

26 Wood, *Comedy of Redemption*, 207.

27 Melynn Bragg, "Forty Years of Middle America with John Updike," in *Conversations*, 223.

28 Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things*, 62.

George believes that

there are the elect and the non-elect, the ones that have it and the ones that don't, and the ones that don't have it are never going to get it. What I could never ram through my thick skull was why the ones that don't have it were elected in the first place. The only reason I could figure out was that God had to have somebody to fry down in Hell.²⁹

His theological musings also extend to the difference between Lutherans and Calvinists. "The Lutherans say Jesus Christ is the only answer and the Calvinists say whatever happens to you, happens to you, is the answer."³⁰ George ponders such thoughts because his job is a necessary burden, a daily martyrdom in order to support his family. He suffers so that his son, Peter (Prometheus), will not suffer. George's self-sacrifice serves the "yes" of *The Centaur*. The "but" is the pain he endures as his life dwindles.³¹

Although Bloom does not mention *The Centaur* by name, undoubtedly it was one of the books that he had in mind when he wrote that Updike had a kind of supernatural smugness allowing Updike to say "the natural is a pit of horror" and "one has nothing but the ancient assertions of Christianity to give one the will to act."³² Updike, however, considered *The Centaur* his "gayest and truest novel."³³

Couples

The novel, however, that would put Updike on the cover of *Time* magazine and made him a national celebrity was his 1968 best seller, *Couples*. For many Christians, it was also the breaking point when it came to reading Updike. The cause for both was Updike's revealing take on adultery in the

29 John Updike, *The Centaur* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963), 189.

30 *Ibid.*, 188.

31 Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things*, 20.

32 Bloom, *John Updike*, 1.

33 Hunt, *John Updike and the Three Great Things*, 49.

suburbs.

Couples begins on Friday, November 22, 1963, the day of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. In Tarbox, Massachusetts, a party planned in advance is not cancelled, so dominant are the sexual appetites of those attending. They dine and dance, as it were, on the top of Kennedy's polished casket. Almost everyone at the party will be unfaithful to his or her spouse as the story unfolds.

The central figure, Piet Hanemas, calls himself a Calvinist, but his Calvinism is a mix of fatalism and freedom. He believes in a sovereign God, but openly cheats on his wife, Angela, with Foxy Whitman. Piet's reasoning is that he can do whatever he wishes: God has already determined the outcome, salvation or damnation are accomplished facts. When Foxy tells Piet that she likes being with him because he didn't judge her, Piet replies that only God judges.

Piet decides to leave Angela and marry Foxy, and in doing so must leave Tarbox for the nearby city of Lexington. But, as he prepares to begin his new life, the Congregational Church building at the center of Tarbox is struck by lightning and destroyed. Updike commented:

When the Church is burned, Piet is relieved of morality, and can choose Foxy . . . can move out of the paralysis of guilt and into what is a kind of freedom. He divorces the supernatural to marry the natural . . . so that the book does have a happy ending. There's also a way, though, I should say (speaking of "yes, but") in which, with the destruction of the church, with the removal of guilt, he becomes insignificant. He becomes merely a name in the last paragraph; he becomes a satisfied person and in a sense dies.³⁴

Among the adulterous couples, only Piet and Foxy are regular churchgoers. Modern life without faith had left a void that the couples try foolishly to fill with sex. Updike said, "The book is, of course, not about sex as such: It's about sex as the emer-

34 *Ibid.*, 126.

gent religion, as the only thing left.”³⁵

Updike could talk about the usurping of the church by sex as the theme of the novel, but as Begley observes, the title of Wirt William’s review of *Couples* in the *Los Angeles Times*, “America’s Most Explicitly Sexual Novel Ever,” reflected what everyone else thought.³⁶ Diane Trilling’s review in the *Atlantic Monthly* followed the same path. Calling the book “fancied-up pornography,” she wrote, “I can think of no other novel, even in these years of our sexual freedom, as sexually explicit in its language . . . as direct in its sexual reporting, abundant in its sexual activities.”³⁷

After *Couples*, Updike would write an additional twenty plus novels, including two Pulitzer Prize winners, *Rabbit Is Rich* (1982) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), but his emphasis tended more towards sexual exploration. Even in a book like *A Month of Sundays* (1975), where the main character is a minister, Updike stated that he wanted to make the book offensive and abrasive.³⁸ Updike justified his emphasis upon sex in *A Month of Sundays* as an effort to have the reader think about the Christian faith. He stated, “In this particular book, one can question, is it right for this minister to seduce his parishioners? Is his brand of Christianity the only kind left?” According to Updike, Mansfield, the minister, “is a Barthian grown old. He has faith, but not much in the way of works.”³⁹

Critics, however, were not persuaded with Updike’s reasoning. A consensus was gaining momentum that Updike had started not only to write about sex exhaustively, but also to write about sex badly. Reviewing the book in the *New York Times*, Anatole Broyard saw it as sex-laden book “packed with bad puns and Freudian slips of the banana peel sort.”⁴⁰

35 Ibid., 117.

36 Begley, *Updike*, 294.

37 Ibid.

38 Elinor Stout, “Interview with John Updike,” in *Conversations*, 75.

39 Ibid., 75.

40 Anatole Broyard, “A Month of Sundays,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1975, <http://www.nytimes.com/1975/02/19/books/>

In the Beauty of the Lilies

In 1996 Updike returned to examine the place of the Christian faith in American culture in the twentieth century with a pre-*Couples* like novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. The American exchange of God as the object of worship for entertainment (movies) and possessions (the car) that takes place in “Packed Dirt” in the early 1960s is re-examined in light of the three and a half decades that had passed. Updike had hinted in *Self-Consciousness*, his 1989 memoir, that he was considering writing such a book. He commented:

In the Beauty of the Lilies Christ was born across the sea — this odd and uplifting line from among the many odd lines of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” seemed to me, as I set out, to summarize what I had to say about America, to offer itself as the title of a continental *magnum opus* of which all my books, no matter how many, would be mere installments, mere starts at the hymning of this great roughly rectangular country severed from Christ by the breadth of the sea.⁴¹

The story begins in 1910 with Clarence Wilmot, a Presbyterian minister in Paterson, New Jersey, a Dutch Calvinist ghetto, losing his faith while in the pulpit. Wilmot, who had studied under B. B. Warfield at Princeton Seminary and owned Calvin’s commentaries, becomes undone after reading a historical-critical attack on the veracity of the Bible. When he reports this to the liberal moderator of his presbytery, the moderator tells him that he doesn’t need to believe anything in order to serve in the church, but Wilmot only despairs more.

Around the same time in Paterson, a more newsworthy event is taking place, the filming of the movie *The Call to Arms*, with the actress Mary Pickford. Pickford falls from a horse and loses consciousness, which is national news. According to Schiff, Updike telegraphed the theme of the novel

[updike-sundays.html](http://www.updike-sundays.html).

41 Updike, *Self-Consciousness*, 103.

in these two episodes. Schiff writes:

Mary Pickford's loss of consciousness and subsequent fall from a horse during the filming of *The Call to Arms*, and Clarence Wilmot's sudden loss of faith and fall from grace (incidentally, the plot of the movie concerns "a lost jewel beyond price," which suggests the plot of Updike's novel: the loss of faith). The moment that yields these two "falls" is highly symbolic and points to the dominant theme in the novel: the rise of the cinema, which through its powerful projection of images has inspired faith and devotion, and the related decline of religious belief. Pickford loses consciousness at the moment of the "facial close up," which suggests that the human face, divinely enlarged on the big screen, replaces the face of God in the eyes of a worshipping public.⁴²

In his new life away from the faith, his motto now being "there is no God," Wilmot finds solace in a new sanctuary, the movie theater. His granddaughter, Essie Wilmot, also loves attending the movies. But, with an exalted sense of self, she is not content with remaining a spectator. Her desire is to be a movie star. Believing there must be a God to love her as she deserves, she climbs from beauty pageant contestant to starlet.

Her son, Clark, drifts until he finds purpose in life in the Temple of True and Actual Faith. The cult comes into conflict with the authorities, and a Waco-like shootout follows. In the battle, Clark lays down his life to save the children of the cult.

Schiff sees Updike asserting in *Lilies* that the faith is not dead in America, but has been transferred, Americanized. However, such an exchange reduces the grand spiritual yearning that once defined America to images on a screen, which in turn leads to individuals, like Clark, who will follow self-proclaimed messiahs. America is now "shaped by the image it creates and broadcasts."⁴³

42 Schiff, *John Updike Revisited*, 145.

43 Ibid., 144.

Did He Go Too Far?

Updike said that the true test for any of his novels would be if they floated after twenty years.⁴⁴ Although it has only been eight years since his death, it appears that Updike's literary star is diminished. Part of the problem is that his sex scenes, which made him a millionaire, *Couples* alone selling 4.6 million copies, are found practically unreadable by friend and foe alike.

The upshot is that Updike has become an author whose books are only read once, if read at all. The exceptions for me are *Olinger Stories*, which is what I recommend first when someone asks me what to read by Updike, and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. Both show most clearly Updike's religious theme at its best, the displacement of Christian faith in American culture and its consequences. Adam Gopnik, on the occasion of Updike's death, astutely commented in *The New Yorker*:

Throughout all [his] varied work, one theme rose and was repeated over and over. Updike's great subject was the American attempt to fill the gap left by faith with the materials produced by mass culture. He documented how the death of a credible religious belief has been offset by sex and adultery and movies and sports and Toyotas and family love and family obligation.⁴⁵

I cannot remember enjoying a single page of *Rabbit, Run*, but after reading it I was convinced that Updike had taken a page from my life. The captured rhythm and description of life in rural, Protestant, mid-century America is eerily accurate. You grow up in such a place as I did, and you know that he has gotten the scene right. But, in receiving the good news by faith and resting upon Christ for salvation, I wanted to leave that scene behind—not the people, but the behavior.

Such realism is what Updike was hoping to at-

44 Hunt, *John Updike*, 212.

45 Adam Gopnik, "John Updike," *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/09/john-updike>.

tain, but did he go too far in doing so? He claimed that he only wanted to write about an imperfect world, which he believed was why so many readers found his books depressing.⁴⁶ He further stated that his books were intended to be moral debates where an issue is examined and the question is asked, “What is a good man?” or “What is goodness?”⁴⁷

I appreciate those aspects of Updike’s books. But I also believe that his novels would have been better served if he had dialed back his writing about sex. Theologian Albert Mohler has a point when he comments that Updike’s “God-plus-sex” model all too often ends up with Updike becoming a “pagan celebrant” of sex.⁴⁸

Begley picks up on this, noting that critic James Wood in his review of Updike’s 1998 novel, *Toward the End of Time*, “added his voice to the chorus of critics who objected to the sexual content of Updike’s fiction; ‘a lifelong distraction,’ he called it.”⁴⁹ In reviewing Updike’s short stories in *Licks of Love* two years later, Wood wrote that Updike’s descriptions of sex “have recurred and overlapped thickly enough in his work to constitute, now, the equivalent of an artist’s palette: this is how Updike chooses to paint the world.”⁵⁰

For his part, Updike believed he had no choice but to write the way he did. Updike’s aim was “to write about sex on the same level, as explicitly and carefully and lovingly as one wrote about anything else.”⁵¹ In describing sex, he believed he had to get himself dirty, even if that meant going against his Christian duty.⁵²

In this regard, Updike’s fiction matched Barth’s theologizing. Both asked to be absolved

from any duty to provide biblical morals. Updike said, “Barth has been a guide and comfort for me not only in his assertive fundamentalism but in his Antinomianism, his lovely and tolerant acceptance of the wide world beyond the church walls.”⁵³

But did Updike’s sharing of Barth’s antinomianism expose an inconsistency that Updike recognized indirectly? In *Self-Consciousness*, Updike stated he had not read Barth much in the 1980s after reading about Barth’s view of the afterlife in an interview. Barth had stated that he imagined the afterlife as somehow this life in review or viewed in a new light. Updike said of Barth’s view, “I had not been as comforted as I wanted to be. For is it not the singularity of life that terrifies us? Is not the decisive difference between comedy and tragedy that tragedy denies us another chance?”⁵⁴

The separation that Barth put forth between the work of Christ in history and one’s faith, the separation that made Updike uncomfortable, parallels the separation between doctrine and life found in Updike’s life and fiction.⁵⁵ Updike claimed to love attending worship services, even proclaiming that when absent he began to hunger for it; but there is no indication from Updike himself or from any commentators that Updike held that believers in Christ are redeemed from guilt and shame and called to holiness.

There is also nothing of this to be found in Updike’s literature. For Updike, such determinations would have strayed from the “middles” that

46 James Yerkes, “As Good as It Gets,” in *John Updike and Religion*, ed. James Yerkes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999): 24.

47 Hunt, *John Updike*, 31.

48 R. Albert Mohler, “John Updike Strikes Again,” Albert Mohler’s website, June 26, 2006, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2006/06/26/john-updike-strikes-again/>.

49 Begley, *John Updike*, 459.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 203.

52 John Updike, “Remarks upon Receiving the Champion Medal,” in *John Updike and Religion*, ed. James Yerkes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 5.

53 Stephen H. Webb, “John Updike the Blogger: Reading Karl Barth with John Updike,” *First Things*, August 15, 2014, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/08/john-updike-the-blogger>.

54 Updike, *Self-Consciousness*, 241.

55 Louis Menand questions why the faith convictions of characters in Updike’s fiction should be equated with Updike’s own faith convictions. The value of Begley’s biography is that he proves that William Maxwell’s description of Updike as “a conspicuously autobiographical writer” was correct. As one example of the matching of Updike’s life and writing, Begley chronicles at length Updike’s adulterous ways while married to his first wife, Mary, while living in Ipswich, which became the basis of *Couples*. See Louis Menand, “Imitation of Life,” *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/28/imitation-of-life>, and Begley, *John Updike*, 256–94.

he loved.⁵⁶ Like Flannery O'Connor, he would have had to condemn his characters, something that he philosophically did not want to do. Updike once explained the difference between his approach and O'Connor's approach when he commented upon O'Connor and Graham Greene:

What strikes me when I think about Flannery O'Connor and Graham Greene is how far they are willing to go in presenting a suffering, apparently Godless world. That is, the very scorchingness with which God is *not* there is something that I don't feel in my own work. It amazes me. In other words, there's something kind of Jansenist—I was going to say Calvinist—in both of these writers. I think there may be a Protestant emphasis on the individual conscience and on attempting to locate a consecrated or a graceful inner state of mind that perhaps is not necessary for these Catholic writers. My heroes, at least, are all struggling for some kind of inner certitude, illumination, or something.⁵⁷

O'Connor is after something that Updike is not, namely, conversion. She aimed to sting the world into a reforming act of self-recognition regarding Christ.⁵⁸ After reading *Rabbit, Run*, O'Connor called it "the best book illustrating damnation that has come along in a great while."⁵⁹ Updike was less dogmatic. He wanted to explore the human condition in light of the cosmic battle between God and nothingness. Consequently, *Rabbit* Angstrom, reprehensible in O'Connor's eyes, was sympathetic in Updike's eyes in that he continued to struggle. Joyce Carol Oates further elaborates on how this contrast played out in the fiction of Updike and O'Connor:

56 When he appeared a second time on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1982, Updike said, "I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly runs." Peter Stoler, "John Updike: Going Great at Fifty," *Time* 120, no. 16 (October 18, 1982).

57 Campbell, "Interview with Updike," in *Conversations*, 95.

58 Wood, *Comedy of Redemption*, 178.

59 *Ibid.*, 208.

Because O'Connor's Catholic faith was unshakable, she could invent for her allegorical people ghastly physical-historical fates, assuming that their souls, encompassing but not limited to their egos, were unkillable. Updike's faith is possibly unshakeable as well—which, judging from observations scattered throughout his writing, in a way alarms and amuses him—but his sympathies are usually with those that doubt, who have given up hope of salvation as such, wanting instead to be transparent, artists of their own lives.⁶⁰

In a best-case reading of Updike's spirituality, Ralph Wood argues that this transparency was why Updike was an ironist of the spiritual life. The realities that constrict the freedom of moderns—marriage, children, church—also enhance that freedom and lead to the discovery of grace, which is not from arbitrary Fate but a benevolent God.⁶¹

The debate will surely continue about the nature of Updike's Christian faith and the impact that it had on his writings. But Updike saw it as real. When he was diagnosed with cancer, he turned to writing poems, the last one, *Fine Point*, being about the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. Updike asked in the first stanza, "Why go to Sunday school, though surlily, / and not believe a bit of what was taught?" Alluding to Psalm 23, Updike answered:

The timbrel creed of praise
gives spirit to the daily; blood tinges lips.
The tongue reposes in papyrus pleas,
saying, *Surely*—magnificent, that "surely"—
*goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life, my life, forever.*⁶² ©

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60 Joyce Carol Oates, "Updike's American Comedies," in *John Updike*, ed. Bloom, 58.

61 *Ibid.*, 179.

62 John Updike, "Fine Point," *The New Yorker*, March 16, 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/16/fine-point-3>.

✚ Servant Reading

Book Reviews

Synopsis of a Purer Theology, vol. I.

by *Walaeus et al.*,
edited by *Roelf T. te Velde*,
translated by *Riemer A. Faber*

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by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (*Synopsis of a Purer Theology*), by Walaeus et al., edited by Roelf T. te Velde, translated by Riemer A. Faber, volume 1. Leiden: Brill, 2015, 659 pages, \$171.86.

This translation introduces a historically important Reformed orthodox text to the English-speaking world. Four professors at the University of Leiden (Walaeus, Polyander, Thysius, and Rivetus) produced this text in 1625 in order to present a “purer” alternative to the theology of the recently expelled Arminians. This present volume is the first of three projected volumes, which include parallel Latin and English text. Since this text remained important in the Reformed world at least through the end of the nineteenth century,

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=599&issue_id=121.

modern students of Reformed theology should use it as a means of connecting them to historic Reformed teaching.

This work has many useful qualities. It is inherently important as a summary of Reformed theology of the time. Beginning theological students today are ordinarily surprised to learn that most Reformed authors in the past wrote their major theological works in Latin. This means that many modern readers are cut off from what is arguably the most significant era in the development of Reformed theology. Some sections in the *Synopsis*, such as disputation twenty-one on the Sabbath, express largely Dutch debates. However, most of the chapters will help readers better understand the substance and structure of Reformed orthodoxy from the doctrine of the knowledge of God and Scripture, through creation, man and sin, to the relationship and differences between the Old and New Testaments. The footnotes scattered throughout this volume will also help many readers understand better philosophical, theological, and historical references in the original text.

The Leiden *Synopsis*, however, has some surprising deficiencies. Many discussions are incomplete or qualified inadequately. For example, Thysius mentioned, but largely omitted, the sufficiency of Scripture in his treatment of the perfection of Scripture, in favor of combating papal views of unwritten tradition (107). The definitions of theology, which occupied such a prominent place in other systems at the time, are stated and passed by on the first pages of the book in order to develop the doctrine of Scripture more rapidly. Sin is described as the absence of good, having no metaphysical reality. However, this point can mislead readers without explaining that Reformed authors generally treated sin as an action directed to a wrong end instead of as nonbeing. Other topics, such as fundamental articles, the decrees of God (subsumed and renamed under providence), and the covenant of redemption, are omitted entirely. Covenant theology comes to bear directly only on disputation twenty-three, which addresses the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Covenantal terminology is not

explained fully enough to be an adequate source for understanding the nuances of the Reformed development of the doctrine. Many doctrinal treatments in this work are too brief to help modern readers understand the theology standing behind these statements. Several positions are simply stated without argumentation from Scripture. Both of these points, surprisingly, stand in contrast to the shorter *Compendium Christianae Theologiae* from the same time period by Johannes Wollebius.

The *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* is a very important work of Reformed theology historically. While it is a must-read text from the time period, it will not likely be the best starting point for readers new to reading primary sources in Reformed orthodoxy. It is a synopsis of a broader theological tradition. Its primary value lies in teaching readers what questions to ask and where to look for theological expansion in other Reformed literature. It is possible as well that the English portion of this work might appear separately eventually at a lower cost, which would make it more accessible to a wider audience. ©

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Synopsis of a Purer Theology, vol. 2.

by *Walaeus et al.*,
edited by *Henk van den Belt*,
translated by *Riemer A. Faber*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2017¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (*Synopsis of a Purer Theology*), by Walaeus et al., edited by Henk van den Belt, translated by Riemer A. Faber, volume 2. Leiden: Brill, 2016, 738 pages, \$154.00.

This is the second volume in the anticipated translation of the so-called *Leiden Synopsis*. This work represents a “survey of academic theology” immediately following the Synod of Dordt and in response to the theological system of the Remonstrants, or, Arminians (1). As such, it is a compendium of Reformed thought by four renowned Professors of theology that brings the English-speaking world into contact with the key ideas of the Reformed system of theology in one of its classic expressions.

Volume 2 of the *Synopsis Purioris* treats a wide range of issues including predestination, Christology, the application of redemption, and the doctrine of the church and its ministers. The translation is clear and accurate. The inclusion of the Latin text alongside the English translation makes this volume even more useful, since many key theological terms are difficult to translate in a way that retains the technical vocabulary current in Reformed orthodoxy. For example, the translator renders *habitus spiritualis* as “spiritual disposition,” correctly capturing its meaning (276–77).

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=613&issue_id=123.

However, readers unfamiliar with Latin theological terminology will not likely pick up on the technical language of habits and acts that was rooted in Medieval theology and flowed seamlessly into Reformed thought. Comparing key terms in the original text with their English equivalents enables readers to build a Reformed theological vocabulary in a way that furnishes them with vital vocabulary and both its meaning and function in seventeenth-century theology. The footnotes added by the editors are helpful as well, since they provide historical background related to the authors cited, they explain the historical context at key points, and they include comparisons to contemporary authors across confessional lines. This increases the value of the translated text by making it serve as an introduction to early seventeenth-century High Orthodox theology.

Another useful feature of the *Synopsis* is the consistent application of Trinitarian theology to the entire theological system. The authors appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity and to the appropriate works of all three divine persons in relation to each locus treated. Doing so was a standard feature of Reformed orthodox systems of theology that gradually disappeared in later times. This fact provides insight into the robust way that Reformed orthodox authors employed Trinitarian theology in relation to the entire system of doctrine, which should offset the common criticism that Reformed theology treated the Trinity merely as an appendix to the doctrine of God.

As I noted in relation to the first volume of the *Synopsis Purioris*, this work does not include a full treatment of every relevant scholastic question in relation to each locus. The authors of the Leiden Synopsis often included less material in the chapters of their work than other authors, such as Wollebius, did in shorter theological systems. Moreover, they omit many theological distinctions that appeared in later systems, such as Turretin's *Institutes*. Questions that other authors addressed at length with extensive proofs and arguments, the *Leiden Synopsis* sometimes stated in a single sentence. However, the subjects treated by its authors clarify many important theological

distinctions by providing clear definitions of terms and their use in Reformed thought. This means that while the *Synopsis* is somewhat incomplete compared to comparable Reformed systems, it nevertheless introduces readers to many key concepts in the context of the early seventeenth century.

In spite of the cost of these volumes, this ongoing translation of the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* has potential to serve a diverse body of students. It will be invaluable to scholars of Reformed orthodox thought. Those familiar with the Latin language can use this publication to gain access to a carefully developed semi-critical text of the *Synopsis*. The translated text will provoke thought and fruitful research as scholars interact with the Latin original. This work can serve Reformed pastors as well. The fact that many Reformed ministers no longer gain proficiency in the Latin language in their theological training means that they effectively are cut off from most of the classic systems of theology in their own theological tradition. It is important to understand how this system developed historically if ministers hope to comprehend where expressions in historic Reformed creeds came from and what they mean. Such material is also vital for evaluating continuities and discontinuities between classic and modern Reformed thought. This provides readers with more theological options to draw from as they grapple with interpreting Scripture in conversation with the church. For both scholars and pastors, these volumes are a welcome addition to Reformed literature in the English-speaking world for those who are willing and able to obtain and read them. ©

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Genesis: A New Commentary

by Meredith G. Kline

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by Bryan M. Estelle

Genesis: A New Commentary, by Meredith G. Kline, edited by Jonathan G. Kline. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016, xx + 154 pages, \$19.95, paper.

Meredith G. Kline, OPC minister and Old Testament scholar, still speaks from the grave. Thankfully this is the case because of the labor of love that his grandson Jonathan G. Kline has performed. While perusing some remaining boxes of Meredith's papers, sermons, and miscellaneous items left behind after Meredith died in 2007, Jonathan discovered a full manuscript of a commentary that Meredith had written on the book of Genesis. Jonathan, an Old Testament scholar in his own right, decided to publish the manuscript after finishing his Ph.D. at Harvard in Hebrew Bible. He did some minor editing, cross referencing to Meredith's other books and articles, and filling in some transliterated Hebrew terms, often pointing out delightful puns from the Hebrew text, a topic in which Jonathan Kline happens to have some expertise. The commentary, without spelling, typographical, or syntactic errors, finally saw the light of day just this last year with a foreword by Michael S. Horton.

The result of this new work is that we now have some of Meredith's most mature and clear thoughts on a biblical book that he spent decades studying. Throughout his career Meredith was known for his exquisite biblical scholarship, although his writing was sometimes challenging to grasp because of his neologisms and self-publishing tendencies during

some phases of his career. Nevertheless, Meredith sought to make his ideas very accessible to a wide audience in this commentary and Jonathan's editorial labors have supported that intention. What is especially helpful in the new commentary are the laconic, simple, and lucid summaries. For example, a person unfamiliar with the argument on a biblical theology of circumcision in *By Oath Consigned*, which is an earlier work of Meredith's, could quickly get up to speed if one just reads pages 66–70 of the new commentary, which summarizes the argument in a few short pages.

From this work I learned much, especially in the latter three-fifths of the book. That portion contains material that is very theologically stimulating and, for the most part, may not be found in *Kingdom Prologue*, Meredith's classroom text used for years in the biblical theology courses that he taught at various seminaries. There are many flashes of insight into how the faith of these patriarchs functioned. Or, for example, the comments on prototypal judgment in the narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah (73). Or his comments on the binding of Isaac. Or, for example, Rachel's disrespectful treatment of Laban's household gods (31:31–35) to demonstrate the sovereignty of God (106). Or why the massacre of the Shechemites was so reprehensible (112). Or how the Joseph narrative prepares the reader for the exodus event and how suggestive these passages are for the coming Messiah (122–140).

Mostly, for this reviewer, it was just plain enjoyable to hear Meredith's voice again through the pages of this posthumous publication. What better person to help us hear that voice again than a grandson who is also eminently qualified as a Hebrew Bible scholar to grant us such attunement? For pastors who plan to preach or teach through Genesis, or for ruling elders who plan to teach the book of Genesis in a Bible study or Sunday school, this new commentary will be a rich and helpful resource full of insights and foundational principles. There is much grist for the mill. Echoed throughout this commentary is the doctrine of sovereign initiating grace rooted in election. The unconditional act of divine mercy is demonstrated through

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=605&issue_id=122.

instrumental faith in the OT patriarchs as well as NT saints as the only grounds for entitlement to heaven. From the beginnings of world history and the subsequent patriarchal age there is only one true and proper merit to earn such heavenly blessings: the active obedience of Christ. It is obvious that this saint and eminent OT scholar and minister, M.G. Kline, stayed faithful to the end. ☉

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Sons in the Son

by *David B. Garner*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* February 2017¹

by **Ryan M. McGraw**

Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ, by David B. Garner. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2016, 366 pages, \$24.99, paper.

In Ephesians 1:5, the apostle Paul described adoption as the predestined goal toward which God in Christ is directing his elect. Adoption is the pinnacle of gospel privileges. It is often presented in Scripture as the highest honor of God's people. Despite this fact, the church has often fallen short of treating adoption in the full scope of its biblical and theological connections. In *Sons in the Son*, David Garner presents a full-orbed biblical and systematic theology of this key doctrine. While

his treatment of adoption raises difficult theological questions at points, Garner makes his readers engage prayerfully with many texts of Scripture while setting forth the glory of gospel adoption to the praise of God's grace. This book is not only worth reading, but also engaging enough to cause meditation-induced insomnia.

Garner's book is thorough in its scope. He divides his ten chapters into three sections, which treat, in turn, the meaning of the term "adoption" and its history, exegesis of the five New Testament passages in which the Greek term for "adoption" appears, and development of the doctrine of adoption in light of biblical and systematic theology. Garner models well the need for systematic theology to build upon sound exegesis that is sensitive to the flow of redemptive history. His ordering of his treatment of biblical texts and his sensitivity to all three persons in the Trinity throughout make his work exegetically clear and theologically refreshing. Garner argues that adoption is not merely one gospel benefit flowing from union with Christ, but that adoption virtually subsumes and magnifies simultaneously the legal aspects of redemption in justification and its transformative aspects in sanctification (307). Following self-consciously the example of Richard Gaffin, Garner provides a solid model for the proper interdependence among exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. This makes his work an admirable endeavor that helps readers engage thoroughly with the relevant biblical material.

Sons in the Son raises at least two potentially problematic issues. The first and most obvious one is Garner's controversial argument that the primary basis of the adoption of God's elect is Christ's adoption by the Father at his resurrection (chapter 7). He argues that believers cannot receive the adoption as sons unless Christ was first adopted for them (194). This means that Christ is both the natural Son of God by virtue of his divine nature and the adopted son of God in his human nature by virtue of his resurrection. While aware of the potential of being charged with adoptionistic Christological errors and attempting to steer clear of them (179, 191), the author's primary contention

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=607&issue_id=122.

is that Christ's eternal Sonship, while vital, has no redemptive characteristics (197).

However, the primary reason why most Christians (Reformed or otherwise) have argued that Christ is the natural Son of God, while we are his adopted sons, is the unity of Christ's person. Contrary to Garner's contention (203), Christ does not need to be adopted on our behalf any more than he needs to experience the new birth in our place in order for us to be born again. Authors such as John Owen argue that Christ's incarnation was an inexact parallel to, and ground for, our regeneration. In like manner, the unity of Christ's person seems to demand that we are adopted sons because we are united to Christ as the natural Son. This point requires more interaction than is possible in this review, but readers should note the unconventional Christology involved in this theological construction.

The second problematic issue is Garner's presentation of historic Reformed treatments of adoption. From the classic period of Reformed theology, Garner cites only Calvin and Turretin, while appealing to the Westminster Standards without historical context for the development of adoption in those documents. The result is that he leaves readers primarily with the choice between an order of salvation in which justification is the ground of union with Christ and all other gospel benefits (as with Michael Horton et al.) or an order in which justification, adoption, and sanctification retain no logical priorities in relation to each other as long as they all evidence union with Christ (302–3). Neither of these options, however, represents a classic Reformed orthodox *ordo salutis*, in which justification, adoption, and sanctification flow from union with Christ and retain a logical order in relation to each other.

In addition to this, Garner represents Reformed orthodoxy as largely stumbling through the doctrine of adoption without knowing where to place it in the theological system. This fails to take into account substantial treatments of adoption in older Reformed systems of theology, especially from the mid-seventeenth through the early eighteenth centuries. While this does not make

such treatments right or wrong, it is hard to justify Garner's dismissal of post-Reformation dogmatics on this subject without adequately exploring the post-Reformation development of the doctrine. It also seems off base to assert that "every aspect of redemption possesses inaugurated and future consummative eschatological realities" (136). While this is true for adoption and sanctification, it is not for other redemptive benefits, such as regeneration and, as most Reformed orthodox authors argued, justification.

David Garner's *Sons in the Son* will make readers think deeply about an oft-neglected topic in Christian theology. While they should be aware that the doctrine of adoption as presented in his work is not the only option available historically, his treatment of the subject is likely the most extensive and thorough one yet produced. The subject matter and the character of this book make it demand our attention, whether we agree with all of the author's arguments or not. This reviewer hopes that reading *Sons in the Son* will both help readers wrestle theologically with the doctrine of adoption and read more deeply in the historic Reformed tradition concerning the application of redemption. ☺

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You Are What You Love

by James K. A. Smith

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, by James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016, xii + 210 pages, \$19.99.

My few complaints about this book would never challenge its great value. At the outset, James Smith does evince a somewhat over-realized eschatology when he declares, “This book articulates spirituality for culture-makers” (xi). But its focus is on the culture of the church, with worship at its center, as the motivating force in the formation of our chief love. This is paramount.

In highlighting the biblical emphasis on love, Smith at times comes close to eclipsing the place of knowledge. However, given the tendency toward focusing almost exclusively on the knowledge of doctrine among the Reformed, Smith’s emphasis has a needed place. “So discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing. . . . To follow Jesus is to become a student of the Rabbi who teaches us how to *love*” (2). Smith has witty ways of making his case: “‘You are what you think’ is a motto that reduces human beings to brains-on-a-stick” (3). He clarifies our concerns about knowledge when he explains, “A follower of Jesus will be a student of the Word, ‘one whose delight is in the Law of the LORD’ (Ps. 1:2)” (4). The gist of his message is not that we need less thinking or doctrine, but that we must reckon on the power of habit in our view of human nature and the Christian life. “Our *telos* is what we *want* . . . a vision of the ‘good life’ that we desire” (11).

Furthermore, love is a habit that involves

formation through the patterns or liturgies of life that orient and cultivate our desires. This should be the aim of all education. Learning “isn’t just information acquisition; it’s more like inscribing something into the very fiber of your being” (18). “This means that Spirit-led formation of our loves is a recalibration of the heart, a reorientation of our loves by unlearning all the tacit bearings we’ve absorbed from the other cultural practices” (22). Missing in Smith’s analysis of our misdirected loves is the problem of total depravity and original sin. However, he picks up on Calvin’s image of the fallen human heart as an “idol factory” (23). The thesis of this excellent book is summed up at the end of chapter 1: “To be human is to be a liturgical animal, a creature whose loves are shaped by our worship” (23).

Chapter 2 focuses on the secular “liturgies of desire.” These are often contrary to what we think. What we really desire is revealed in the habits of our daily lives (29). These loves often exist subconsciously, as second nature, because we underestimate the power of habit. “If you think of love-shaping practices as ‘liturgies,’ this means that you could be worshipping other gods without even knowing it” (37). We can identify these by being aware of cultural practices as liturgies or rituals of everyday life. Smith goes on to demonstrate how the mall is a religious site that has messages of the “consumer gospel” built into it—and these messages are after our hearts (41). The analysis is profound. “The mall is a *formative* space, covertly shaping our loves and longings” (55).

Chapter 3 shows how historic worship is designed to reorder our disordered loves (57). Smith strongly advocates returning to “historic” worship and ecclesiology. “The church—the body of Christ—is the place where God invites us to renew our loves, reorient our desires, and retrain our appetites” (65). So, public worship enculturates us in the life of our new kingdom, participating in the “life of the Triune God” (66, 70). Smith’s advocacy of historic patterns of discipleship is refreshing in a culture that is always craving novelty. In McLuhanesque fashion he understands that cultural forms are not neutral, but are freighted with

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=614&issue_id=123.

messages of secularism, so that when they enter the church through worship, they fail to challenge our worldly loves (76).

If worship is formative, not merely expressive, then we need to be conscious and intentional about the form of worship that is forming us. . . . If we think of worship as a bottom-up expressive endeavor, repetition will seem insincere and inauthentic. But when we see worship as an invitation to a top-down encounter in which God is refashioning our deepest habits, then repetition looks very different: it's how God rehabilitates us. In a formational paradigm, repetition isn't insincere, because you're not *showing*, you're *submitting*. This is crucial because there is no formation without repetition. (80)

While I sometimes tire of what seem to be contemporary clichés like “narrative arc” and “recalibration,” the point Smith is driving at is well worth our perseverance. And his writing skills are, in the main, considerable. So, in chapter 4 worship is depicted as the story of the gospel that captures the hearts of worshippers. This liturgy is designed to win our hearts to the *telos* or purposes of our God, which are embodied in Christ and his gospel story (90). After a summary of the formative power of elements of the historic liturgy, Smith concludes that “immersing yourself in this Story is how the Spirit is going to change your habits” (99).

Smith's literary sensibilities enter his argumentation in an engaging way. “Desire-shaping worship isn't simply didactic; it is poetic. It paints a picture, spins metaphors, tells a story. . . . Stories stick” (107). Because the gospel story we encounter in worship is one we are to inhabit throughout the week, chapter 5 deals with the liturgies of the home. In contrast to the “marriage industry,” the ritual of marriage calls us to serve God and others (125). (I wish he did not connect the Lord's Supper with the marriage ceremony.) While some, including me, will object to the liturgical calendar as an ecclesiastical imposition, Smith's suggestion for its use seems to be more of an informal aid to family worship (129).

We might say that the sacramental power of Christian worship “enchants” our everyday lives, reminding us that the world we inhabit is not a flattened “nature” but rather a creation charged with the presence and power of the living Spirit. (130)

Chapter 6 focuses on education, asking, “What if education weren't first and foremost about *know* but about what we *love*?” In this chapter the section on youth ministry is worth the price of the book. “Youth Ministry for Liturgical Animals” (143–54) accurately depicts much of contemporary youth ministry as moralistic and concerned primarily to avoid boredom (144). Tending to divorce young people from public worship, youth ministry limits the exemplars of their imitation to their own generation. Focusing on exciting, emotive expression limits the message portion of meetings to the “dispensation of information,” leaving young people no different than when they came to the meeting (145). Relevance is purported reason for importing secular liturgies into the church through youth ministry (146).

While I was not impressed with the example of the Taizé community, a French ecumenical monastic group,² Smith's point about them is well taken. What young people “really crave is not liberation from ritual but rather liberating rituals” (150). He makes a superb point about the importance of strangeness in liturgy. Church growth has emphasized relevance and comfort, while worship is intended to offer a weary world something markedly different from the disenchanting world (151). Here Smith's book would have been improved by reference to the rich treasure of Reformation liturgies at our disposal. Smith concludes this section with three suggestions for formative youth ministry: (1) enfold youth in congregations committed to historic Christian worship; (2) invite youth into “a wider repertoire of Christian disciplines;” (3) replace entertainment with service (152–53). The

2 Taizé worship has no preaching and the Taizé brothers take vows of celibacy. The ecumenical quest to unite Catholics and Protestants mutes theological differences. For these reasons Reformed people cannot affirm the value of this community.

remainder of the chapter discusses “Schooling the Imagination.” Here, Smith suggests rituals for higher education that seem odd.

The concluding chapter is a weak ending to an otherwise superb book. Smith’s work is suggestive, creative, interesting, and convincing. Officers should read this book and glean the best from its compelling theme. ©

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How Bible Stories Work by Leland Ryken

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by David A. Booth

How Bible Stories Work: A Guided Study of Biblical Narrative, by Leland Ryken. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2015, 129 pages, \$9.99, paper.

A large part of becoming educated is learning to read well. For the Christian, far more is at stake than merely cultivating erudition. Rightly knowing God through his Word is dependent upon our skill as listeners and as readers. Wouldn’t it be great if there were a series of reliable and accessible guides designed to teach lay people how to read God’s Word better? Now there is. For nearly half a century Leland Ryken has been teaching

Christians to read God’s Word with greater care, sensitivity, and depth. *How Bible Stories Work* is the first of six volumes by Professor Ryken, published by Weaver Books, designed “to equip Christians to understand and teach the Bible effectively by giving them reliable tools for handling the biblical text” (7). We could scarcely ask for, or even imagine, a better guide.

Every pastor and ruling elder faces the challenge of teaching Christians that proverbs are not unconditional promises from God and that figurative language should not be understood woodenly. In these obvious ways, we are already modeling and teaching aspects of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, I suspect that few pastors have ever systematically taught their congregations how stories work, even though the majority of God’s Word comes to us in the form of historical narrative. This book provides a clear and helpful framework for rectifying this oversight.

The basic premise of this book is that understanding how stories work precedes grasping what the stories are trying to teach. To put the matter positively, the better we become at interpreting the Bible as literature, the more fully and accurately we will grasp the Bible’s theology. The opening chapter explains how “the subject of literature (whatever the genre) is universal human experience, concretely embodied” (17). Unless readers fully grasp this principle, they will have great difficulty relating literature, including biblical literature, to life (25). Regretfully, Ryken sometimes pushes this principle in unhelpful ways. For example, he describes God’s judgment on the Tower of Babel by saying: “This story tells us about a failed experiment in living on a grand scale” (22). Now, it might be easier to relate to a story “about a failed experiment in living on a grand scale” than to one about God judging all the people on earth who were united in rebellion against him, but the story of the Tower of Babel is about wickedness and judgment rather than a failed experiment. What makes literature engaging is the combination of “universal human experience” and the particular, even sometimes the unique, ways in which those experiences are “concretely embodied.”

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=612&issue_id=123.

In my judgment, one of the most common errors in evangelical Bible study is the over-identification of the reader's experiences with the events of biblical history. If the Bible were a collection of moralistic fairy tales, it would be essential for the reader to be just like Moses when the Lord meets with him at the burning bush. But since the Bible is a revelation of God's character and saving work, rather than a collection of moralistic fairy tales, such distinct encounters teach us the most when we don't attempt to flatten them to fit within our own experiences. Thankfully, this book contains few such lapses.

The heart of the book is found in six chapters which explore setting, characterization, and plot. Trained pastors, and other experienced readers, largely will have internalized how they assess the setting and characterization in stories, and therefore we can easily forget that most lay people need to be taught how to analyze these literary features. Ryken strikes a helpful balance toward this goal by providing sufficient detail to be clear without overwhelming the reader with minutia. The heart of the book is rounded out with insightful chapters on "plot structure and unity" and "plot devices." Ryken notes that "the track record of study Bibles and commentaries on the subjects of plot structure and unity is not as good as it should be" (78); he helpfully warns against some of the common pitfalls found in "published material on Bible stories" (79). While these warnings are important, one of the most helpful features of this book is that it guides individuals into thinking clearly about how stories work rather than providing readers with a long list of technical rules to apply. The book closes with a chapter on "Hero Stories," which Ryken calls "a neglected and fruitful narrative genre," and a final chapter on how we find theological significance in narrative texts.

This thin volume is an excellent resource for a pastor or elder who wants to lead an eight- to ten-week study on how to read biblical narrative. Each of the eight chapters in this book is crafted with the right balance of detail, illustration, and brevity to be covered in a single class. This book would also work well in a discussion-based adult Bible study

where each participant reads through the book on his or her own prior to class. Pastors will want to augment this book by explaining how Hebrew narrative differs from modern English stories and also by demonstrating how the didactic portions of the Bible both explain and limit the ways in which biblical stories are to be read. In the series preface Ryken writes: "The Bible can be trusted to reveal its extraordinary qualities if we approach it with ordinary methods of literary analysis" (8). That is undoubtedly true, and this book will help God's people use the tools of literary analysis to grasp better the priceless treasure of his Word and apply it to their lives. ©

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Preaching Christ from Psalms

by *Sidney Greidanus*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2017¹

by **Iain Duguid**

Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year, by Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, xx + 595 pages, \$40.00, paper.

Resources in biblical exegesis aimed specifically at preachers are an all too rare commodity. Too often, academic commentaries answer all the

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=611&issue_id=123.

questions that no preacher is asking and no congregation needs to hear, while so-called homiletical resources are often academically flimsy and theologically lightweight. It is therefore always welcome to see another book from the pen of Sidney Greidanus, the author of a well-regarded textbook on preaching Christ from the Old Testament.² Alongside his homiletic textbooks, Greidanus now has given us volumes on Genesis, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, and the Psalms, allowing us to watch over his shoulder as he crafts Christ-exalting sermons from a variety of Old Testament genres.

The book is comprised of a forty-five-page introductory chapter, “Issues in Preaching Christ from the Psalms,” followed by detailed analysis of twenty-two specific psalms. Because Greidanus has chosen to follow the sequence of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, these psalms are not in the scriptural order—Psalm 1 is chapter 2 in the book, while Psalm 2 is chapter 10. The book concludes with six appendices, giving brief summaries of the author’s method of expository preaching, sample sermons by the author and his students, and suggestions for sermon series on the Psalms.

In the introductory material, Greidanus defends preaching from the Psalms (as opposed to simply praying or singing the Psalms), and discusses the different genres of the psalms, along with various devices and features of Hebrew poetry. He briefly explores the role of the literary context within the psalter, noting the greater attention paid recently in academic scholarship to the editorial placement of each psalm (unfortunately, he finished his work before the appearance of O. Palmer Robertson’s recent book, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* [2015], which is an excellent full-scale treatment of the subject). He rightly discourages attempts to reconstruct the supposed historical background from which the psalm comes, which is in many cases elusive. He also provides a few general comments about moving from psalm to application: often

2 Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

the pathway lies through an analogy between the psalmist and the congregation, or between Israel and the congregation. At other times, the psalm seeks to address a need that we too share (43–44). Ultimately, the goal is always to preach Christ, and Greidanus believes that the seven methods he has outlined in his earlier works apply equally well here in the Psalter.

This introductory material provides a fair survey of academic scholarship: its brevity means that it serves as a good refresher for those familiar with these topics, though beginners might wish for a bit more detail. One or two suggestions will raise eyebrows in more conservative Reformed circles, such as the idea that the reading of Scripture might be “supported by mime or drama” (44). More seriously, Greidanus argues that modern preachers cannot adopt the apostolic hermeneutic, suggesting that it must be replaced by “a responsible, modern hermeneutic method” (8). Greidanus is far from alone in this assessment of the NT use of the OT, but Dennis Johnson, Gregory Beale, and D. A. Carson have provided a substantive response, defending the apostles from the charge of irresponsible exegesis.³ Certainly we want to avoid arbitrary eisegesis in our expositions, but I believe that is very far from what the New Testament writers were doing.

I was also surprised to find no substantive help in this book for preaching the imprecatory portions of the Psalms—surely one of the most significant issues for anyone in preaching from the Psalms. There is a very brief mention of Psalm 137 under the preaching method of “Contrast,” which treats this psalm as embodying the exact opposite of Christ’s teaching (interestingly, Greidanus’s discussion of this same psalm is lengthier and more circumspect in his earlier *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*⁴), but none of the psalms

3 G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012); Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

4 Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 275.

selected as examples are imprecatory psalms. He writes in his preface, “My first inclination was to help preachers with especially difficult psalms such as the imprecatory psalms” (xiii). Unfortunately, although critiquing the Lectionary for omitting Psalm 104:35a (409), and providing a brief exposition of that verse on page 499, he provides little help for the more challenging passages—many of which find an echo in the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation, which suggests that they cannot simply be wiped away neatly under the heading of contrast.

The meat of the book, the substantive work that makes this book worthwhile for every preacher to own, lies in its individual expositions. There is a wealth of material here that will repay every reader, distilled from Greidanus’s wide reading and research. Even when you disagree with his application or how he gets to Christ, the process of thinking through your disagreement with him will sharpen your insight into the text. Read this book alongside Edmund Clowney’s classic article “The Singing Savior”⁵ and Robertson’s book on the *Flow of the Psalms*, and it will be astonishing if you are not significantly more motivated, inspired, and equipped to preach Christ from the psalms, which were after all “written about him” (Luke 24:44). ©

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The True Doctrine of the Sabbath

by *Nicholas Bownd*

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* April 2017¹

by **D. Scott Meadows**

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

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

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

The book begins with new material, including a substantial introduction and analysis. The

⁵ Edmund Clowney, “The Singing Savior,” *Moody Monthly*, July-August 1979, 40. Also available on a number of internet sites.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=621&issue_id=124.

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

Book One, "The Ancient Institution and Continuance of the Sabbath," addresses perhaps the most technically difficult aspects of the subject, such as the nature of the Fourth Commandment in particular and the complex case for its continuance. Five formidable objections to Christians keeping the Sabbath are answered admirably; some of these are still in circulation today, being offered by Dispensationalists and adherents of so-called New Covenant Theology. Bownd insists that each seventh day is moral law, while the specific day of the week to be set apart is positive law, being changed from the last day of the week for the Jews to the first day of the week for Christians, in honor of Christ's resurrection upon this day. He argues that the day's name has also been changed to "the Lord's Day." Many good reasons remain for resting from our ordinary work on this day—particularly so that we might without hindrance give ourselves to the worship of God in public and in private. Keeping the Lord's Day is a commandment for everyone, not just believers. Christians are as strictly bound by this law as were Jews, and yet the specific requirements for keeping the Lord's Day are not as complex and burdensome. Book One concludes with a case against recreations that interfere with Sabbath sanctification.

Book Two, "The Sanctification of the Sabbath," gives specific and practical direction for both corporate and private obedience to the

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

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

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

As with any book of mere human composition, there are weaknesses and flaws, but in my view they are slight blemishes in comparison with the overall treasure. Bownd relates a bizarre story, probably superstitious or exaggerated, of a baby born with the face of a dog as divine punishment for a nobleman who loved his hunting dogs too

much and chose hunting over church attendance. This is one example of the few instances for reasonable criticism.

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

A good dose of Bownd with God's blessing, expressed accessibly for this generation, would go far toward recovering greater faithfulness in worship—in the church, our families, and in society. Making the best spiritual use of our Lord's Days is both a sign and a means of evangelical and redemptive progress. Those most likely to benefit from Bownd's book must have an open mind, facility in reading older works, and a zeal to glean all that is profitable for the soul. ©

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Reading for the Common Good

by C. Christopher Smith

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by T. David Gordon

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

Reading in the West—both its growth and its decline—has itself occupied the attention of cultural observers for some time now. One could easily devote several months of reading time to reading *about* reading (and its history of cultural ebb and flow).² Much of that literature falls into the category of cultural analysis, and a small

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=623&issue_id=124.

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

portion of it is somewhat self-consciously Christian: some medieval monasteries devoted themselves to copying manuscripts of Holy Scripture; Protestants are “people of the book” (to the point that Westminster Larger Catechism 156 says, “Although all are not to be permitted to read the Word publicly to the congregation, yet all sorts of people are bound to read it apart by themselves, and with their families”); and the Sunday School movement in America was largely a literacy movement.

What has not been done—at least not with the thoroughness and theological acumen that C. Christopher Smith has shown here—is to promote reading for thoroughly Christian purposes—as a practice conducive to love of God, his creation, our neighbors, and fellow believers. According to Smith, “Reading carefully and attentively is an essential part of a journey into knowledge that is rooted in love. . . . Reading, as explained in this book, is essential to the health and flourishing of our churches” (19, 65). Smith is an avid reader, a published essayist and book author, and contributing editor of *The Englewood Review of Books*; and he has discovered that reading all sorts of literature—fiction, history, science, poetry, etc.—contributes profoundly to the exercise of dominion over God’s order, the journey of faithful discipleship, and the pursuit of the church’s mission. Smith makes a compelling (and stimulating) case for this basic thesis in chapters devoted to “Slow Reading in Accelerating Times,” “Shaping the Social Imagination,” “Reading and Our Congregational Identity,” “Discerning Our Call,” “Reading with Our Neighbors,” “Deepening our Roots in Our Neighborhoods,” “Hope for Our Interconnected Creation,” “Toward Faithful Engagement in Economics and Politics,” and “Becoming a Reading Congregation.”

In the process of contending for the many significant contributions reading makes, Smith also plausibly argues that reading has benefits in precisely those areas where its opponents have often attacked it. It contributes *to* our social bonds, to our empathy with, and sympathy towards, others as the *solution* to our narcissism and not its cause: “Reading in communion is one way to counteract

the influence of individualism” (56). It stimulates us to informed action in the world and in our communities, rather than cultivating passivity and idle speculation: “Without learning, our action tends to be reaction and often is superficial” (16).

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

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

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

Many of the apologies I have read through the years for the value of reading appear to have been written/preached to the choir, and, as a member of that choir, I have enjoyed them immensely. Smith’s apology is different; he patiently and compellingly presents the case—in distinctively

Christian terms—that reading should be done “for the common good,” and in order to “help our churches and neighborhoods flourish,” as the title says. My only lament is that I have no conversation partners at this point with whom I might discuss this interesting volume, but I am making plans to address that matter already. I would be delighted if, several years from now, I encountered a nice representation of church members and officers to discuss this volume with me. In the words of Robert Frost, “You come too.” ©

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The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God

by *Johannes Cocceius*

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by **David R. Holmlund**

The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God, by Johannes Cocceius. Translated by Casey Carmichael. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016, xxxviii + 408 pages, \$50.00.

Last year Reformation Heritage Books published a brand-new English translation of one of the classics of Reformed covenant theology—

Johannes Cocceius’s *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*—a fitting selection to stand as the third volume in their Classic Reformed Theology series. Casey Carmichael translated Cocceius’s work from the original Latin text *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* (first published in 1648) into a form which is quite useful in English, while also maintaining Greek and Hebrew citations for biblical exposition along with English renderings. The book’s introduction and a short biographical sketch are supplied by Willem J. van Asselt, the world’s leading expert on Cocceius and one of the finest scholars of post-Reformation theology in the past generation. All of those involved in producing this fine volume deserve to be highly commended for what is now available to the English reader interested in the history of covenant theology.

Cocceius—while lacking some of the name recognition belonging to other theologians of the post-Reformation period—is one of the greatest of the seventeenth-century Scholastics who systematized orthodox Protestant theology in the period between the Reformation and the rise of rationalism. A native of the north German city of Bremen, he studied and taught in the Netherlands first in Franeker and later at Leiden—centers of world class scholarship and international influence in the era. With a mastery of Hebrew and Semitic languages, Cocceius was fundamentally a biblical exegete whose voluminous writings stretched from philology to biblical exposition to systematic formulation.

As a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, Cocceius subscribed to the Three Forms of Unity and remained in good standing in the church throughout his life. However, particularly today, his name is also synonymous with sometimes controversial assertions of the nascent field of federal (covenant) theology among those who were confessionally orthodox in the post-Reformation period. His great rival in the Dutch Reformed Church of the seventeenth century was Gisbertus Voetius of Utrecht, who—as something of a Dutch expression of that century’s puritan theology—believed Cocceius’s theological methods undermined

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=629&issue_id=125.

important aspects of Christian doctrine and ethics. Their clashes over justification and Sabbath requirements in the new covenant were not unlike similar controversies across the English Channel, although it is possible to argue that the clearer theological argument happened in the Dutch context. With Roman Catholicism officially removed from the Dutch Reformed Church by the start of the seventeenth century, this era now affectionately known as the *gouden eeuw* (golden age) in the Netherlands had its greatest theological controversy in the clashes between the Voetians and the Cocceians throughout the latter half of the century.

The structure of *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* is not vastly different from other more recent books of covenant theology which are more widely known today. He defines what a covenant is; he argues for the covenant of works with Adam; then he gives a full elaboration of the covenant of grace, which shows continuity and discontinuity over the whole course of redemptive history. And yet, as a book, it is decidedly different in its flavor and content than Geerhardus Vos, O. Palmer Robertson, Edmund Clowney, Michael Horton, and the rest.

One difference is that Cocceius gives frequent reminders of his seventeenth-century context. He spends considerable time interacting with theological opponents like Robert Bellarmine (a Roman Catholic controversialist) or Hugo Grotius (an Arminian sympathizer and perennial critic of the Reformed orthodox) even though Cocceius clearly stands in the mainstream of the Reformed tradition. This reminds us that polemics was a large part of systematic theology in the post-Reformation era, as any reader of other post-Reformation texts has already discovered.

The other difference is crucial to understanding the importance of the book. Beyond simply contrasting the covenant of works with the covenant of grace established through the second Adam, Cocceius argues that the covenant of grace unfolds as the series of five “abrogations” of the covenant of works throughout redemptive history (nicely summarized on pages 58–59, as well as in

the book’s chapter divisions). In the first abrogation, which precedes the inauguration of the covenant of grace, the possibility of receiving eternal life and blessedness through obedience is removed through the event of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. By the second abrogation, the consequence of condemnation for sin is overturned through the first proclamation of the Gospel and the gift of faith for believers. In the third abrogation—by far the most controversial both in the seventeenth century and today—the terror and bondage of sin under the law is removed with the arrival of the new covenant following the finished work of the Savior. Through the fourth abrogation, sin’s corruption expires at the death of the believer in Jesus Christ. Fifth, and finally, the general resurrection is understood as an abrogation of all that remains from the covenant of works so that the course of redemptive history is entirely framed by the passing away of the covenant of works through participation in the benefits of life in Christ until believers share only in the covenant of grace forever.

The thoughtful reader is forced to wonder what bearing Cocceius’s formulation ought to have upon our covenant theology today. Cocceius offers considerably greater detail than one would find in either the Westminster Standards (WCF chapter 7 and various catechism answers) or the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover, apart from a few obscure books in the Dutch Reformed context, the Cocceian approach is quite different from what is taught in the Reformed community today on the topic of covenant theology in which the covenant of works is generally *contrasted* with the covenant of grace—not *phased out* with the gradual arrival of the benefits of Christ, as in Cocceius. This book raises anew that old question about just how important historical theology *is* for systematic theology.

The appearance of this work in English is a timely reminder that good historical theology helps us to appropriate the best of biblical interpretation as we arrive at the best systematic formulation possible. This is where Cocceius is so useful. For example, in the third abrogation with the new covenant, he has some very good passages about

the role of the law written on the hearts of God's people in the new covenant (243–45). He also argues for a contrast between the *paresis* (passing over) of sins in the old covenant and the *aphesis* (full remission) of sins with the arrival of the new covenant, contrasting Romans 3:25 and Matthew 26:28 (227–30). He even offers a short examination of the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath, as opposed to the Sabbath of the old covenant, in the context of Christ's fulfillment and the greater measure of grace which is now known in the new covenant (226).

When a theologian starts probing into questions of Sabbath practice or discontinuities in justification or finer points to the covenant of works, it can become controversial very quickly. Indeed, some of the same fault lines of Reformed covenant theology remain roughly the same some three and a half centuries after Cocceius because our secondary standards are rather sparing on the topic of the discontinuities which emerge over redemptive history. Because the confessions are so restrained, we end up with various expressions of Cocceians and Voetians continuing to battle it out in every new generation of the church.

Knowing Cocceius's monumental *Summa doctrinae* is part of the hard work of understanding the Reformed exegetical tradition. Yet, the more we do this as a church, the better we will be able to understand our Reformed heritage, articulate the fault lines of historic debates, and discern the possibilities for consensus in holding to the riches of covenant theology as a united church. I therefore recommend adding Cocceius to the body of required reading for Reformed covenant theology in the OPC and in other similarly confessional bodies of like faith and practice. ©

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Pulpit Aflame: Essays in Honor of Stephen J. Lawson

edited by Joel R. Beeke and Dustin W. Bengé

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* June–July 2017¹

by **Stephen J. Tracey**

Pulpit Aflame: Essays in Honor of Stephen J. Lawson, edited by Joel R. Beeke and Dustin W. Bengé, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016, 188 pages, \$25.00, hardcover and ePub.

Our Larger Catechism asks in Q. 158, “By whom is the Word of God to be preached?” It answers, “The Word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.” I often find myself chewing on the phrase “sufficiently gifted” — usually with regard to myself, and usually on a Saturday evening or Monday morning. The contributors to *Pulpit Aflame* are gifted preachers, and in seeking to improve the gift of preaching it is profitable to listen to their reflections on preaching. These reflections are clouded only by the inclusion of a chapter by the late Iain D. Campbell, bringing to mind our grief for him and the grief caused by him.

This is a beautiful little book. The hardcover edition is beautifully produced on quality paper with an excellent binding. Of course, the binding may reflect the fact that it is a collection of essays in honor of someone: a cheaply produced recycled paper edition would not reflect much honor. But the true beauty of the book lies not in the binding, nor even the honor it pays to Mr. Lawson (though

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=635&issue_id=126.

I am sure that is deserved), but instead lies in the honor it gives to the place of preaching in the life of the Christian and the church.

Following a foreword by Ian Hamilton, Dustin W. Bengé outlines the ministry of Steven J. Lawson. The remainder of the book is divided into four parts, dealing with the mandate, meaning, motivation, and method of preaching. Part 1, “The Mandate of Preaching,” presents essays by John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, and Joel Beeke. Part 2, “The Meaning of Preaching,” contains essays by R. Albert Mohler Jr., Derek W. H. Thomas, and Sinclair B. Ferguson. Part 3, “The Motivation of Preaching,” includes essays by Robert Godfrey, John J. Murray, and Michael A. G. Haykin. Concluding the volume, Part 4, “The Method of Preaching,” has essays by Iain D. Campbell, Geoffrey Thomas, and Conrad Mbewe.

Sinclair Ferguson’s reflections on “Preaching as Worship” provide the marrow of the whole matter. “Through the ministry of the Spirit, preaching is worship and also evokes worship” (89). Expanding on this, he reflects on two points: first, Christ’s role in preaching and worship, and second, the implications of this for the preacher and his preaching. The implications are telling. “No one sits ‘under’ my preaching more than I do if I am the preacher” (98). Furthermore, “Worship is the expression of the whole person, and thus, to a great extent, involves the affections” (99). This reveals something of the power of his own preaching, and his improvement of his gifts.

R. Albert Mohler Jr. has a powerful chapter on “Preaching as Exposition.” He argues that “the preaching that is central to Christian worship is expository preaching” (62). He means that “preaching must always derive its message from a passage of the Bible” (62). I would have thought that was obvious, but alas, Mohler demonstrates the lamentable fact that the “therapeutic concerns of the culture too often set the agenda for evangelical preaching” (62). The proclamation of the Word of the living God to people who would rather hear stories about themselves is an issue of life or death.

Geoffrey Thomas, having preached from the same pulpit for over fifty years, begins “Building the Sermon” with a reminder that our task is to build up the people of God, “in fact, to make every effort to excel in gifts that build up the church (1 Cor. 14:12)” (159). He draws a vivid picture of preaching as the way to bring people into the building. Starting with the path that leads to the house of God (the preacher), he takes us to the door (the text), the hallway (the introduction to the sermon), the living room (the place where people are dealt with personally), and finally to the dining room (“where together affectionately we eat”). It is a beautifully written chapter, with the insights of a gifted and faithful preacher. Most moving is his brief description of the last occasion Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached in Wales. Thomas writes, “It was all over too soon, an hour disappearing like a watch in the night. And then we sang with all our hearts a great Welsh hymn tune” (167). I wish I had been there. God was there. Such is the power of the preached Word.

Conrad Mbewe reflects on “Delivering the Sermon” by asking the question, “What is it about the delivery of the sermon that makes it so powerful and puts it in a class of its own when compared to all other forms of live audio communication?” (173). The answer, of course, is the Holy Spirit. Yet the Holy Spirit chooses to work through the preacher: our emotions, voice, gestures, and eye contact. Delivery is important: there must be earnestness, and the responsible use of our body in the service of the King. God can work freely without these things, and often does. I periodically remind myself that God can speak through a donkey. Yet we are more than that. God gives gifts to preachers and then gifts these preachers to his church. We are to improve our gifts by using them; by conscientiously remembering “to fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6).

I hope these few points are enough to whet the appetite for this book. I expected that this would be a book to be read once, and then shelved. I was wrong. The contributors are themselves aflame with a passion for preaching. The sparks from their passion are infectious and

encouraged me to keep fanning the flame. All praise to God. ©

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The Deacon

by Cornelis Van Dam

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2017¹

by David P. Nakhla

The Deacon: Biblical Foundations for Today's Ministry of Mercy, by Cornelis Van Dam. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017, xiii + 253 pages, \$18.00, paper.

Despite being one of the two (or three) offices in Christ's church that we who are Presbyterian or Reformed believe are established by Scripture, the role of the deacon is often misunderstood in our circles today. I suspect that many deacons struggle to understand the scope and breadth of the work associated with the office to which they have been ordained. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, emeritus professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario, addresses this in his new book, *The Deacon*, a fitting complement to his 2009 book, *The Elder*.

Van Dam's mature and balanced presentation of the subject is refreshing. The reader realizes quickly that Van Dam's material has been researched very thoroughly. Not only does he cite

numerous Scripture passages (approximately 190 from twenty-eight Old Testament books and 170 from twenty-three New Testament books); he also references many books and articles related to the various topics he covers. His comprehensive research has provided a number of resources that may be useful to the reader who wants to explore any particular topic further. Each chapter begins with an introduction that orients the reader to the topic, and concludes with a concise summary that often includes a clear segue into the next chapter.

The book is well organized with a chronological flow. It begins with the responsibility of God's people to care for the poor in the Old Testament, moves on to Christ's teachings about the poor and the apostles' establishment of the office of deacon, continues through early church history and the re-establishment of the office of deacon during the Reformation, and concludes by looking at how the various manifestations of the office of deacon are carried out in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. Along the way, Van Dam expands upon certain topics as they arise. For instance, when covering the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3, he discusses whether or not female deacons are biblical, and how to understand what is meant by the "enrollment" of widows aged sixty or older in 1 Timothy 5.

A highlight of the book is Van Dam's detailed history of the ministry of mercy, which began long before the office of deacon was instituted by the apostles in Acts 6. Van Dam explains that ministry to the poor, weak, and afflicted was embedded in the law that God gave his people in the Old Testament, and was the responsibility of all the children of God. It was to serve as a reflection of the compassion that the Lord had on Israel in its affliction.

Most will agree with Van Dam that the ordination of the seven by the laying on of hands in Acts 6 is properly understood to establish the office of deacon. But what happened to the office of deacon after the closing of the canon? This part of the book was an eye-opener to this reader!

During the years of the bishops and the centralization of ecclesiastical hierarchy in the early church, the diaconate lost its responsibility for the

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=640&issue_id=127.

ministry of mercy. At that time, serving as a deacon was seen as a stepping stone towards reaching the priesthood, and giving to the needy was considered a means of meriting God's favor. Van Dam explains how the Reformation brought about "a renewed biblical vision for the office of deacon and worked to restore that office to its original task of helping the poor" (101).

Van Dam dedicates a chapter to the topic of "Women and the Diaconate," contrasting the reasons that women apparently served as deacons at certain times in the past with the current cultural reasons (feminism and women's rights movements) that this is debated today. He discusses what Calvin intended when he suggested the notion of a "second-rank deacon in the form of un-ordained widows." Van Dam concludes that, while "there is no biblical warrant for the ordination of women . . . a church has considerable freedom in enlisting women's help in the diaconate" (130).

The fourth and final section of the book is a factual and practical look at the office of deacon in Presbyterian and Reformed churches today, covering such topics as deacons' ordination, length of service, and relationship to the session or consistory. He suggests ways in which deacons can be equipped for service by means of special training. Regarding the diaconal offering, Van Dam helps his readers think through the touchy subject of whether or not Scripture mandates that Christians today should tithe.

Van Dam brings clarity to the roles that the family, the church community, and the state play in meeting needs. He introduces the concept of diaconal visitation and provides specific pointers for ministry to the unemployed, the sick, the elderly, the bereaved, the disabled, etc.

I was very encouraged by his recommendation that deacons serve proactively by providing pre-marital counseling on stewardship, or sponsoring stewardship conferences for the church or community. He also presents a good balance between the deacon's obligations to those within the congregation and those outside.

I commend this book especially to those who serve as deacons or who train deacons. A recurring

theme in the book is that the primary objective of the ministry of mercy is to remove impediments that prevent people from sharing in the joy of deliverance that ought to characterize those who have been set free—set free to serve God and their neighbor. May this book lead Christ's church to grow in its appreciation for the gift of deacons as they help us in our spiritual journey. ☺

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John Owen and English Puritanism

by Crawford Gribben

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2017¹

by Darryl G. Hart

John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat, by Crawford Gribben. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, xvi + 401 pages, \$60.94.

For most contemporary English-speaking Calvinists, John Owen is an unending source of wisdom and inspiration. In his biographical sketch of the English Puritan, John Piper justified his own admiration by quoting J. I. Packer, Roger Nicole, and Sinclair Ferguson. Packer wrote that "without Owen I might well have gone off my

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=643&issue_id=127.

head or got bogged down in mystical fanaticism.” For Nicole, Owen was the greatest theologian of the English language, even superior to Jonathan Edwards, something that certainly caught Piper, the Edwards aficionado, off guard. And for Ferguson, “Owen’s penetrating exposition opened up areas of need in my own heart, but also correspondingly profound assurances of grace in Jesus Christ.” Not to be outdone, Piper could not help but be impressed by how many people wrote about Owen and praised him for his character. “When a man like this, under these circumstances,” Piper wrote, “is remembered and extolled for centuries for his personal holiness, we should listen.”

Readers will not receive the same impression from Crawford Gribben’s meticulous intellectual biography of Owen, though they may still come away singing (now in a minor key) the English Puritan’s praises. A professor of history at Queen’s University Belfast with great sympathies for Puritanism, Gribben’s purpose is to situate Owen in his cultural and political contexts. As an intellectual historian, Gribben knows that ideas have consequences, but as a social historian of ideas he also writes with the conviction that contexts have consequences for ideas. His attention to contexts extends even to book production. Gribben believes that the standard way most modern readers encounter Owen, namely, through the Banner of Truth collected works, distorts the ideas that the English theologian developed. For instance, volumes three and four of that edition produces under one title, *Of Communion with God*, six different treatises written at different times in Owen’s life. Such an arrangement is “misleading” (19). He writes to correct a tendency to make Owen’s theology into an abstraction.

Doing justice to the contexts of Owen’s life (1616–1683), however, is another question altogether. The theologian and pastor, born to an Anglican vicar, led anything but a remote or ivory-tower existence, even if knowledge about his career comes mainly from published writings. Owen ministered and wrote at a time of great political and social upheaval in England. The fortunes of his ministerial career were bound up with the

political struggles that saw Parliament go to war with Charles I and execute him for treason, and led England into its brief experiment with republicanism. Owen’s life coincided with Puritanism’s greatest success (at least politically) and its equally devastating defeat.

As a young man, Owen served as chaplain to English nobility before coming to the attention of the House of Commons in the 1640s through his critique of Arminianism. Invitations to preach before Parliament led in 1646 to his meeting Oliver Cromwell who, in turn, enlisted Owen to serve as chaplain to English soldiers on a campaign to subdue Ireland. After the execution of the king, Owen was in regular contact with English officials, whether in preaching to various political bodies or serving the Commonwealth as an advisor on its religious policy. Owen also received from Cromwell in 1651 an appointment as dean of Christ Church College at Oxford, which led to his post as vice chancellor of the university under Cromwell, arguably the crown jewel of Owen’s posts. Throughout the 1650s, Owen continued to work in close proximity with the government even while publishing widely on a range of theological topics. Once Cromwell died in 1658, Owen’s fortunes shifted. Parliament restored the monarchy, and Owen was relegated to the role of a dissenting minister, and sometimes suspected of being a political troublemaker. That last phase of his career involved creating space for nonconformists in England’s new religious establishment. All the while he continued to write at a feverish pace.

Imagine if Jonathan Edwards, while pastoring, served in the government of Boston, or if Charles Hodge, while teaching at Princeton, had also worked for President James Buchanan, and you have something of a picture of Owen’s many-faceted responsibilities. Equally impressive is the way that Owen produced material on some of the most important of doctrinal subjects even while working in the context of very turbulent politics. Owen’s achievement on this score is impressive.

The social history of ideas results in some remarkable coincidences. For instance, the sermons behind Owen’s *Mortification of Sin* (1656) came

while he was still vice-chancellor at Oxford when John Locke was a student, and while grieving the death of two sons. Six years later came *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies, and Their Imposition* (1662), a book that Owen published anonymously because of the religious policy that was to come later that year with the Act of Uniformity. Owen's defense of extemporaneous prayer was decidedly at odds with—and even a threat to—political stability, thanks to the return of the state church and the policy of liturgical uniformity. But at the very same time, Owen was writing in defense of the ecclesiastical establishment's rights, which seemed to be at odds with his own interest as a dissenting Protestant. These contexts suggest that Owen was engaged in a bit of self-fashioning throughout much of his career since his ability to preach and publish depended on his political fortunes. One last example from Owen's corpus is *The Doctrine of Justification* (1677)—a book likely written with a sense that the English Reformation was running out of steam and basic doctrines needed to be reaffirmed. During this time as well, Owen's health suffered and his chief work was preaching, pastoral care, and attention to family.

Gribben's book sometimes raises questions about how much context mattered to ideas. If Owen's theology shows no obvious references to his personal circumstances, can a historian conclude that context matters? More often than not, however, Gribben highlights how remarkable the theologian's accomplishments were, considering how many responsibilities he carried and how fragile his political standing was. The theme of defeat, as the subtitle indicates, makes Owen's accomplishments all the more impressive since he continued to labor on even as he experienced an "enduring sense of failure" (271). The main insight that Gribben's method yields is that Owen was "not a systematic thinker." Instead, he treated themes individually and in great detail without necessarily keeping previous writing in mind. None of that diminishes Owen's achievement. According to Gribben, Owen "emerges as the genius of English Puritanism—its preeminent thinker, and a formative influence on successive generations of

evangelicals" (272). The author adds that Owen would likely have wanted his contribution to be a reform of the English churches, not an inspiration for contemporary evangelicalism. That said, Gribben gives even better reasons for esteeming Owen than those that prevail in Calvinist circles. Such theological insight forged in a context of political intrigue and personal adversity make Owen truly exceptional. ©

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The Book

by Keith Houston

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by T. David Gordon

The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time, by Keith Houston. W. W. Norton & Company, 2016, xvii + 428.

Both reviewers and readers of Houston's *The Book* will be tempted to compare it to Elizabeth Eisenstein's 1980 two-volume *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*; and each quickly will get over the temptation. Eisenstein's volume was political and economic in nature (concerned primarily with the sociological changes associated with, and influenced by, the industrialized production of printed books); Houston's is technological

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=641&issue_id=127.

in nature (concerned primarily with the various inventions and developments in the history of the making of books). Eisenstein was primarily interested in the fifteenth century (a synchronic study); Houston is interested in the over-four-millennia period that brought us to our current place (a diachronic study). Each is *exhaustive*; only Eisenstein was *exhausting*. I was (pleasantly) surprised at how interesting Houston's narrative is, almost embarrassed at how hard it was to put down. Students of human civilization will enjoy Houston's book, even if (prior to now) they had no particular interest in book-formation, because his tracing of the series of human actions—mistakes, intrigue, good fortune (and bad), good intentions (and worse), hard work, sloth, obsequiousness, ambition, greed, and more—has nearly the insight of a Tolstoy novel, with little of the dreariness.

The historian David McCullough has often written about or around (non-)discoveries or (non-)inventions: the Johnstown flood, the Panama Canal, the Brooklyn Bridge, American painting and sculpture, etc., and yet has woven throughout such narratives many fascinating subnarratives of human interest. Houston does the same, choosing *The Book* as the organizing metanarrative. In the process, he appears to have as much fun as an uncle does in inventing a bedtime story for nephews and nieces. The reader encounters wryness where he expected dryness, play where he expected gray:

In 2009, in an apparent attempt to carry out the world's most ironic act of censorship, Amazon silently deleted certain editions of George Orwell's *1984* from their owners' Kindles as part of a copyright dispute, and news outlets continue to report on the plight of readers whose e-books have vanished without warning. . . . Pluck a physical book off your bookshelf now. Find the biggest, grandest hardback you can. Hold it in your hands. Open it and hear the rustle of paper and the crackle of glue. Smell it! Flip through the pages and feel the breeze on your face. An e-book imprisoned behind the glass of a tablet or computer screen is an inert thing by comparison. (xvi)

If book lovers are not already interested, consider the concluding words from Houston's introduction:

This book is about the history and the making and the *bookness* of all those books, the weighty, complicated, inviting artifacts that humanity has been writing, printing, and binding for more than fifteen hundred years. It is about the book that you know when you see it. (xvii, paraphrasing Justice Potter Stewart)

My own interest in Houston's work was and is fourfold: I am an academic, whose most frequent companions are books; I am a (Protestant) practitioner and clergyman of the religion that the *Qur'an* calls "the People of the Book"; I teach an introduction to Media Ecology—the discipline that studies the influence of various media on individual consciousness and on social structures and behavior; and I am an impenitent example of what C. S. Lewis referred to as a "literary type" of individual. If you are any of these, Houston is for you; if you are not, why are you reading a book review anyway?

In fifteen chapters, Houston gives thorough, detailed, yet engaging coverage of: the invention of papyrus, parchment, and paper; and the development of writing and alphabet(s), illuminated manuscripts, woodcuts, copperplate printing, lithography, photography, papyrus scrolls and wax tablets, the codex, and book-binding. He identifies where many or most of the skeletons are, and what many or most of the competing claims are for who invented what (and when and where). Throughout, he resists the simplifications and self-congratulations that so many of us have been taught (and, in my case, have mistakenly *taught*). In the process, he challenges many of our prejudices, and not a few of our sensibilities:

Gutenberg was not the father of printing so much as its midwife. (114)

Papyrus's usefulness in bookmaking, in fact, was only one of the many forces that drove its journey: of equal, if not greater importance, were humanity's parallel obsessions with

religion, war, and underpants. (56)

Though the *Qur'an* referred to Christians as “People of the Book,” the crusaders burned books as readily as they did heretics. (56)

In 1719, de Réaumur regaled the French Royal Academy with an account of his travels to the New World, where he had observed wasps making papery nests out of chewed wood pulp. Might not these industrious insects be emulated in order to make real paper? (68)

[Correcting those who overestimate the pious devotion of medieval scribes, such as this anonymous one]: Writing is excessive drudgery. . . . It crooks your back, it dims your sight, it twists your stomach and your sides. . . . Thank God, it will soon be dark. (166)

[Houston referred to the 1896 discovery of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri as] one particular episode of archaeological dumpster-diving. (261)

Books are rectangular because cows, goats, and sheep are rectangular too. (312)

In addition to such striking language, Houston gives full, interesting, and nuanced accounts of many events with which we are already somewhat familiar, such as the making of papyrus, parchment, rag-based paper, wood-pulp paper, the development of ink, the several printing presses that antedated Gutenberg’s (many readers will be surprised to learn that, between printing *Ars grammatica* and the *Bible*, Gutenberg printed two thousand indulgences for Pope Nicholas V), the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, etc.

The Book is itself sumptuously produced, and includes many pertinent and helpful illustrations, rich bibliographical annotations, and a helpful index. Any work of this size (sixty-five pages of notes) is bound to have an occasional small mistake,² but they are rare in this superb book.

² I happened to notice that when he mentioned the standard introduction, *The Birth of the Codex* (1954), he refers to “T. C. Roberts and C. R. Skeat,” giving each of their initials to the other’s surname.

Readers of *Ordained Servant* are already firm believers in God’s providential dealings,³ and most have already recognized how crucial that providence was when it culminated in the printing of Gutenberg’s Bible, without which our great formative principle of *Sola Scriptura* would have made little practical sense. Houston’s narrative, however, assists us in seeing how remarkable God’s providence was for well over a millennium before Gutenberg’s time (though Houston himself betrays no religious opinions at all). In fact, as a lifelong lover of books, and a lover and minister of the Holy Scriptures, I am inclined to think that this extraordinary narrative that culminated in the printing and widespread distribution of the Bible was not an “ordinary providence” at all, but an extraordinary one. ☺

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³ WCF 5:3: “God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.”

12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

by Tony Reinke

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2017¹

by T. David Gordon

12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You, by Tony Reinke (with foreword by John Piper). Wheaton: Crossway, 2017, 224 pages, \$14.99, paper.

Journalist and author Tony Reinke has written the book that many Christians have wished someone would write; a thoughtful, well-informed analysis of the smartphone (the most intrusive, and therefore most life-altering, of the various digital technologies) that is neither techno-philic nor techno-phobic, and that is intentionally (and persuasively) focused on the question of how this technology affects Christian discipleship. Reinke's concern is not about how smartphones alter political discourse, public education, etc.; his concern is primarily about how the phone shapes us as followers of Christ.

As is appropriate to such a timely work, Reinke's thinking is informed both by broad reading in the Christian tradition and by intelligent interviews with contemporary theologians, pastors, educators, philosophers, and ethicists. Reinke is well acquainted with the works of those whom we call "media ecologists;" he has digested the insights of Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Ellul, Daniel Boorstin, Neil Postman, Nicholas Carr, Douglas Groot-huis, and Sherry Turkle, and has consulted with theologians and philosophers from John Flavel and Blaise Pascal, through the twentieth century's G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, to contemporaries such as Tim Keller, Rick Lints, Jamie Smith, John Dyer, Alan Jacobs, Oliver O'Donovan, and

John Piper (and others). The breadth of his sources makes it difficult for readers to dismiss his thoughts as merely his own idiosyncratic opinion. Happily, despite Reinke's thorough familiarity with pertinent thought on the matter, his book does not read at all as a dull or merely academic survey; pulsating throughout the prose is the drive of a follower of Christ, eager to believe, quick to repent, and indignant at the Enemy's counterfeit of the true life our Redeemer offers and calls us to.

The chapter titles alone will intrigue many of this review's readers: "We Are Addicted to Distraction"; "We Ignore Our Flesh and Blood" (Ken Myers has often lamented the "dis-incarnate" nature of phones); "We Crave Immediate Approval"; "We Lose Our Literacy"; "We Feed on the Produced"; "We Become What We 'Like'"; "We Get Lonely"; "We Get Comfortable in Secret Vices"; "We Lose Meaning"; "We Fear Missing Out"; "We Become Harsh to One Another"; "We Lose Our Place in Time."

I have become so accustomed to the abuse/misuse of Scripture citations in so many publications that I only occasionally bother to consult them. After consulting the early citations here, I abandoned that practice. Reinke's citations (with just the Scripture references) are as apt as any I have encountered; they are not at all superficial "proof-texts." They are profound and persuasive. In remarkable succinctness, Reinke provides a rich biblical assessment of the categories of the "seen" and "unseen," with due warnings for how the onslaught of visual images on our smartphones calls our attention to exactly the opposite of what we ought to attend to. Groups who study this book together would be well advised to take turns reading aloud the Scripture passages Reinke cites in order to derive the full benefit from this volume.

I was pleased that Reinke has observed the paradox that others (Giles Slade, Sherry Turkle, Nicholas Carr, Maggie Jackson, Alastair Roberts, William Deresciewicz, et al.) have observed: that typical use of smartphones robs us of both true solitude (and self-knowledge) on the one hand, and of true society (and other-knowledge), on the other. Readers unfamiliar with this paradox will be

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=649&issue_id=128.

fascinated by Reinke's seventh chapter.

This is perhaps the most practical volume touching on digital media that I have read; nevertheless, Reinke issues no imperatives. His effort is to demonstrate what is going on in the faux, profit-driven, narcissistic, contemporaneous, image-based world of the smartphone, so that his readers will have to wrestle with how to benefit from the best of this tool while evading its worst. Towards the end, however, Reinke does raise the question (197–98) of a temporary or permanent “cold-turkey” opt-out of their use (and, earlier in the book, he quotes approvingly Alan Jacobs's having done so, 116–17), though he has not (yet?) made that decision himself. Though Reinke eschews imperatives, he routinely passes along sound advice on how to moderate and discipline smartphone use so as to evade/avoid their most damaging effects.

Reinke rightly says that the challenge of determining what constitutes the proper use of these (fairly new) devices properly falls on the shoulders of this generation, an observation he derived from Oliver O'Donovan, and with which I concur. Like the initial colonizers of any new world, the original inhabitants thereof profoundly shape the experience of future denizens. However (and I am merely quibbling with the title here), I would suggest that the smartphone is not *changing* this generation (it may have changed *us*); it *shapes them initially*, so they do not even notice the ostensible “change.” The prairie-dog world of digital adolescents who pop up and down from one environment to another incessantly is the only world they know; and this is precisely why they will have difficulty taming the beast. They will not realize one day that it is harder to read Tolstoy novels than it once was, because they have *never* read Tolstoy novels (or, ordinarily, even Hemingway's novelettes). They have not *lost* an attention span they once *had*; they never had one to *lose*. The smartphone may well be “changing” our culture, and has “changed” many of us adults, but it is the nursery in which the Millennials were reared, and they cannot perceive any change in themselves at all. But this is mere pettifogging; O'Donovan and Reinke are right in assigning the duty of taming

the smartphone to the Millennials, and only an academic nitpicker such as myself (who teaches/nitpicks an introductory course on Media Ecology) would bother to split this hair.

I hope Reinke's book receives a wide readership; and I hope many will read it and discuss it as a group, in the manner C. Christopher Smith suggested in his recent *Reading for the Common Good: How Books Help Our Churches and Neighborhoods Flourish* (2016). It will not be the “last word” on the smartphone, and it isn't entirely the first; but for those attempting to follow Christ with one of these in purse or pocket, it is currently the best. ☺

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Making Sense of God

by Timothy Keller

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* October 2017¹

by Dale Van Dyke

Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical, by Timothy Keller. New York: Viking, 2016, 254 pages, \$27.00.

I was skeptical. Although I had benefited greatly from *The Reason for God* (2008), I doubted Keller had another worthwhile apologetics book in him. I was wrong; *Making Sense* is significantly

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=650&issue_id=128.

different, and better. *The Reason for God* was written to answer common objections to the Christian faith (the problem of evil, idea of hell, exclusivity, etc.). However, the times are changing. As secularism has advanced, the “nones” seem to have moved from questioning the Christian faith to a comfortable and convinced unbelief. Consequently, as Andrew Wilson neatly puts it: “*Making Sense of God* isn’t so much a series of answers for those who think they have questions (like *The Reason for God*) as it is a series of questions for those who think they have answers.”²

In *Making Sense*, Keller, in his classic literary style, doesn’t address questions no one is asking, but rather raises the ones they should be asking. He calmly but masterfully challenges the unexamined faith claims of the new secular religion.

In the first two chapters, Keller confronts two widely held assumptions: secularism is inevitable in a modernizing world (ch. 1) and, unlike faith, it is based on pure reason and scientific observation (ch. 2). He argues that the “secularization thesis”—modernization inevitably results in secularization—has “been empirically shown to be false” (24). While the church seems to be declining in Europe, it is growing dramatically in other parts of the modernizing world, e.g., China. In fact, not only is secularism not inevitable, but there is substantial evidence that it is declining! “University of London professor Eric Kaufmann, in his book *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?*³ speaks of ‘the crisis of secularism’ and argues that the shrinkage of secularism and liberal religion is inevitable” (24).

The primary problems facing secularism are (1) secularists tend not to reproduce and, (2) most significantly, secularism cannot account for actual human experience.

Strict secularism holds that people are only

2 Andrew Wilson, “Tim Keller’s Invitation to the Skeptical,” The Gospel Coalition, September 21, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-making-sense-of-god>.

3 Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth: Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile, 2011).

physical entities without souls, that when loved ones die they simply cease to exist, that sensations of love and beauty are just neurological-chemical events, that there is no right or wrong outside of what we in our minds determine and choose. Those positions are at the very least deeply counterintuitive for nearly all people, and large swaths of humanity will continue to simply reject them as impossible to believe. (23)

In chapter 2, Keller quotes contemporary philosophers to refute the claim that secularism, unlike religion, is based purely on science and reason. “Twentieth-century thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, have argued that all reasoning is based on prior faith commitments to which one did not reason” (34).

Like Paul on Mars Hill, Keller repeatedly uses respected cultural authorities to reveal the inherent flaws of a secular worldview. For example, he references Michael Polanyi to show “there is no such thing as an objective, belief-free, pure openness to objective evidence. There is no view from ‘nowhere’” (36). Nietzsche is called upon to show that secularism has no coherent basis for morality. Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov exposes the irrational ethical reasoning of secularism by summarizing it this way: “Man descended from apes. Therefore we must love one another” (42). This is typical Keller—use “secular” sources to challenge secular assumptions—and he does it very well. The extensive references to Robert Bellah, Mark Lilla, Charles Taylor, and so on, gives cultural weight and street credibility to Keller’s argument.

In Part Two, “Religion is More than You Think,” Keller contrasts secularism and religion, specifically the Christian faith, on the issues of meaning (ch. 3), satisfaction (ch. 4), freedom (ch. 5), identity (chs. 6–7), hope (ch. 8), morality (ch. 9), and justice (ch. 10). Those who have read Keller’s *Preaching*⁴ will find this material familiar,

4 Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of*

but it is an insightful analysis of secularism and a useful aid to pastors striving to address both their secularized community and secularizing congregation. In each chapter, Keller exposes the unmoored assumptions of secularism and concludes with a short defense of the Christian faith. Christ alone provides

a meaning that suffering can't remove, a satisfaction not based on circumstances, a freedom that does not hurt but rather enhances love, an identity that does not crush you, a moral compass that does not turn you into an oppressor, and a hope that can face anything, even death. (215)

In Part Three, "Christianity Makes Sense," Keller concludes by giving six brief arguments for God (ch. 11) and then a specific case for believing in Jesus (ch. 12). Some may consider this treatment to be far too brief, others might think it insufficiently pre-suppositional, but it supports the purpose of the book well and warmly invites a skeptic to consider the claims of Christ.

Making Sense of God is not an exhaustive discussion of the issues it addresses. While the decline of secularism is good news, it may be exaggerated. It would have been helpful to include a discussion of the devastating impact secularization is having among those who profess Christ, particularly here in America. As Steve Bruce has pointed out, apostasy isn't the only indicator of secularization. "While the British secularized by abandoning their churches, Americans have secularized their churches. In Europe, the churches became less popular; in the United States, the churches became less religious."⁵

Nonetheless, *Making Sense* is very good at what it does: challenging the false assumptions and illogical conclusions of the secularist's faith and inviting a skeptical culture to see the truth of Christ as the most coherent, rational, liberating, and satisfying truth.

Skepticism (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016).

⁵ Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156.

I highly recommend *Making Sense* for every pastor, church planter, and evangelist in the OPC. It is an insightful road map to the secular faith of our day. It will help you avoid answering the questions no one is asking and help you to invite your neighbors to consider the questions for which secularism has no answers. This would be a terrific neighborhood book study.

Making Sense of God would also be excellent for a Sunday School class or small group study. It will encourage the saints by showing the coherence of the Christian faith and arm them for more helpful conversations with their unconverted family members and neighbors. Ultimately, *Making Sense* will remind you of the sheer joy and privilege of being a Christian in a lost world! ☺

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The Crisis of Modernity

by Augusto Del Noce

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2017¹

by Carl Trueman

The Crisis of Modernity, by Augusto Del Noce. Edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014, xxiv + 312 pages, \$34.95, paper.

Few if any of the readers of *Ordained Servant* are likely to have heard of Augusto Del Noce. An Italian political and cultural philosopher

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=656&issue_id=129.

whose life spanned the years 1910 to 1989, much of his work was preoccupied with philosophical debates in his homeland, and little of it has been translated into English. Which is what makes this volume, translated by Carlo Lancellotti, professor of mathematics at the City University of New York, so important.

Del Noce's interest was modernity, its causes, its pathologies, its impact. And the essays collected in this book are representative of that, dealing with such matters as secularism, revolution, psychology, and pornography. A certain amount of the material deals with thinkers who have had little influence outside of Italy, but many of his concerns and ideas have universal relevance to the modern West. Specifically, Del Noce saw that the collapse of classical metaphysics was lethal to theism and consequently to humanity's self-understanding, and also therefore utterly destructive to the moral structure of life.

The central essay in the collection—and worth the price of the volume in itself—is his article from 1970, “The Ascendance of Eroticism.” This is a stunning piece of work. For a start, with prophetic insight he highlights the importance of gay marriage for the reconfiguring of traditional social structures and mores—long before anyone of any significance was talking about the subject.

I suspect many Christians are staggered both at the ferocity of the LGBTQ lobby and at their failure to carry any cultural weight of traditional arguments which we regard as setting our objections to gay sex in a broader ethical context (“We Christians don't agree with sex outside of marriage, straight or gay, and so we should not be dismissed as homophobic”). Reading “The Ascendance of Eroticism” should help. What we need to understand is that the sexual revolution is deeply political at every level. Del Noce uncovers this politicizing of sex through the failure of classical Marxism and its rebirth through a fusion with some of Sigmund Freud's ideas. He highlights the writings of Wilhelm Reich and the cultural activism of the Surrealist Movement as key. Traditional sexual morality had to be destroyed because the Left regarded (and still regards) the family unit as

inimical to political liberation.

As Del Noce points out, the family is the means by which morality and identity is passed on from generation to generation, and its very existence relativizes individual loyalty to the state. And the family depends upon carefully structured sexual behavior. The abolition of sexual morality is, in effect, the abolition of the family, and Reich and later the thinkers of the New Left, such as Herbert Marcuse, knew this. Here is how Del Noce describes the issue:

What is the repressive social institution *par excellence*? To Reich it is the traditional monogamous family; and, from his standpoint, certainly he cannot be said to be wrong. Indeed, the idea of family is inseparable from the idea of *tradition*, from a heritage of truth that we must *tradere*, hand on. Thus, the abolition of every meta-empirical order of truth requires that the family be dissolved. No merely sociological consideration can justify keeping it. (161)

In support of this thesis, Del Noce notes that Reich argued that the state should penalize those parents who would not enable the free sexual expression of their children. Sound familiar? What Reich desired in the 1930s and what Del Noce predicted in the 1970s has come to fruition in our day and generation. And it is surely interesting that, at the very moment Del Noce was arguing that the real agenda of the New Left was revolution via destruction of the morality that protected the family, the feminist theorist, Shulamith Firestone, was arguing that case explicitly. In her widely influential book, *The Dialectic of Sex*, she also called for the abolition of gender differences as being vital to the revolution's success. The politicizing of sex was a self-conscious, strategic decision by the New Left which is now bearing much foul fruit.

There are other aspects of Del Noce's work which are very thought-provoking. For example, he points out that the movement for sexual liberation does not aim at redefining the bounds of modesty. What it really wants to do is abolish the concept of modesty all together. That is a fascinating thought and explains much of what we see around us. Of

course, Del Noce was mercifully spared the rise of Internet pornography, the normalization of perversion, and the pornification of pop culture. But it is hard not to see all around us the world exactly as he predicted it—nearly fifty years ago.

In the essay “The Death of the Sacred,” Del Noce raises the problem of secularism as the basis for any kind of political cohesion. Speaking of the West-Soviet conflict, he says this:

We face the greatest paradox of contemporary history: whereas Russia’s official atheism “guards” an explicitly sacral myth—which must necessarily bear the mark of its origins and act accordingly, regardless of the intention of the rulers—the non-atheist West (at least officially) can stand against it only as a democracy “devoid of the sacred.” (119)

Again, this is a remarkably perceptive and prescient point. More recently, conservative commentator Rod Dreher has argued that the problem the West faces when confronted by militant Islam is that one cannot fight something with nothing. It is very clear that the lack of transcendent meaning upon which postmodern democracy is predicated is, to put it simply, not enough to inspire devotion or to imbue life with any meaning. Myths—whether Marxist or Muslim—have a power which the metaphysically empty consumerism of the West cannot command or, more significantly, resist.

Del Noce also ties this to the long war against authority in the West. In the fascinating essay “Authority versus Power,” he again focuses on Surrealism and argues that it was not so much an artistic movement as an assault upon traditional categories and as the establishment of new, totalitarian ones. Authority he sees as something historical, rooted in tradition and communicated from age to age by culture. In this, he sounds remarkably similar to Edmund Burke. Power is established, by contrast, on the basis of a break, a radical rejection of the past. Marxism and Surrealism represent two forms of the revolutionary phenomenon. And again, the family as the basic cultural mechanism for transmission of the past to the future is at the center of these two movements’ iconoclasm.

There is much more to this collection of essays than can be communicated in a short review. As an important thinker on the origins and fate of modernity, Del Noce has few peers. His writing is at times abstruse, but his conclusions are always thought-provoking.

Of course, some might ask why an Italian Roman Catholic philosopher should be of interest to an American Reformed audience. The answer is simple. First, he is trying to explain why the modern world is descending into moral and political chaos. Whether one agrees entirely with his analysis is beside the point: To follow the thinking of a great mind wrestling with the great issues of modernity is in itself a worthwhile and educative task. Second, in his identification of tradition, the family, and sex as three primary areas of confrontation between Christianity and modernity, he surely speaks truth. Those wanting to learn how we have arrived at our current cultural malaise and why things like militant Islam and resurgent nationalism are beginning to threaten the old liberal consensus can hardly do better than pick up Del Noce and read. ©

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Meet the Puritans

by Joel R. Beeke and
Randall J. Pederson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* November 2017¹

by William B. Kessler

Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints, by Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015, xxvi + 896 pages, \$31.23.

A Puritan Theology Study Guide, by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016, vi + 121 pages, \$8.00, paper.

Impressive is the word that not only comes to mind but is felt in the soul when reading Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson's book, *Meet the Puritans*. Similar to the scope of another big book of Puritan studies, *A Puritan Theology* by Beeke and Mark Jones, *Meet the Puritans* is a deep chest filled with pertinent information about the Puritans. It is a book primarily of biographical sketches, nearly 150 (146 to be exact). These brief biographies are divided into three categories: the English and American Puritans (with the most material devoted to them), and then in Appendices 2 and 3, the Scottish Divines and the Dutch Second Reformation divines, respectively. Furthermore, and what gives the volume its depth, with each biography there are summaries and reviews of reprinted Puritan titles covering "books reprinted for half a century, from 1956 through 2005," including comments "on close to 700 volumes from more than 75 publishers." This is an impressive book!

But there is more. As with an old deep chest, there are various pockets and compartments that hold treasures. The preface is a gratifying and

stimulating opening to the book which includes: a brief definition of Puritanism (no easy task); five major concerns the Puritans addressed; and then a succinct section on how to profit from reading the Puritans. I was very motivated to read through the volume after reading the preface.

When I explored the book, I found other sections that were informative. There is a brief history of English Puritanism, always a helpful reminder. In addition, there is Appendix 1 that contains fifteen pages recording various collections of Puritan writings. Appendix 4 contains secondary sources on the Puritans, with an extended bibliography coming later in the book. Appendix 5, a concluding excerpt by J. I. Packer, is followed by a useful feature, a glossary of terms and events. The book as a whole is encyclopedic, a virtual library, truly a guide through a vast country of Puritan literature.

The scope, range, and variety of subjects in the biographical review material is striking. As expected, there are expanded treatments of the better-known Puritans, such as William Ames, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, John Flavel, Cotton Mather, John Owen, William Perkins. The Puritan who receives the most attention is Jonathan Edwards, referred to as "the last Puritan." In reading about Henry Airay (a Puritan of whom I knew nothing), I found that the authors included a book reprinted in 2001 of lectures on Philippians given by Airay. As I am presently preaching through Philippians, I would like to add his lectures to my list of resources.

There were various surprises in the list of biographies. I was delighted to read the entry on Anne Bradstreet, early Colonial poet. The authors mention two volumes of her poetry, *The Completed Works of Anne Bradstreet*, published by Belknap, 1981, and *To My Husband and Other Poems*, published by Dover, 2000.

To make good observations, you need to take into consideration the framework. At the beginning of the book, after the title page, I noticed that the book was published in 2006. Then I noticed that it had gone through five printings, the fifth published in August 2015. At the end of the book, after the fifth appendix, the authors include a

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=658&issue_id=129.

prayer that the Holy Spirit may bless the book and give the readers discernment.

Let me include in this review the small workbook entitled *A Puritan Theology Study Guide* by Joel Beeke and Mark Jones. It is a workbook in which each chapter corresponds to the chapters in their 1,060-page book, *A Puritan Theology*.² This is a helpful topical guide that makes a massive work more accessible. I especially appreciated questions in chapter 52 concerning a pilgrim's attitude, questions on the subject of meditation in chapter 55, and in chapter 56 questions exploring metaphors that the Puritans used to describe the conscience.

Though I am grateful for the work and material presented by Beeke, Pederson and Jones, and though I am humbled, instructed, and richly edified when I read Puritan literature, I continue to have questions that arise out of the tensions felt when reading the Puritans, and especially when reading such strong advocates of Puritanism. One question is: How are we to commend, or imitate, Puritanism in a society that has vilified it? Surely, much ignorant prejudice and stereotyping are at play in our society when it comes to the Puritans. There are perceived Puritan social convictions and conventions that are strongly criticized, such as the hanging of witches, the banishing of dissenters, the attitudes of paternalism and ethnocentrism towards native Americans. These criticisms run deep in the American psyche. A similar question is: How does the church, representing and proclaiming Christ as Savior and Lord, address the bigotry towards our Puritan forefathers and the historical baggage that follows them? Should the emphasis on Puritanism remain a subject solely for the church?

There is so much good in studying the Puritans and learning from them. However, when declaring and defending the gospel in the American context, romantic attachment to the Puritans may create more confusion than clarity. ☉

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² Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012).

The Benedict Option

by Rod Dreher

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* December 2017¹

by John R. Muether

The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation, by Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2017, 262 pages, \$25.00.

Rod Dreher, senior editor of *The American Conservative*, writes an engaging and thought-provoking appeal for American Christians to rethink their calling amid an increasingly hostile post-Christian world. The church can no longer sleep, as it has, through cultural revolutions—social, sexual, and technological. Many of the dislocating effects of modernity seemed unthreatening as long as they were championed as progress. But the culture wars have been lost, and the Judeo-Christian worldview now faces stiff opposition. We must now prepare for what's coming (77), beyond cultural marginalization to conditions that might invite persecution.

The title invokes the story of the eighth-century saint, Benedict of Nursia, whose withdrawal into monastic seclusion in the wake of the barbarian invasion of Europe proved improbably to be the means by which the church was preserved and Western civilization rebuilt. We are facing barbarians today, warns Dreher, both in the overt expressions of opposition and the “sneaky” forms of secularism such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (10). Dreher recommends that Christians revisit this “Benedict option,” because “the humble Benedictine way is such a potent counterforce to the dissolving currents of modernity” (23). Some critics challenge a call to retreat into a Christian ghetto, but there is actually little of that rhetoric in the book. The task of the church to be both a sign

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=663&issue_id=130.

of contradiction to the world and a sign of hope does not necessarily entail withdrawal. Rather, Dreher urges engagement in local culture and faithfulness in small ways, while waiting for God to produce fruit in his time.

Here is where conservative Protestantism comes up short for the author, a former Methodist who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy. The Protestant Reformation did its part in the rise of modern fragmentation and unbelief. Dreher leans on the work of Brad Gregory (in *The Unintended Reformation*, 2015), and he repeats the standard Roman Catholic charges of the interpretive chaos of Protestantism: “No Reformer believed in private interpretation of Scripture, but they had no clear way to discern whose interpretation was the correct one” (32). But of course, that is what confessions serve to provide. Having succumbed to individualism, modern evangelicalism is especially unable to witness to a post-Christian culture, because “you cannot give what you do not possess” (102). Dreher even describes a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America that is beset by vast biblical illiteracy with few signs of a culture of discipleship.

Chapter five outlines a starter set of practices that shape discipline for the life and witness of the church, such as prayer, catechesis, liturgical worship, self-denial, and hospitality, altogether a very ordinary list that will produce healthier communities of faith. Later in the book, there are additional suggestions oriented around the challenge of media ecology, including the practice of a “digital Sabbath” and keeping social media out of public worship. Aside from non-Reformed expressions of piety here and there (“fasting according to the church calendar”), these are means of shaping hearts heavenward.

The longest chapter in the book is on Christian education. Dismissing public schools as wastelands of progressive sexual ideology, Dreher commends particularly the “new counterculture found in classical Christian schools” (173). Here the author tends to tip the scales by comparing the ideal of classical education with the messy history of other forms of Christian schooling. (Where

classical education is not available, Dreher gives a nod to homeschooling.)

But why is the Benedict Option so urgent for us now? Do our uniquely desperate times call for these measures? The main flaw in Dreher’s argument for his “church in exile” lies in misuse of the biblical metaphor of homelessness. In the chapter on politics we read that the church’s cultural powerlessness demands a “new politics,” one particularly suited for our fragile and fragmented age (83). It should be prudent and subtle, polite and respectable, and focused on the local church and community. Purging ourselves of consumerist distortions of corporate life, the church needs “forms of living” that reinforce our distinctiveness as “strangers in exile.” But only *now*, to cope with these dark times? Shouldn’t the new covenant community always aspire to those virtues?

It is not true that the church in the West is now suddenly entering life in Babylon. As citizens of the kingdom, we are always and everywhere called to be strangers in a strange land, living under ungodly regimes that sometimes subject God’s people to persecution. The biblical term for that is Babylon. Our calling is to seek the welfare of Babylon, and so Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles (29:4–7) is his letter to new covenant exiles. Peter makes this clear (1 Peter 1:1, 2:11), whether the conditions of exile are friendly, indifferent, or hostile to the Christian way of life. If our city of exile prospers, we have helped to build a better Babylon, but it remains Babylon, and we are still homeless. We dare not imagine we can turn it into Jerusalem.

Exile, then, is not a cultural condition that yields a unique strategy. It is a redemptive-historical category that invites us to find our life hidden in Christ in the heavenlies. Still, this book remains a worthwhile read. Its real value is found in Dreher’s reminder of the character of a community of faith necessary to conduct the task of Christian formation in all ages. It must be a close community (although Dreher weakens his case, it seems, by his appeal to thin expressions of ecumenicity, such as the 1994 “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”). Thickness demands order, which he

rightly identifies as a fundamental act of cultural resistance.

In describing the church as an island of sanctity and stability in the raging sea of modernity, Dreher could have made his appeal instead by turning to John Calvin, whom he does not cite. For Calvin, the cursed world has lost the order with which it was endowed at creation, and a battle now rages between rest and restlessness, between tranquility and confusion, or between the permanent glory of the world to come and the transitoriness of this passing age. Order can only be found in one place: “There is no stability in the whole of the universe,” wrote Calvin, “except for the church, which is built on the foundation of God’s word.”² The church disciplines us by reshaping our desires and our loves, and far from anti-worldly escapism, the church enables us to see the world as it truly is.

We can follow a sixteenth-century Reformer just as much as an eighth-century monastic to find the church which Dreher yearns to see, that “will live in small circles of committed believers who live the faith intensely, and who will have to be somewhat cut off from mainstream society for the sake of holding on to the truth” (4). ©

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² Cited by Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin’s Theology of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 67, where he offers a particularly helpful analysis on Calvin’s teaching on order.

Wendell Berry and Higher Education

by Jack R. Baker and Jeffrey Bilbro

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by Darryl G. Hart

Wendell Berry and Higher Education: Cultivating Virtues of Place, by Jack R. Baker and Jeffrey Bilbro. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2017, xiii + 247 pages, \$49.98.

The question to which I kept returning while absorbing this book was—“can you put lightning in a bottle”? Wendell Berry, a poet, writer, cultural critic, farmer, and leading contemporary voice for agrarianism (a defense of farming that includes a critique of industrialism), is the lightning. As mild-mannered a person as he is in real life, and as soothing as his poetry and fiction can be about the ways of nature and the virtuous people who work the land, Berry also has a radical side (at least for a society that takes its cues from the rhythms of big corporations and cities). Berry has at times left the farm to protest American society and as early as 1968 protested U.S. policies with this remark about the Vietnam War:

We seek to preserve peace by fighting a war, or to advance freedom by subsidizing dictatorships, or to “win the hearts and minds of the people” by poisoning their crops and burning their villages and confining them in concentration camps; we seek to uphold the “truth” of our cause with lies, or to answer conscientious dissent with threats and slurs and intimidations. . . . I have come to the realization that

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=664&issue_id=130.

I can no longer imagine a war that I would believe to be either useful or necessary. . . . I would be against any war.²

The authors responsible for trying to tame Berry are both professors of English at Spring Arbor University in Michigan. To notice that their own prose does not achieve the vigor or elegance of Berry's is not necessarily a major fault since very few writers—let alone academics—can match Berry's gifts as a writer. Still, the problem of taking the sting out of the jolt that usually comes from reading Berry is doubly pronounced in this book since the authors try to imagine what higher education might be if its procedures, aims, and ethos conformed in any sense to Berry's ideas. This is where the opposition between Berry's radicalism and higher education's unreflective attachment to wealth, status, convenience, and nationalism is most evident. Is it really possible to take a set of institutions and a culture of professionalism and turn it in the direction of limits, place, and reduced expectations? To try to apply Berry's brief for small-scale farms to a system that ranks Harvard and Yale as models of educational and organizational achievement appears almost as impossible as propelling an aircraft carrier by sails.

Baker and Bilbro are not naive about the herculean nature of their task. For instance, in Berry's 2004 novel, *Hannah Coulter*, a story about an older farming widow who reflects on the changes in her community since the 1930s (the authors use Berry's novels throughout to frame their critique of and proposals for higher education), Hannah laments the effects of universities on her children. "After each one of our children went away to the university," she recalls, "there always came a time when we would feel the distance opening to them, pulling them away. It was like sitting snug in the house, and a door is opened somewhere, and suddenly you feel a draft" (2). In other words, universities and colleges thrive on Americans' ambition

for getting ahead and for social mobility. These institutions do not educate students in a manner that encourages them to appreciate families and home or that rewards them for returning to the communities that shaped them. Rather, American higher education becomes a vehicle for escaping the constraints of local life and for acquiring skills that will reward students with a "better" way of life—one with greater wealth and convenience, and that is less limited by the demands of work that is necessary (production of food, maintenance of land and structures, elimination of waste). The tension between agrarianism and the ideals of contemporary higher education are downright enormous. At one point, Baker and Bilbro concede that the modern university may be beyond "hope of recovery" (17).

But they plow ahead. In the first part of the book, they make a case for each educational institution to become more aware of its own physical place—economic, political, historical. Paying attention to language and physical work are ways that professors can encourage students to heed their own institution's surroundings (as well as the places from which they come). In the second part of the book, Baker and Bilbro reflect on ways in which colleges and universities can offer instruction that cultivates fidelity, love, gratitude, and memory—virtues the authors believe are crucial to making students aware of the importance of place and how to live in a manner that thrives less on ambition and more on becoming a member of a (preferably rooted) community. What their appropriation of Berry adds up to is a proposal that shifts the aim of education from "upward and lateral mobility, regardless of the costs to our ecosystem, communities, and souls" to one that instructs students through stories "about rooted, contented lives; about the grateful, loving pursuit of wisdom, about people who sacrificed their private ambitions to serve the health of their local places" (191). Some of the practical proposals include memorizing poems, observing the Sabbath (Berry wrote almost a half dozen collections of Sabbath poems), and working on school-sponsored farms or gardens while studying. Between studies in the

2 Wendell Berry in a quote from Bill Kauffman in "Bill Kauffman: American Anarchist," by Laurence M. Vance, December 4, 2006, <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2006/12/laurence-m-vance/american-anarchist/>.

classroom and work alongside study, Baker and Bilbro encourage readers to think of alternatives to the standard way we esteem higher education, careers, and success.

Whatever this book may mean for professors and students, its arguments are ones that Christians should appreciate. If parents and church officers want covenant children to grow up in the faith and stay in the church as adults, will this be achieved by sending kids off to the best university or college to acquire skills for a successful career? Will it result in a next generation that belongs to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and is willing to serve in some capacity in a local congregation? Ideally our churches are already instilling an understanding of the faith and attachment to the church that will affect our youths' decisions about education and their ideas about success. But having a reminder about the dangers higher education poses to the pattern of handing on the faith from generation to generation is a worthwhile aid in the very challenging work of rearing covenant children. Readers of this book who have not read Berry will ultimately go to the original source. But in the meantime, Baker and Bilbro do admirable (if not always zesty) work of applying Berry to the Leviathan of higher education. ©

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Learning from Lord Mackay

by J. Cameron Fraser

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Learning from Lord Mackay: Life and Work in Two Kingdoms, by J. Cameron Fraser. Lethbridge Alberta, Canada: SoS-Books, 2017, 128 pages, \$12.00, paper.

This is an unusual book written by a Westminster Theological Seminary fellow student and friend, Cameron Fraser. Until I read this book, I had never heard of Lord Mackay, considered “one of the most brilliant Scottish scholars of all time” (38). I am very pleased to have made his acquaintance. Fraser was once the editor of *The Presbyterian Guardian*. In his subsequent career he has ministered in Canada, although he was raised in Scotland, where he knew the subject of this book, Lord James Peter Hymers Mackay. The book explores the sterling character of Lord Mackay and how he navigated the two kingdoms of his British context.

The subtitle of the book, “Life and Work in Two Kingdoms,” is of special interest to Orthodox Presbyterians, as Fraser notes in his preface (7). So, after a foreword by Sinclair Ferguson, Fraser looks at the origins of the “two kingdom doctrine.” He begins with Andrew Melville’s (1545–1622) famous humiliation of King James VI, when he reminded the king that he was merely a member of the Church of Scotland (11). Fraser traces the development of the two kingdom doctrine through Luther, Knox, and Calvin, concluding with the enshrinement of many of their ideas in various Reformed confessions (12–17).

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=665&issue_id=130.

Fraser contrasts the British version of the Westminster Confession with the American revision, which was written prior to the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America (18). “The establishment of national churches, opposed by the Constitution of the United States and the American revision to the Westminster Confession of Faith, was the norm” (20). While the structures of establishment exist in England, “pluralism and secular values . . . hold sway. How is a Christian in the tradition of the Westminster Confession to conduct himself in such a context?” (20). Enter the story of Lord Mackay, one-time Lord Chancellor of the British government, who outranks even the Prime Minister.

Born in 1927 in Edinburgh, Mackay was raised in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, in which his father was an elder (25). After graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, he went on to practice law in Scotland. He became Queen’s Counsel and leader of the Scottish bar (the Faculty of Advocates, 27–28). In 1979 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher appointed him Lord Advocate of Scotland, “the chief legal officer of the government and crown in Scotland” (30–31). As part of his responsibilities in this position he represented the UK in the European Court of Justice. In 1985, he was appointed Lord of Appeal in Ordinary of the House of Lords (32). His integrity and brilliance had brought him to a high place. This ascent culminated in Mackay’s appointment in 1987, by Mrs. Thatcher, as Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain (34–35). His view of his role in this new position is seen in his first press conference: “‘If you are humane and compassionate at heart, and judges should be,’ he said, ‘it is an awesome responsibility to send [individuals] to prison knowing the conditions they will face when they arrive at the prison gate’” (37).

Mackay strongly favors the continued Union of Britain and Scotland (united since 1707) (41–42). He also opposed Brexit. On St. Andrews Day in 1996, he played a vital role in returning the Stone of Scone, on which ancient Scottish kings were crowned, to Scotland (40). He ended up leaving his beloved Free Presbyterian Church after

being censured for attending the funeral mass of a dear friend and colleague (51). Cameron and his wife, Margaret, have enjoyed a long-term friendship with Lord Mackay. Despite criticisms for his unwavering stand on the Bible and the Christian faith, Mackay maintained a humble attitude.

The third chapter explores lessons to be learned from Lord Mackay. The first lesson is the effect that his consistent Christian character had on his legal associations. He treated everyone with respect, not the norm for lawyers when it came to reporters (59). “Lord Mackay has become known in the legal profession, in political circles and the media as well as in the church, for his unassuming humility, personal loyalty, and gracious character” (58). This character was cultivated by faithful Lord’s Day observance (61).

In the public sphere, Mackay became known for his advocacy in child and family welfare. In favoring no-fault divorce law, he parted company with many Christians and conservatives. But he did so, not in order to make divorce easier, but to prevent the poisoning of the negotiations in a divorce. He believed that the acrimony created by the necessity of finding fault was damaging to the children and the couple (67, 105). His ideal, as stated in his speech in Parliament (Appendix 1, 1995), was marriage between a male and a female for a lifetime (106). In dealing with law, he always sought the most humane solution through principled compromise (73–74).

Chapter 3 concludes with Mackay’s views on church establishment (cf. Appendix 2, a 2013 lecture). Fraser suggests that Mackay’s views “are closer to the revised version adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States” (80). Mackay believed that it was the duty of the state to “protect the free practice of all faiths in this country” (80). However, he did not oppose church establishment entirely, as he said in his 2013 lecture:

Since both church and state receive their mandate from the God who is revealed in Christ, the provision of Establishment may be seen as providing valuable, God-given opportunities in furthering the church’s vital task

of bearing witness to the supreme kingship of Jesus before the principalities and powers of this present age. (124)

The fourth and final chapter locates Mackay's position on the two kingdoms in the contemporary context. Fraser quotes extensively and with approval from Tim Keller's *Center Church*,² which provides a helpful summary of the weaknesses of both the transformationalist and the two kingdom positions (84–89). One of Keller's criticisms of the two kingdom position raises a good point that has always intrigued me. "Much of the social good that Two Kingdom people attribute to natural revelation is really the fruit of the introduction of Christian teaching—special revelation if you will—into world culture" (86). The problem is that I doubt that many two kingdom advocates would disagree with the reality of this influence. I certainly don't. David VanDrunen weighs in on the charge of Docetism by simply saying that he doesn't advocate everything articulated by those who claim to hold a two kingdom view (89–90). Fraser then mentions another two kingdoms advocate, Darryl Hart, by quoting a "sympathetic reviewer" to the effect that Hart holds to "two airtight spheres" (90). I wish Fraser had given Hart a chance to respond.

According to Fraser, Mackay

does not self-consciously operate on the basis of either model. But his concern for personal godliness coupled with his realistic view of what can be accomplished in a fallen political system seem to me to place him closer to the two kingdoms model. (93–94)

Fraser goes on to assert his own opinion: "All too often Christian involvement in politics seems to involve baptizing the political agenda of either the right or the left, whereas neither has a monopoly on biblical priorities" (94). While I agree with Fraser in principle, there may be a less polarized party system in the UK and Canada than in America presently.

² Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

I wish Fraser had commented on Mackay's thoughts on Islam and Islamic terrorism in the context of participation in democratic societies.

The discussion of the relationship between church and state will no doubt continue until the end of time. This little book makes a nice contribution to the conversation. More importantly it provides an inspiring example of a serious Christian serving in church and state. ☺

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✦ Servant Reading

Review Articles

The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 2017¹

by Darryl G. Hart

The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed National Interest, by Walter A. McDougall. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016, x + 408 pages, \$30.00.

No matter where you come down on the Christian origins of the United States, rare are the American believers who think the nation's foreign policy should conform to Christian norms. Should the United States, for instance, establish diplomatic ties with nations of like faith and practice? That is the way that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) conducts its foreign policy—better known as ecumenical relations. But if nation-states conducted their affairs based on religious identity, would Christian nations only establish treaties or enter alliances with other Christian nations? Such a question was thinkable during the early modern era of confessionalization—the time when a European nation's religion was synonymous with its national identity: the Dutch were Calvinist, the English were Anglican, the French were Roman Catholic, and the Scots were Presbyterian.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=598&issue_id=121.

That early modern pattern prevailed until the late eighteenth century, when the United States was founded to be a new order for the ages (*novus ordo seclorum*), a nation without an established church and no religious tests for holding federal office. At that point, religious questions receded to the background of foreign policy. Instead, order, stability, and prosperity became decisive.

Or not.

Although the United States was not officially a Christian nation, it did have a civil religion, equally unofficial, but far more decisive for the way its officials conducted foreign policy. Walter McDougall traces the effects of American civil religion (ACR) on the nation's foreign affairs in a book that is as sobering as it is riveting. ACR came to the attention of scholars during the 1960s, when the sociologist Robert Bellah detected in a “hip, young, liberal, rich, Harvard-trained Catholic” president, John F. Kennedy, a manner of describing national purpose that invoked divine will.

For instance, in his 1961 inaugural, Kennedy asserted “the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.” He added that “here on earth God's work must be truly our own” (25). McDougall argues that Bellah should not have been surprised to discover such affirmations. He observes that most nations in the West (at least) have “required some transcendental glue to cement their citizens together and give their polity purpose” (26). Americans were no different, and the founding generation employed English understandings of divine favor to give Americans confidence that God was on the side of the new nation. This “classical” ACR, as McDougall calls it, lasted until the wrenching challenges of the Civil War and morphed subsequently into a Progressive version in which the “march of the American flag” around the world was part of the nation's fulfillment of God's promises to the United States (122). The Progressive ACR underwent revisions over the course of the twentieth century, but sustained U.S. foreign policy and shared understandings of national purpose through two world wars and the Cold War. It yielded finally to a post-Cold War Millennial

ACR during the 1990s that styled itself “a global civil religion for all humankind.” As McDougall sees it, President Barack Obama “exploited his high priestly office to invite all Americans—not just Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—to join the human pilgrimage toward ‘community, prosperity, mutual care, stewardship of the Earth, peacemaking, and human rights’” (351).

Readers will likely recoil from ACR’s rhetoric, depending on their political party affiliation and the president responsible for invoking divine blessing, but McDougall’s book is a powerful reminder of how central civil religion has been to rationales for American wars and additional interventions around the world. In 1900, after the Spanish-American War, when the United States started to flex its global muscle, Senator Albert Beveridge, a Republican from Indiana, defended William McKinley’s colonial acquisitions of Cuba and the Philippines by attributing to America a “divine mission.” The nation “holds all profit, all the glory, all the happiness possible to man. We are trustees of the world’s progress, guardians of its righteous peace” (124). Most Americans remember Woodrow Wilson’s iteration of the Progressive ACR when he described the First World War as a conflict “to make the world safe for democracy.” Less familiar is Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s depiction of the Second World War as a contest between those “guided by brutal cynicism, by unholy contempt for the human race,” and the Allies, who were “inspired by a faith that goes back through all the years to the first chapter of the Book of Genesis: God created man in His own image” (215). ACR only picked up momentum during the Cold War, when the United States could contrast its affirmation of “in God we trust” to the Soviet Union’s avowed atheism.

If these presidents’ confidence in reading providence troubles the theologically minded, the churches’ role in underwriting the appeal and authority of ACR is even more disconcerting. Throughout the book, McDougall follows church leaders and theologians’ reactions to American foreign policy and finds “never was heard a discouraging word.” In the run-up to World War I, Protestant clergy separated into three camps—militarists,

pacifists, and moderates—but few challenged the idea that the United States had a redemptive role to play on the stage of world affairs. Protestants as diverse as the Yale Divinity School dean, Charles Reynolds Brown, and the evangelist Billy Sunday, equated the United States and divine purpose: Brown believed the country was “called of God to be in its own way a Messianic nation,” while Sunday boasted that “Christianity and Patriotism are synonymous terms” (154). By the time that the United States had fought in another world war and used atomic weapons to end it, McDougall writes, Protestants “tacked and fell into line behind the flagship of state” (249). The National Association of Evangelicals worried less about *the* bomb itself than who “controlled” it. The Federal Council of Churches called on Americans to be “deeply penitent” about the taking of innocent life, but would not abandon its support for U.S. foreign policy in its fight against Soviet Communism. Some Protestants did express reservations about the implications of U.S. engagement in world affairs. Reinhold Niebuhr cautioned officials and citizens about the dangers of pride and self-righteousness as a “God-blessed” America combated the godless Soviets. But McDougall also wonders if Niebuhr merely encouraged a “stealth hubris” in which a concerned American Christian could “take on a Niebuhrian pose of being troubled by the implications of power—only without remorse or charity” (266).

One other Protestant who dissented from the churches’ endorsement of American exceptionalism and the nation’s civil religion was J. Gresham Machen. McDougall notices that at the end of World War I, Machen condemned Woodrow Wilson’s foreign policy as a “terrible crime against the truth” (164). In fact, Machen, who served in the YMCA during the war, returned to Princeton Seminary and delivered a chapel talk in which he worried that American success in defeating Germany had twisted the churches’ ability to proclaim the gospel. The rhetoric of war and victory had produced a “profound satisfaction with human goodness” by those who had served on the winning side because they had defeated “a convenient

scapegoat” —Germany. “In attending to the sins of others,” Machen warned, “men have sometimes lost sight of their own sins” (379). The real remedy for national pride, he argued, was to remember that the returning soldiers were still sinners despite their heroic self-sacrifice. The only source of goodness for fallen men was in “the goodness and greatness of Christ” (380).

Whether McDougall’s book will trouble Christian or non-Christian Americans more is hard to predict, if only because the entire country, irrespective of party affiliation or church membership, has drunk so deeply at the trough of ACR. The foreign policy lesson of McDougall’s argument is to find a way to calculate national interest in distinction from messianic dreams of national greatness. White House and State Department officials may be poorly equipped to make that distinction since the United States’ redemptive status in world affairs is hardwired into the nation’s self-conception. But for the nation’s Christians, who should know a thing or two about the differences between redemption through Christ and improvement by foreign policy, McDougall’s book should not be necessary reading. That it is essential for reminding believers of the limits of American exceptionalism is an indication of American Christianity’s uncritical identification with a nation that, however remarkable by earthly standards, is hardly in the league of God’s accomplishments to save his people. ©

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Is This Really the End?

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by **Darryl G. Hart**

The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church, by Peter Leithart. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016, ix + 225 pages, \$21.99.

In his new book on church unity, Peter Leithart adds to the burden of the local church. For starters, an average pastor has two sermons to prepare, meets with sick church members, comforts those grieving the death of loved ones, and counsels couples preparing for marriage. Your ordinary church member has a full-time job, family responsibilities, goes out to the weekly Bible study, and sometimes socializes with other church members. And now both church members and pastors will hear from Leithart in *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* that they are not doing enough. The church is divided, he complains, and Christians need to do more to overcome fragmentation.

What Leithart does not seem to notice is that local congregations are not necessarily united, nor are the denominations to which they belong. Not every church member shows up at the evening service. Some do not attend the Bible study. Others do not sign up to bring meals to families with newborn babies. And these believers attend churches that do not always support denominational activities, either by hosting missionaries on furlough, giving to denominational programs, or encouraging children away at college to attend a congregation of like faith and practice. In other words, Christians are divided not only between the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity, or between Protestants and Roman Catholics, or among the diversity of Protestant denominations and independent churches. Believers are divided

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=605&issue_id=122.

in the ordinary parts of their lives. They do not live together. They do not dine together. Sometimes they do not even see another church member for an entire week. Is this situation fundamentally a betrayal of Christ's plea for his followers to be united? Is it simply the way life is? Or should we think about church unity in a way that adjusts to these circumstances even if members of a local congregation sometimes appear to have less in common than the local chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

Leithart believes unity is important because the Bible teaches it. Oneness is a large theme in Christian theology, aside from Christ's own call for his believers to be one. God is one even in the diversity of the Trinity. Salvation is about the creation of a single (one) humanity that follows the one true God. God's plan in salvation, Leithart argues, is "to unify all tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples in Christ" (14). So, too, Paul calls Christians to unity of "mind, spirit, and confession" in Ephesians 4 (15). For Leithart, this means that "invisible unity is not biblical unity." "Visible division," in fact, "is incompatible with the New Testament's portrayal of the church" (21). At the same time, Leithart argues that ecclesiastical divisions have hurt the church's proclamation of the gospel. "Nothing has so weakened our witness as tragic divisions," he asserts. "Nothing has made the gospel so implausible, if not preposterous" (166). That sort of all-or-nothing phrasing punctuates the book and makes Leithart read like so many critics of a divided church—the well-meaning believers who love everybody against their critics who lack charity and harbor parochialism (or worse). This explains a lengthy part of the book about the liabilities of denominationalism and how these loyalties have prevented Western Christians from recognizing the vitality of the global church (indigenous churches in Asia, Africa, and South America).

What Leithart ignores is the actual division that existed in the New Testament, the substantial controversies between Judaizers and Paul, or among parties in the church at Corinth. Nor do we have a good conception in the New Testament of an organizational structure, such as Paul telling

Timothy to send church planting reports to the elders at Ephesus. Leithart also fails to address the competition that occurred between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism after the Reformation and how this rivalry was partly responsible for the spread of Christian witness around the world. Sure, division has problems, but unity of the kind that Leithart idealizes remains abstract, almost impossible to conceive because it never existed.

To his credit, Leithart does conclude the book with some suggestions for pastors and church members at the local level. For instance, pastors should seek to observe the Lord's Supper weekly as a way of embodying the unity of the church. He also recommends that pastors participate in (or start, if need be) a local association of pastors. Leithart wonders if such fellowship and cooperation, over time, could lead to a church of, say, Birmingham, Alabama, rather than having ten different congregations in that city with attachments to different denominations. But what about the unity of the church between Mobile, Alabama, and Birmingham? Leithart is silent about such regionalism. For church members, Leithart recommends participating in local charity or political organizations with Christians from other churches, as well as cooperation on missions trips, not to mention prayers for unity. Again, most of these suggestions result (perhaps) in unity at the level of a city or town. What it means for a county, state, or nation is another question.

The problem of achieving unity at local, national, and international dimensions is precisely where this book fails. Leithart does not sufficiently attend to the way that denominations and ecumenical organizations facilitate church unity at levels that go beyond the resources of a local congregation or churches in a specific community. What if denominations are an effective way of marshaling unity at the national level? And what if the ecumenicity committees of denominations are fairly effective at establishing fraternity with churches in other parts of the world? What local congregation in North America has the resources, and which officers have the time, to travel to Uganda to establish ecumenical ties with congregations there?

That question, in fact, points to the largest problem in Leithart's book—namely, to act as if existing social and political structures are simply background noise to biblical exegesis or theological argument on behalf of unity. In his own discussion of denominationalism and its inherent weaknesses, Leithart gives away his argument with the following admission, namely, that discussions of ecumenism or church polity “trade in abstractions” (57). Theologians, he complains, “treat the church as a self-standing entity, without any significant connection to the other institutions and social structures that surround it.” Without considering whether he himself has done this, Leithart goes on to concede:

Every church—Presbyterian, episcopal, or congregational—is part of an ecclesial meta-structure linked to a complex net of political, legal, economic, media, and other institutions. That network of nonchurch institutions affects the way that churches relate to one another and the way churches are internally organized. We cannot do justice to questions about denominationalism and Reformational Catholicism without paying attention to meta-governmental structures. (57)

The downside of this important and poignant observation is that denominationalism is precisely the sort of ecclesiology to emerge in modern liberal societies where ecclesiastical establishments no longer exist and liberal democratic governments protect freedom of religion. In the Roman Empire before Constantine, the dominant ecclesiology yielded important urban centers with bishops who gave coherence to church life. After Constantine, church and state became engaged in a delicate set of negotiations between the emperor's official religion and the church's spiritual mission. After the Reformation yet another form of ecclesiology emerged, one that scaled back Christendom from the general affirmations of Christian Europe to national expressions of Christian identity (what some historians call confessionalization). And after 1789, when modern governments began to disentangle church and state, another form of ecclesiology

emerged. The point of noting these different iterations of ecclesiology is to recognize that believers and church officers have always heard and practiced Christ's call for unity in the context of what Leithart calls meta-governmental structures. In that case, for Leithart's call for unity to make sense, he doesn't need vague advice about local congregations, but a policy paper for political, business, and political structures that will make church unity plausible and possible. Without that, Leithart's argument is as abstract as the ecclesiology he faults.

Without such a comprehensive proposal, we are left with the idea of church unity asserted in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The first paragraph of chapter 25 declares, “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof.” This may be too abstract an idea for Leithart, since he wants unity to be not simply invisible but tangible. Yet this ideal of unity has the advantage of uniting all believers, the living and the dead, from Abraham and Paul to J. Gresham Machen, my parents, and me. That seems like a fairly profound understanding of unity since it encompasses that great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us. Yes, it is abstract. That is the way of mysteries. But it is also amazing to ponder that we are united in Christ with believers who have finished the race and have passed into glory. Maybe it is just me, but that appears a much more profound conception of church unity than working with Methodist neighbors at the local Salvation Army to serve meals to the homeless. ☺

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Sweet Revenge: Digital Meets Reality

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

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

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

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

Now lest you think I oppose technological progress, I do not wish to return to pure vinyl listening. I enjoy the variety of access I have to music on my several devices. I enjoy an expanding collection of CDs. Of course, now even those are giving way to MP3s, where music lives on hard

drives, iTunes, or in various streaming services. My problem has always been with the uncritical acceptance of every new device, along with the almost religious rejection of the old device it replaces.

What does it give, but also what does it take away? And how do the answers to these questions shape my navigation of this ever-changing environment?

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

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

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

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

David Sax, a Canadian journalist, begins and ends the book with stories from his own analog and digital journey. He confesses that soon after the first iPhone was available "my wife and I were just like every other couple; our faces buried in screens at the dinner table, blind to the world around us and to each other. . . . digital's gain was not without sacrifice" (xiii). Then a friend started using his

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=622&issue_id=124.

parent's old turntable. Sax observed that while it was less efficient "the act of playing a record seemed more involved, and ultimately more rewarding, than listening to the same music off a hard drive. . . . It all involved more of our physical senses" (xiii). Then he began to notice that things that "had been rendered 'obsolete' suddenly began to show new life" (xiv). This was the beginning of Sax's exploration of a new assessment of a renewed interest in analog. To his amazement, he discovered that it is often those on the cutting edge of technological progress and development that have come to appreciate the real advantages of analog.

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

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

Chapter 1, "The Revenge of Vinyl," "begins on the factory floor at Nashville's United Record Pressing (URP)" (3). One of the three largest record-pressing plants in the world, it had reached a low point in 2010, but by 2014 it was building a second plant (4). Sales of vinyl records grew from a little under a million in 2007 to over twelve million in 2015 (10). In the sixties, URP pressed records of Elvis, Johnny Cash, and even the first Beatles album pressed in the United States. The director of marketing, Jay Millar, explains, "Music is just vibrations in air. . . . When a record is

playing grooves in the record are duplicating those vibrations, and the needle is picking them up and amplifying those vibrations" (6). "Digital helped save the very analog record it nearly killed" (11). The niche market of millennials began the turnaround. As record stores closed, they purchased vinyl records over the Internet. Now Whole Foods and Barnes and Noble carry new vinyl. The physical presence of turntables and records appeals to a generation that has lost the sense of ownership with their music housed on hard drives. Listeners and performers alike are finding that the lack of editing and takes, which digital amplifies, gives them a more authentic performance (25–26). So the renaissance in vinyl production has also seen a revival of analog recording (27).

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

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

In what Joseph Pine and James Gilmore call the "experience economy"² the analog businesses

2 E. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011).

that are succeeding today emphasize the authenticity of the physical object they sell (40). And surprise, it's the digital natives who are most interested in paper (46). So letterpress printers and stationers are popping up everywhere (44). No directions necessary. Ikea came out with a brilliant parody on digital catalogs with their new catalog, "The Bookbook" — no batteries necessary.³

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

Chapter 4, "The Revenge of Board Games," is startling. I just reorganized the board games in our closet and thought these will never be used again. However, I am plotting to teach my grandson chess with real pieces instead of digital. So tabletop gaming centers are springing up all over the country, creating "a unique social space apart from the digital world." Sax quotes MIT professor Sherry Turkle, who explores the interaction between people and computers and is the author of *Alone Together*,⁴ "Networked, we are together, but so lessened are our expectations of each other that we can feel utterly alone" (80). "The very need for social interaction lies at the heart of the revenge of tabletop games" (81). It's all about being human,

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

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

made in the image of God, body and soul.

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

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

is disembodied. People crave human assistance. The success stories of small bookstores make this a fascinating chapter.

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

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

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

Educational technology is most effective when used appropriately, but not exclusively, as if it can do the entire job. A recent Duke University study showed that the introduction of computers into math and reading education had a persistently negative impact on test scores (183–84). Sax gives an example of a fifth grade class given a choice between using an iPad or paper and pencil—they

overwhelmingly preferred the analog (187–88). A similar result proved true with MOOCs (massive open online courses), billed to change the entire educational system. Google’s Sebastian Thrun was its biggest promoter. It proved to be a massive failure. The reason is teachers, a most fundamental analog reality, because education involves more than the mere transfer of data (201–3).

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

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

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

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

I will confess that this book and the trend that it represents are a vindication of what I have believed since I began my doctoral studies on

homiletics and electronic media in 1990. Neither digitopian nor dystopian, I have always enjoyed a variety of analog realities. I have a 1965 rotary telephone in the dining room of our antique house, a turntable and vinyl records, books in every room, fountain pens and fine stationery. It is heartening to witness the revenge of the analog, not because I have sympathy with Ned Ludd, but because it renews appreciation of embodied life and helps hone the skills of navigating the digital world. It is not either digital or analog, but both working in harmony. That's why I heartily recommend this book. Church officers should digest it and consider the value of the face-to-face relationships and the live worship we enjoy each Lord's Day, face-to-face with God, as it were.

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

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

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“Now Then . . .”

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by **Gregory E. Reynolds**

The Presbyterian Philosopher: The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark, by Douglas J. Douma. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016, xxv + 292 pages, \$37.00, paper.

“Now then,” said Dr. Clark as he sat behind a small, utilitarian oak table in a second-floor classroom in Carter Hall at Covenant College in the fall of 1974. He then placed his pocket watch on the corner of the table as he looked out the window to gather his thoughts. He proceeded to launch us into the complex world of contemporary philosophy. These were deep waters, but the clarity of Clark's thought enabled us to navigate.

Gordon Haddon Clark was a major influence on my life. To a novice like me in the world of Christian scholarship, Clark was a breath of fresh air with his old-school pedagogy and theology during my final year at Covenant College from 1974 to 1975. Since most students were intimidated by his demeanor, which reminded some of Alfred Hitchcock, a few of us had him to ourselves. It only took an ounce of humility and a hunger to learn to get his attention. Underneath the stern exterior was a warmhearted man. He excelled in his knowledge of much of the history of philosophy. To this day I regularly consult his one-volume history of philosophy, *Thales to Dewey*.² He taught me the discipline of thoroughly understanding a thinker's philosophy by analyzing and articulating it in detail before engaging in critical assessment. My first assignment was Augustine's *De Magistro*. Then I wrote my senior thesis on Jonathan Edwards's *The Freedom of the Will*.

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=636&issue_id=126.

2 Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957).

Coming out of the 1960s counterculture, I found Clark's logical rigor to be of enormous help—although it could also be frustrating: I won only one game of chess while playing him by mail for a decade up until his death. Beyond the disciplines he taught me, his love for Scripture and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms had a lasting effect on me. I shall never forget his paternal kindness and instruction.

While Douma's biography is clearly written by an admirer, he does a fine job in tracing the personal biography, intellectual development, and philosophy of Clark. He also doesn't hesitate to paint an accurate picture of Clark. For anyone who has any connection with Clark's thought or life, this is a fascinating and very informative read. Some of the philosophical and theological discussions will prove difficult for those without training in these disciplines. Also, the details of some of the history, especially in the Clark–Van Til controversy, will be more interesting to those who are at least aware of some of the issues.

If that controversy is all one knows about Clark, this book will demonstrate the great value of Clark's expansive contribution to the church, whatever one may think of his apologetics. I am convinced of Van Til's version of presuppositionalism, but I have still learned much from Clark's approach. I have learned to value what they held in common, as well as to identify their differences. Douma is very good at explaining both.

Clark was born on August 31, 1902, to Presbyterian parents. His father, David, was a minister who attended Princeton Theological Seminary and the Free Church College (4). At Princeton, David Clark studied under A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, so young Gordon had an early and extensive exposure to the Reformed Faith. Gordon attended the University of Pennsylvania with a mature faith, having made a profession at a Billy Sunday campaign in 1915 (8). Clark thrived in a rigorous academic environment, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and completed his doctorate in 1929 with a dissertation entitled *Empedocles and Anaxagoras in Aristotle's De Anima*. He began teaching undergraduate philosophy in 1924 (10–11) at the

University of Pennsylvania. In 1936 he founded a chapter of the League of Evangelical Students there (13).

Chapter 2 on intellectual influences shows how he came to his version of presuppositionalism, seeking to uncover logical inconsistencies in unbelieving philosophies and worldviews, while defending the logical consistency of the Christian faith. Plotinus, Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster Confession all had a powerful influence on his thinking. Of course, he rejected Plotinus's doctrine of God and some of the remnants of empiricism in Augustine, and maintained that Calvin was the best interpreter of Paul. The Old School theology of Charles Hodge, the Westminster Confession, and the teaching of J. Gresham Machen were all central in forming Clark's thinking (17–22).

During the era of the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Clark strongly opposed the Auburn Affirmation's denial of the central tenets of orthodox Christianity. As an elder and a churchman, he fought against this heresy in the courts of the church alongside men like H. McAllister Griffiths and Murray Forst Thompson (27). Clark especially admired Machen's 1923 *tour de force*, *Christianity and Liberalism*, in which Machen clearly distinguished between true Christianity and the liberalism that artfully hid its heresies under Christian language (28). Clark was deeply involved in the founding and early history of the OPC at the behest of Machen (30). Also, Clark's father, David, was on the board of Westminster Theological Seminary, which Machen had founded in 1929. Douma concludes, "Machen, for his part, saw Clark as an ally" (31).

At the first OPC General Assembly, both Clark and Van Til were elected to serve on the Committee on Christian Education. In his first year of teaching apologetics at Wheaton, Clark even used Van Til's syllabi notes. As Clark began to understand Van Til, he came to disagree fundamentally with his transcendental approach. This would lead to a major controversy in the 1940s (35).

The Wheaton years (1936–43) were difficult for Clark because he "expounded theological views that irritated the college's inter-denominational

establishment, but despite conflicts with the administration and board of trustees, his years at Wheaton were some of his most productive” (38). He now had an opportunity to influence Christian students, some of whom would become notable church leaders such as Edward Carnell, Edmund Clowney, Carl Henry, Paul Jewett, and Harold Lindsell. Even Billy Graham took medieval philosophy from Clark (43). Clark sent many students off to Westminster Theological Seminary.

Students often accused Clark of being “cold,” and he was stoic, as Douma admits, but he used this sternness to instill logical thinking and scholarly discipline in his students. If he at times emphasized the rational over against emotion, it was due partly to his stoicism but more to his proper aversion to the anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalism of his day. Once, when reading a passage from Jock Purves’s *Fair Sunshine* about a Scottish Covenanter martyr, I saw a tear roll down his cheek.

Chapter 5 explore the origins of Clark’s presuppositionalism, which Douma sums as the “synthesis of two factors: (1) the rejection of empiricism and (2) the acceptance of worldview thinking” (58). Clark insisted that absolute truth cannot be obtained through experience. He also believed that the senses are untrustworthy, thus disagreeing with the Scottish Common Sense Realism of his father and old Princeton (63). The idea of the logical coherence of Christianity was not new to Clark. James Orr and Abraham Kuyper held a similar view (64–7). “Clark came to believe that all knowledge possible to man is limited to the propositions of the Bible and that which can be logically deduced from the Bible” (68). This does not seem to allow for various kinds of knowledge, especially in the area of common grace and general revelation. I know that when it comes to science, however, Clark was an operationalist,³ a position consistent with the tentative nature of the scientific method, which is empirical. Clark’s rigorous defense of the infallibility of the Bible

3 Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* (Nutley, NJ: Craig, 1964).

should not be forgotten by those of us who are not on board with his apologetics.

By emphasizing the importance of a Christian worldview, Clark made a significant contribution to students seeking to navigate a liberal education. On the importance of developing a Christian worldview, Clark and Van Til were agreed. Where Clark came to disagree with Van Til is in the area of epistemology. Clark rejected both empiricism and the traditional proofs for the existence of God, whereas Van Til still held to aspects of empiricism, and believed that the traditional proofs must be formulated in terms of a Christian epistemology (74).

In Chapters 6–8, Douma does a masterful job presenting the great conflict in Clark’s career and the history of the OPC. He has researched the episode with great care and presents the results in a fair and balanced way. For the most part he leaves the reader to decide. I was happy for an opportunity to revisit an old and very complex issue that I had not thought much about for decades. I learned a lot of new things about that controversy, even though I had investigated it very closely in seminary. I believe that, whatever the reader’s assessment of the issues involved, he will learn from the history, because Douma is a serious historian. I do not intend to go into much detail on the three chapters covering the controversy, or I will greatly exceed the editor’s word limit.

Clark applied for ordination in the OPC through the Presbytery of Philadelphia in March 1943 (77). The 1944 General Assembly voted to waive the requirements of both a seminary education and the study of Hebrew. A protest was submitted, arguing that the waiver was premature given the absence of “discussion of the evidence concerning Clark’s theological examination” (78). At the same time a document titled “A Program for Action” was circulated by Clark supporters which, among other things, encouraged affiliation with the non-Reformed American Council of Christian Churches, favored a recommendation against the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and pressed for the church to supervise Westminster Theological Seminary and *The Presbyterian Guardian*. So there were more than theological differences at

play behind the scenes. “The ministers leading the Program for Action saw Clark’s ordination as an opportunity to change the direction of the denomination” (81). It is no wonder that commissioners were alarmed.

On July 7, 1944, the Presbytery of Philadelphia met to consider Clark’s ordination. He was licensed to preach, and the GA waiver of seminary education was affirmed on a 34 to 10 vote. Clark read Genesis 1 in Hebrew to prove his knowledge of the language. On August 9, 1944, Clark was ordained as a minister, becoming part of Calvary OPC in Willow Grove. Douma doesn’t make clear what the call associated with the ordination was (82). Three months later, twelve church officers, among whom were R. B. Kuiper, LeRoy Oliver, N. B. Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, Cornelius Van Til, Edward J. Young, and Arthur W. Kuschke Jr., lodged a complaint against the ordination (83). Clark was surprised, since he had been the commencement speaker at WTS in 1941 and sent many students there (84). Given the objectives of the Plan of Action, the complaint is very understandable. What is sad is that the ordination was linked to these other very distinct issues (85). Douma helpfully explains the four issues causing the complaint (87–101). Douma makes the point that requiring subscription to a particular view of apologetics goes beyond the confessional requirements for ordination. As one who favors Van Til’s approach in rejecting the neutral bar of reason as the common ground between believer and unbeliever, I nevertheless think Douma is correct. As Clark concluded, Hodge and Machen would not have passed this ordination test (102).

A special committee of the presbytery, consisting of Clark supporters, responded to *The Complaint* with *The Answer* at the presbytery’s March 1945 meeting, defending “the decision to ordain Clark and supported his theological positions” (108). Beginning in 1945, Clark accepted a position as assistant professor of philosophy at Butler University in Pennsylvania, so he sought to transfer his credentials to the Presbytery of Ohio. He was received after examination in October 1945. Earlier that year he wrote an article in *The Presbyterian*

Guardian criticizing the OPC for assuming “the position of an isolationist porcupine” (109). From pages 110 to 127, Douma gives a helpful summary of the theological issues: the incomprehensibility of God, the relationship of the faculties of the soul, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and the free offer of the gospel. He sums up by discussing the “overriding issue: charges of rationalism.” As Douma points out, technically, this label describes those who base their knowledge on human reason alone (127). Although there is a rationalistic aspect to Clark’s apologetic as there was in old Princeton’s, it should have remained an academic debate and not an issue for ordination.

The complaint that had been defeated at the Presbytery of Philadelphia was appealed to the Twelfth General Assembly in May 1945. A special committee to deal with the complaint was erected, consisting of Richard Gray, Edmund Clowney, Lawrence Gilmore, Burton Goddard, and John Murray (136). The majority report favored Clark, and the GA agreed by a vote of nearly two to one. The report concluded: “Our committee is of the opinion that [*The Complaint*] requires the Presbytery of Philadelphia to exact a more specialized theory of knowledge than our standards demand” (137).

Although the case was over, the controversy continued, leading to Clark’s departure from the OPC in October 1948 to join the United Presbyterian Church of North America (153). Under the heading of “Changes in the Position of the Complainants” (157) Douma argues that Murray, Stonehouse, and Kuschke clarified *The Complaint* in the area of epistemology in order to avoid the charge of skepticism (158). I found this helpful and wish this clarification had been made at the outset.

Just when the reader may need a break from controversy, Douma digs into Clark’s long tenure at Butler University from 1945 to 1973. He produced an impressive number of books during that time (167). He became deeply involved in his new denomination, but, as his daughter Betsy testified, “My dad never complained about the OP church” (172). He strongly opposed the proposed merger of the UPCNA with the PCUSA. When this occurred

in 1958, he helped to lead his congregation out into the Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod (RPCGS, 173). After the death of the pastor, Clark preached regularly for over eight years (175). He was truly a churchman. In 1965, he assisted in arranging a merger between his denomination (RPCGS) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES). The EPC brought Francis Schaeffer and Covenant College and Seminary (176).

During this time, Clark and Van Til both opposed Barthianism with trenchant critiques from different epistemological perspectives in their respective books in 1963: *The Theological Method of Karl Barth* and *Christianity and Barthianism*. They also both ardently defended biblical inerrancy (180–81, cf. 209), something Van Til would warmly recall about Clark in their later years and renewed friendship.

Douma reports on Clark's life outside of work (176–80). On the human side, Clark was a legendary chess player. A friend and I once played Clark together. He took us both on at once and beat us handily in a matter of minutes. I recall watching him feed the wild dogs on the Covenant College quad. He kept a supply of biscuits in his suitcoat pocket. Clark also had a dry sense of humor. In a class at Covenant College, he referred to distressed blue jeans as “synthetic poverty.”

In chapter 10, Douma enumerates four theological contributions of Clark: (1) an axiomatized epistemological system, built like Euclidean geometry, with Scripture as the basic postulate and doctrines as derived theorems (184–88), (2) theological supralapsarianism in which the logical order of the decrees is the reverse of the temporal execution (188–92), (3) the solution to the problem of evil (192–94), and (4) arguments for a return to traditional logic (194–98). These comprise an accurate description of Clark's views on these major topics.

Chapter 11, on “Clark's Boys,” distinguishes between prominent leaders who strayed from the doctrine of inerrancy and those who didn't. Clark would have been disappointed that, as a minor “Clark boy,” I became a Van Tilian in apologetics.

But I heartily affirm the best of his convictions: the inerrancy of God's Word and the summary of its teaching in the Westminster standards. Whatever our disagreements with Clark may be, we must appreciate his deep commitment to Christian scholarship and the Christian faith, which he clung to, to his dying day. He defended Machen, inerrancy, and the Westminster standards. In the end, Clark is on the side of the angels.

After a chapter on Clark's theology of the Trinity and the incarnation, Douma covers Clark's years teaching at Covenant College (1974–84). This chapter includes an interesting history of Clark's opposition to the RPCES joining with the newly formed Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) (235–39). Ironically, one of his reasons for opposing the union was that it would be “an unmerited insult to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” because earlier the RPCES had voted against merging with the OPC, despite the OPC's favorable vote (236).

My favorite part in this final chapter is “‘My good friend’—personal reconciliation with Cornelius Van Til” (240–42). I witnessed the first of four friendly meetings between the two aged apologists. It was significant that two of the original complainants, LeRoy Oliver and Paul Woolley, went to lunch with Van Til and Clark after Clark spoke in chapel at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1977. Thereafter, Van Til and Clark referred to each other as good friends. “Later that year, in an interview for *Christianity Today*, Van Til made reference to ‘my good friend Gordon Clark [who] believes in the inerrancy of the Bible’” (240). Remarkably, in 1983 Van Til asked Clark to speak at a dinner in Van Til's honor. Without diminishing their theological differences, reading this was a little taste of heaven. I highly recommend this book.

When I arrive in heaven I plan on having lunch with professors Clark and Van Til. ☺

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Mencken in Machen's World

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* August-September 2017¹

by Danny E. Olinger

Damning Words: The Life and Religious Times of H. L. Mencken, by D. G. Hart. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, xiv + 259 pages, \$14.04 Kindle, \$19.37.

D*amning Words*, D. G. Hart's religious biography of H. L. Mencken, does not fit the norm for the genre. Mencken, perhaps the most well-known American newspaperman and satirist of the first half of the twentieth century, made no pretense of being religious. Mencken took prophet-like status among secular intellectuals as he warred against popular causes (sexual oppression, Prohibition, etc.) and superstitions (Christianity) prevalent in rural America. So disdainful was Mencken of faith in Christ that he named the final volume of his memoirs *Heathen Days*.

Andrew Ferguson, senior editor of the *Weekly Standard*, emphasized this angle from the start of his review of *Damning Words* in the December 14, 2016, issue of the *Wall Street Journal*. He wrote,

Everyone involved with “*Damning Words: The Life and Religious Times of H. L. Mencken*” seems to know it's pretty wacky—publishing a book about Mencken in the Library of Religious Biography, “a series of original biographies on important religious figures throughout American and British history.”²

Ferguson noted that series coeditor Mark Noll in his forward to the book asks why Hart would

think anyone would be interested in a religious biography of Mencken. After listing Mencken's literary accomplishments in the first two pages of the introduction, Hart himself poses the question, “What does any of this have to do with religion? Why should Mencken qualify for entry in a series of religious biographies of prominent Americans?” (3). In Ferguson's judgment, Hart is not persuasive in supplying an answer. For all the book's virtues, particularly its charming writing and the author's knowledge of the subject, Ferguson concluded that Hart became enamored of Mencken as a literary figure and wanted to write a Mencken book.³

It is a fair question, and Ferguson wrote a fair review. But, for readers of D. G. Hart's writings on J. Gresham Machen, there are clues to his motivation. In his intellectual biography of Machen, *Defending the Faith*, Hart on his opening page established the post-World War I setting in America through the lens of Mencken. What Hart found intriguing was Mencken's belief that the whole Protestant project of refashioning Christianity in modern garb had failed. Mencken wrote, “What survives under the name of Christianity, above the stratum of the mob, is no more than a sort of Humanism with little more supernaturalism in it than you will find in mathematics or political economy.”⁴ Mencken the secularist echoed the verdict of Machen the Calvinist.

The connection between Mencken and Machen undoubtedly played a part in Hart's motivation. Mencken wrote two memorable pieces about Machen in 1930 and 1937, but, as Hart writes, “to Mencken devotees, Machen is just one more obscure figure from the past” (6). For Machen devotees, however, Mencken provides historical context and a level of discernment for Machen and the Presbyterian Conflict. He might have loathed Machen's Calvinistic beliefs, but he understood the import of Machen's argument. Lose the authority of Scripture and the supernatural, and you

³ Ibid.

⁴ D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 2.

¹ http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=642&issue_id=127.

² Andrew Ferguson, “Poking the Ribs of Believers,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 2016.

lose historic Christianity. Upon Machen's death, Mencken wrote:

[Modernists] have tried to get rid of all the logical difficulties of religion, and yet preserve a generally pious cast of mind. It is a vain enterprise. What they have left, once they have achieved their imprudent scavenging, is hardly more than a row of hollow platitudes, as empty [of] psychological force and effect as so many nursery rhymes. They may be good people and they may even be contented and happy, but they are no more religious than Dr. Einstein. Religion is something else again—in Henrik Ibsen's phrase, something far more deep-down-giving and mudupbringing. Dr. Machen tried to impress that obvious fact upon his fellow adherents of the Geneva Mohammed. He failed—but he was undoubtedly right. (8)

Hart concludes that Mencken seemed to be able to tell the difference between serious and ephemeral forms of belief. This is the thread that Hart pursues in *Damning Words*. It is also why he believes that a religious treatise on Mencken is valuable.

Born on September 12, 1880, in Baltimore, Henry Louis Mencken was baptized into the Protestant Episcopal Church. The christening was not because of the faith of his parents, August and Anna, but because Anna believed it was a rite of passage in civilized society. When Henry was old enough to go on his own, August would send him off to Sunday School with the Methodists. August's motivation was not that his son would grow in the knowledge of Christ, but that August would have a quiet time to nap.

At fourteen years old Mencken was confirmed on Palm Sunday 1895 at the Second English Lutheran Church. The Episcopal connection for the family had ended with the 1891 death of his paternal grandfather, Burkardt Mencken. The custom remained in the Mencken family, however, that the children were to join the church, even if, like Henry, they did not believe.

In 1899 August Mencken died, and Henry was free from family expectations. He did not want

to be a part of the church; what he wanted was to be a newspaper writer. He was soon hired by the *Baltimore Morning Herald*. Hard working and ambitious, Mencken was soon writing around five thousand words a day for the paper. A few years later he started taking on editorial tasks and even found time to write books, including *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, published in 1908.

Mencken's interest in Nietzsche was tied in part to Mencken's desire to break the hold that he believed Christianity had on American culture. Nietzsche had argued that Christianity was untrue and degrading. Mencken would labor throughout his career to find scientific support for these philosophical contentions.

The same year that Mencken published his Nietzsche volume, he started writing for the literary magazine *Smart Set*. Through *Smart Set*, Mencken's national reputation was established. In 1913 he assumed the role of coeditor with George Jean Nathan. In their editorial policy, they wrote, "Both of us are opposed to all such ideas as come from the mob, and are polluted by stupidity: Puritanism, Prohibition, Comstockery, evangelical Christianity, tin-pot patriotism, the whole shame of democracy" (77).

Mencken's mocking definition of Puritanism in 1917—"Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy"—is perhaps his most well-known epigram. The individual that embodied Puritanism for Mencken more than any other was Woodrow Wilson, the Presbyterian president who advocated the adoption of Prohibition. Wilson unwittingly helped to create the new era of American Puritanism, where "the special business of forcing sinners to be good was taken away from preachers and put into the hands of layman trained in its technique and mystery, and there it remains" (93).

For Mencken the problem with mixing Christianity and politics to create right-thinkers often depended on a belief in the goodness of man. Hart writes:

Perhaps Mencken's greatest objection to his Christian citizens was their optimism about

human nature, a concern that ironically put him closer to Augustinian notions of depravity than his churchgoing opponents. Mencken observed perceptively that causes like Prohibition and Comstock depended on the “doctrine that virtue and ignorance were identical—that the slightest knowledge of sin was fatal to virtue.” Consequently, the way to prevent drunkenness was not through moderate consumption of alcohol, but through complete avoidance of it. (115)

Mencken’s view that men were inherently selfish, envious, and fearful of others had a resemblance to Calvinistic anthropology. According to Hart, the difference was “where the Calvinist saw such defects in all persons, Mencken attributed them overwhelmingly to rural folk; for him the city dwellers were superior” (124).

The 1925 John Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, allowed Mencken to extend his views regarding rural backwardness and urban enlightenment to evangelical Christianity and scientific knowledge, respectively. Mencken, who was friendly with Clarence Darrow and despised prosecutor William Jennings Bryan, attended the trial in person.⁵ Mencken encouraged Darrow to put Bryan on the witness stand. Bryan said, “They came here to try revealed religion. I am here to defend it” (136).

Hart also recounts Mencken’s observations about attending a weeklong revival meeting headlined by Billy Sunday, “the celebrated American pulpit-clown.” Mencken reported that men came forward every evening, crying out for help against their sins. He did not see one woman come forward. He concluded that they had too much good sense.

By 1930, Mencken believed that the landscape for Christianity in America was shifting. There was less antagonism among Protestants. Christians were adopting the progressive spirit. He predicted a

5 Interestingly, in *Defending the Faith*, Hart writes that lead counsel William Jennings Bryan had requested in writing that J. Gresham Machen appear as an expert witness at the trial. Machen declined. See, Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 84–85.

common American religion was coming soon, one part Wesleyan, the other part Roman Catholic.

Mencken continued to write about Christianity from the perspective of a skeptic throughout the rest of his career. He never fully recovered from a stroke in 1948, and died on January 28, 1956. ©

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Current Trends in the History of the English Reformation

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by Edward Manger

There has been much ink spilt in the past two decades about the English Reformation and its place in history. Historians working in the field have devoted considerable time recounting the developments that have emerged in the historiography. Particularly helpful examples are the essays “The English Reformation after Revisionism” by Eamon Duffy² and “Modern Historians on the English Reformation” by Diarmaid MacCulloch in his collection *All things Made New: The Refor-*

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=648&issue_id=128.

2 Eamon Duffy, “The English Reformation After Revisionism,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2006): 720–31.

mation and Its Legacy.³ They, among others, have charted the rise and fall of the popular narrative of the English Reformation articulated primarily by A. G. Dickens in his magisterial tome *The English Reformation*.⁴ This volume undergirds the still pervasive idea that the English Reformation was in some ways inevitable, and largely complete by the beginning of Elizabeth I's reign. Dickens painted a picture of the medieval Church of England as being corrupt and decadent, ripe to fall into the hands of an anticlerical population just waiting for an opportunity to devour it. This image was largely effaced by the work of revisionist historians, such as Christopher Heigh⁵ and Eamon Duffy,⁶ who argued that there was nothing inevitable about the English Reformation. In their theses, the church in England prior to the Reformation was far from the edge of collapse, but rather a vibrant and lively institution that contributed to social cohesion and the fabric of everyday life. Central to their view is that the Catholic reign of Mary I was more than a hiatus in the glorious march towards England's natural Protestant destiny, and that one could still be talking of reformations well into the seventeenth century. More recently, historians such as Peter Marshall⁷ have trodden a careful path between the two extremes, showing that there is truth in both positions, and that the real watchwords for the English Reformation are complexity and multiplicity. It would be instructive in this, the five hundredth anniversary year of the Reformation, to look at the current state of historical thought on the English Reformation, a series of events that would define the practice of Christian-

3 Diarmaid MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

4 A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

5 See especially Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (London: Clarendon, 1993).

6 See especially Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

7 Particularly the recent Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

ity in the English-speaking world down to this very day. I shall attempt this by examining two books published in recent years and two books published this year among the slew of titles seeking to benefit from increased interest in the subject.

* * *

The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I: Reformation and Identity, c. 1520–1662, edited by Anthony Milton. London: Oxford University Press, 2017, 544 pages, \$135.00.

This is the first volume of four charting the history of the various ecclesiastical bodies that developed out of the Church of England and the latter Anglican communion. The dates of this first volume are indicative of the contemporary trend for long-perspective views on the Reformation. It is divided into twenty-five chapters thematically addressing issues relating to the evolution of Anglicanism from the reign of Henry VIII up until the Great Ejection of 1662. Understandably, the book opens with a discussion of the problematic nature of the very word “Anglicanism.” The book seeks to peel away layers of preconceptions and imposed narratives that have accumulated around this word. An argument is advanced that many groups that are viewed as distinct from “Anglicans,” such as Reformed Presbyterians and Puritans, were solidly within the mainstream Church of England throughout this period. The term Anglican is a later development that most nonspecialists will associate with the concept of a *via media*, a middle path, between Geneva and Rome. This myth is dispelled in this volume, as the first four chapters helpfully illuminate through a chronological account of the period. The notion of “compromising” with or in any way seeking to chart a middle path with Rome on one side was anathema to both Evangelicals of the Henrician Reformation and the Elizabethan settlement. On the other hand, a distaste for Geneva was held by a number in the upper echelons of society, but this was for fear of the public unrest that might result from a more “democratic” church constitution, not for its rigorous ascetic visual tastes, Calvinistic soteriology,

or adherence to the Word of God as the basis for reforming the church. These were all principles accepted to a varying degree by the vast majority within the Church of England.

A highlight of this volume is Diarmaid MacCulloch's essay on the international nature of the English Reformation, reflecting an emphasis prevalent in the recent literature: the interconnectedness of the Reformations across Europe. England was far from "isolated" or a unique case in the broader Reformation, but constantly interacted with the most influential thinkers in the Reformed world. The influence of Peter Martyr and Martyn Bucer is well documented, but the connections go deeper and further. As the Marian exiles rose through the ranks of Episcopal theologians, they had direct contact with the likes of Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger, regularly communicated with bishops, and sided with them against those who would later be called "Puritans" over issues of conformity, such as the vestments controversy of the 1560s.

The other standout chapters are by Chad Van Dixhoorn and Ann Hughes, who helpfully place the Westminster Assembly and the Cromwellian church within the broader chronology of the Church of England. Far from constituting a break with what had gone before by attempting to establish a "new" church, both were contained within the existing national church. All participants (other than the Scottish commissioners) in the Westminster Assembly were ordained members of the Church of England who were seeking to reform that institution, not break away from it or end it. As such, the Westminster Assembly and Cromwellian church can be seen as part of Anglicanism in a way that Presbyterians and modern Anglicans often have overlooked. The restoration of the monarchy and the events of 1662 whitewashed much of what was achieved during the 1640s and 1650s and effectively forced that period out of the mainstream Anglican narrative.

Also helpful are Peter Lake's and Peter MacCulloch's complementary chapters on what has been called "avant-garde conformity," which was the embryonic manifestation of what would later become the Arminian movement of the Laudian

period. This avant-garde conformity is most famously characterized by Lancelot Andrewes and Richard Hooker. This article goes some way toward helping us move past the stereotyped image of crypto-papists attempting to pervert the course of true Reformation, or heroic defenders of beauty in worship against Puritan iconoclasts. Instead, we must see them as nuanced as any of their contemporaries, committed to the Word of God and the cause of the Reformation.

This volume is highly to be praised, it is replete with the most recent scholarship and rigorous research by some of the most able and impressive historians working in the field today. For anyone wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the terrain of the current debates surrounding the English Reformation, this cannot be too highly recommended.

* * *

Reformation Divided: Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England, by Eamon Duffy. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 448 pages, \$48.00.

Eamon Duffy substantially redefined the way historians discussed the English Reformation with his treatment of popular religion in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*.⁸ He argued persuasively for the vital and dynamic reality of English Catholicism prior to the Reformation and the near success of the Catholic Church under Mary I. All subsequent historians have needed to reckon with this thesis, and many owe a debt of gratitude to Duffy for this insight. It has been challenged and modified, yet not completely overturned.

This volume is a collection of the essays published by Duffy over the past forty years, having been updated and corrected where necessary. It is insightful to see the thought of this important historian over an extended time period, and recurrent themes begin to emerge. Duffy is himself a Catholic, and the largest section of this volume

⁸ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

comprises a set of essays relating to the experience of English Catholics during and after Elizabeth's reign. In these, the reader is treated to an insight into a world that is often left out of narratives of the English Reformation, where Catholics are viewed as either evil opponents of the gospel, or agent-less victims of cruel religious oppression. The truth is that they were neither. Duffy investigates the establishment of the English college at Rheims for the training of English priests, and the infighting of Jesuits and Jansenists in their approach taken to the re-evangelization, as they saw it, of England. These essays go a long way toward humanizing the Catholic population, showing they were not a faceless, homogeneous mass of seditious traitors. In reality they experienced their own internal debates and acted with real agency, making decisions to conform or resist and strategized on how they might most effectively reach their countrymen who had turned away from the sources of authority that for so long remained the keystone of English society.

The first three essays in this volume reassess of the work and life of Thomas More (1478–1535). There is inevitable overlap and slight repetition, which is hard to avoid in three separate essays on one man. The main thrust of the argument in all three is to re-cast More as a committed humanist in line with Erasmus and move away from the popular image of him as the arch villain of Henry's reign, most recently popularized by Hillary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. Alongside this central aim, Duffy also establishes More's credentials as a systematic and sophisticated thinker and apologist for the traditional faith against Evangelicals during the reign of Henry VIII.

The third section is composed of essays concerning the later Reformation, again adding weight to the view of the Reformation as a long multiplicity of events and developments rather than one or two single large shifts. One particularly interesting chapter examines Richard Baxter's ministry as a model of the Reformed ministry, arguing that his methods were not unique and indeed can be seen as constituting the pinnacle of a legitimate tradition of ministry that existed within the English

church, even if it was ultimately overlooked following the Great Ejection. The other chapters in this section address the long Reformation and the debates that continued past 1662 and 1688 over the nature of the Protestant church in England, religious tolerance, and the place of Catholicism within that dynamic. Thus, Duffy extends the Reformation further than most text books or single volumes usually attempt to do. This volume is a worthy read for those interested in exploring some overlooked aspects of the English Reformation and a worthwhile antidote to accounts that can easily fall into Protestant triumphalism.

* * *

Reformation Unbound: Protestant Visions of Reform in England, 1525–1590, by Karl Gunther. London: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 296 pages, \$29.99, paper.

Originally published in 2014, but republished in paperback this year, Karl Gunther has sought to revise our current understanding of the English Reformation by reappraising the development of the radical element within it. He contends that historians have seen radicalism as a phenomenon that emerged late during the reign of Elizabeth I. He endeavors to build a compelling case over the course of the book that the roots of this movement go back further than has traditionally been appreciated. He contends that from very early in the English Reformation there was a spectrum of voices calling for a complete overhaul of the theology and ecclesiology of the church in England in the most definitive terms.

It is a well-written, well-researched book, full of fascinating insights. One must concede that Gunther is almost certainly correct that at least some historians have overlooked the range of revolutionary and extreme opinions that were circulated in the first half of the sixteenth century. However, he does not show clearly that this is currently a widespread trend among recent scholarship. Thus, he overstates his case and as a result cannot be said to have significantly changed our understanding of the landscape of the English Reformation as he

claims to be doing. A more accurate description of the effect on this book is that it causes a subtle reorientation of emphasis. The first chapter is devoted to works published during the Henrician Reformation. He examines texts that, interestingly for readers of *Ordained Servant*, show that there were calls for establishing a system of church government that included the eradication of Episcopacy, as well as the equality of ministers even at this early stage. He does not argue that there was a simple, straight line joining these writings to the latter Presbyterian controversies of the second half of the sixteenth century, but that they informed and encouraged latter thinkers who did not emerge from a vacuum but drew upon these earlier publications.

Gunther then moves on to the experience of the Marian exiles with a discussion of texts relating to Nicodemism. This was a term coined to describe those who were Protestants but conformed to the Catholic Church reinstated by Mary I, rather than face persecution. Those who had fled to the continent were scathing about these Nicodemites, denying, outright, the possibility of communion with Catholics. They wrote in the harshest terms against the outward conformity of those who remained in England, equating association with Catholics as a denial of Christ himself. Gunther also offers a reexamination of the controversy that arose among the exile community in Frankfurt over the use of vestments and the Edwardian Book of Common Prayer. This he sees as a precursor to the vestarian conflict and debates surrounding conformity in the 1560s and onwards. The men who took part in these debates came back to England under Elizabeth's reign and rose to positions of prominent influence; for example, William Wytigham, who translated the Geneva Bible and was one of the main protagonists of the controversy in Frankfurt, became Dean of Durham. These chapters adequately show that the Puritans, who were to emerge as a prominent party within the church in the later sixteenth century, were not a late development or new party espousing novel ideas. They were part of a continuity of thought and practice within the church from the Edwardian church and

Marian exile.

The flaw in Gunther's book is one of ambition rather than one of argument or sources. He is correct that radical voices were present and active in the English Reformation, however, he does not fully demonstrate how prominent or powerful they were early on, or that many of today's historians would disagree with this. For example, his treatment of texts published during the reign of Henry VIII would have benefited from establishing that they had a wide readership or broad influence, or that previous historians had neglected them as sources. Overall this book fits into the contemporary historical preoccupation with adding complexity and nuance. It adds another piece to the historical puzzle of the English Reformation and reminds us to appreciate the diversity of thought and ideas within it, not just accept the dominant narratives we have inherited. However, Gunther's narrative is itself perhaps less radical than the subjects of his study.

* * *

Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism, by Patrick Collinson. London: Cambridge University Press 2013, 252 pages, \$29.99, paper.

Patrick Collinson had a career that spanned over half a century, during which he became the foremost historian of Puritanism. This was the book he was working on when he passed away in 2011. As such, it forms an important contribution to the history of the Puritan movement.

The book opens with Collinson's assertion that it is "rather less and much more than a biography of Richard Bancroft" (1), and he is right. It is not a straightforward biography of a primate of the Church of England, as was Collinson's masterly treatment of Bancroft's predecessor Edmund Grindal.⁹ The book ends just as Bancroft is raised to the primacy as Archbishop of Canterbury, and does not focus on the life or inner workings of the man, but is comprised of a series of vignettes of

⁹ Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519–1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).

Bancroft's interactions with Puritanism.

Bancroft was, even before his elevation to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, at the center of the life of the Church as Bishop of London from 1559 to 1570 and acting as the chaplain to Archbishop Whitgift. The previous archbishops, Matthew Parker, Edmund Grindal, and John Whitgift, had all been soteriologically Calvinist and staunchly Protestant, yet all had faced controversy over the conformity of ministers within the Church; over vestments; over the prayer books; and over the practice of preaching and prophesying conventicles, the latter of which had effectively ended Grindal's archbishopric. Bancroft is a significant divergence from this trajectory, less adamantly Calvinistic and more certainly anti-Puritan. Collinson traces this development in his character over the events and controversies of the latter sixteenth century.

Collinson deals with the Marprelate Tracts, a series of tracts written under a pseudonym that argued vehemently and satirically against the Episcopal government of the church. They advocated for establishing a Presbyterian system of ecclesiastical government modelled upon Geneva. These tracts, which had widespread support among Puritan-minded clergy, caused a stir in the Church which precipitated the eruption of a pamphleteering war. Bancroft was one of the foremost opponents of the tracts and their philosophy of church government. Yet this was the first attempt, or at least first significant attempt, at articulating a divine right form of Presbyterian government in England, i.e., that it was not just the best, most pragmatic, or even closest to the early church, but that it was discernibly ordained by God in the Scriptures. Until this point, no, or very few, Protestants had been arguing that Episcopacy was divinely ordained either. It was only in response to this Puritan attack that a defense along these lines was formulated by supporters of the status quo. Collinson argues that it is not clear, however, in all the opposition Bancroft gives, that he was convinced that Episcopacy was divinely ordained.

For Bancroft the issue was primarily one of conformity and obedience, and in this he stood in

the line of Heinrich Bullinger, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley, those who had become unassailable through their status as martyrs. This is seen when Collinson discusses the Hampton Court Conference, where in 1604 Puritan ministers met with bishops to dispute a list of contentions in front of the new King James I. Bancroft was infuriated with the trifling nature of some of the Puritans' concerns, even to the extent of irritating the King with his opposition. It is a fascinating point in the history of the Church in England, a moment where things could have gone in a variety of ways. Bancroft is largely responsible for the way events did play out, against the Puritan interest.

Written in Collinson's engaging prose and full of insights accumulated over a lifetime of study, this book is absorbing in its focus on the interplay of two factions within a church. As with the other titles reviewed above, the aim was to add depth and to deconstruct the simple narratives surrounding characters and events in the English Reformation. Collinson achieves this by fleshing out Bancroft and his opponents, the Puritans, so the reader gains an appreciation for the views and issues at the center of either side of the contemporary debates. This is a fitting final volume for one of the truly great historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Conclusion

The four books reviewed in this article differ in many ways: in aim, style, layout, and length. However, they also have similarities: each one seeks to move away from overtly praising the Reformation or being critical of it as have historians of past years. Discussion of theology does not take center stage in any of these books, and the relative merits or demerits of various doctrines are not examined. Instead, all these works are informed by current historical mores, the desire to advance past simple narratives and repetitions of familiar stories with typecast heroes and villains. As such, they look to overturn and reexamine past Reformation histories, to seek the overlooked and unappreciated

aspects of an event, a movement, or a person, or even groups of people. The express purpose is to give a more fully rounded and deeper understanding of the incredibly fraught and complex forces that brought about such a dramatic shift in society. In doing so, the modern historians reveal their distaste for the dominant historiographies that have emerged to reinforce certain groups within the contemporary church, whether it be Evangelical, broad church, or Anglo-Catholic. Instead of seeing a strand that leads from the early sixteenth century to any of these groups as the “rightful” inheritors of the Church in England, these histories show that there were multiple voices and parties within the church from the first days of Reformation theology being consumed within the shores of England. With each vying for power and containing its own inconstancies and idiosyncrasies, it was by no means clear who would emerge victorious. The identity of the Reformed church in England was still being shaped and undergoing change well into the seventeenth century and beyond, making the Reformation difficult to date. The debates remain as hotly contended as they have ever been. And, although historians may agree on these very broad points, there is still much disagreement, as well as areas that are benefiting from fresh appraisals, new research, and brand-new study. In this Reformation anniversary year, the history of the English Reformation is as vital and fascinating as it has ever been. ©

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Morality after Calvin

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by **David C. Noe**

Morality after Calvin: Theodore Beza’s Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics, by Kirk Summers. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 432 pages, \$94.10.

The *Oxford Studies in Historical Theology* series, formerly edited by the late David C. Steinmetz and now helmed by Richard A. Muller, has produced many fine volumes for the benefit of the church and academy. Scott Manetsch’s *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, Amy Nelson Burnett’s *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, and John Owen and *English Puritanism* by Crawford Gribben are just three noteworthy titles.² To these, Orthodox Presbyterian officers should quickly add a fourth, Kirk Summers’s *Morality after Calvin*. Released in the fall of 2016, the work is a *tour de force* of classical scholarship, historical and social research, philology, and theological reflection. It is also very edifying.

Before discussing some of the more interesting portions of the volume, I would like to begin with its final page. Here Summers writes:

Through the years some have characterized [Beza] as a sort of Reformed pope, a self-appointed tyrant of mores, the scowling, judgmental face on the Genevan landscape. This reading of Beza seems superficial, however, when we take into account the richness of his ethical convictions. His confident belief in

1 http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=657&issue_id=129.

2 Scott Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

the possibility of mankind's renewal through the recovery of a certain divinely sanctioned mode of life shaped every facet of his ministry: the controversies, the correspondence and scholarship, the sermons and poems, the daily interactions in Geneva are all expressions of this one central hope. (378)

It is this central insight—that most previous judgments have been superficial, ignoring Beza's commitment to divine revelation—that animates the whole of Summers's work in its careful research, sympathetic expression, and conclusive proofs. In many ways this volume, with its core observation, is a companion to the parallel resuscitation of Calvin's life and work, by placing them both in their proper historical context, that has been recently effected by Richard Muller (*The Unaccommodated Calvin*), Scott Manetsch (*Calvin's Company of Pastors*), and Bruce Gordon (*John Calvin: A Biography*), among others.³ And as students of Beza know, such a resuscitation is long overdue.

The introduction and chapter 1, "Cato, God, and Natural Law," set the stage by explaining to the reader the character of the Roman orator and statesman Cato the Elder (239–149 BC). Appointed to the constitutionally established office of *ensor* of morals, it was Cato's responsibility to conform Roman society to the traditions of their ancestors. In a clever appropriation and imitation, Beza, as a seasoned poet, published his *Cato Censorius Christianus* in 1591, a collection of poems modeled after Greek and Roman precedents. This collection was intended to teach morals by lampooning various vices with incisive wit and vituperation. A host of different kinds of men of bad behavior come under scrutiny, including the proud (*In Superbos*, 82), the ambitious (*In Ambitiosos*, p. 93), flatterers (*In Assentatores*, 139), the

³ Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bruce Gordon, *John Calvin: A Biography* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009).

idle (*In Otiosos*, 165), the garrulous (*In Garrulos*, p. 193), and many more. For representations of Beza's flawlessly executed poems, presented in a variety of meters both familiar (elegiac couplet, *In Adulteros*, p. 270) and recondite (iambic distich, *In Epicureos*, p. 323), Summers draws from Beza's *Poemata* (two editions, 1597 and 1599) and the *Emblemata* (1580). He also gives properly idiomatic, and in places compelling, English translations of these gems.

As Summers moves through his various topics, "An Ethos of Listening" (ch. 2), "Living Sincerely" (ch. 3), "The Execution of One's Calling" (ch. 4), "Usury and the Rhetoric of Mutuality" (ch. 5), "Sanctifying Physical Relationships" (ch. 6), "Outliers" (ch. 7), and "A Retrospective View of Life's Journey" (ch. 8), it is clear that his erudition is profound and does full justice to his subject. Take page 86, footnote 17, for example, in which Summers cites Beza's translation of James and 1 Peter from his *Annotationes* to the New Testament. Here he notes how Beza has replaced from his 1582 version the word *modestia* (which he construes as "modesty") with *summissione* ("submissiveness") in the final edition of 1598. And Summers notes that the concept was present in Aquinas, *Summa* 2,1, q.84. This depth of research and deftness with primary sources is, in the reviewer's experience, unparalleled in works of this type (note 38 on page 94 is an additional, shining example). I hardly need to mention that Summers's skill with French, German, and Greek are equally impressive.

Although the work is very even in quality and range of ambition, some chapters stand out more than others for their interest. In chapter 4 on vocation, Summers develops the interesting point that Beza and his contemporaries among the Reformed were eager almost above all else to redeem the time:

On the flipside of the vice of idleness one finds the virtue of punctuality, which Engamare views as an original contribution of the Reformed movement. For example, Mathurin Cordier's pedagogical treatise *Colloques* emphasizes the need for punctuality in the

careful use of time, as did the keen interest in the ringing of bells, clocks, and timekeeping around Geneva. (210)

Nuggets like this abound throughout the lengthy work, and add a great deal of liveliness to Summers's central argument.

Chapter 5 on usury, for example, is especially helpful in understanding the times and the issues. Summers sets the stage well by taking us back to Ambrose and even before that to the Cappadocian fathers. On page 220 he explains the Ambrosian stance toward moneylending: "a loan is evil that aims at interest," and shortly thereafter tells us how the Cappadocian fathers din moneylenders for their hypocrisy (232).⁴ Their "giving has the appearance of helping but in reality has the purpose of enriching the giver at the expense of the receiver." From that point Summers develops his argument in the Genevan context, noting especially an apparent discrepancy between Beza and his mentor Calvin on this point. While Beza was (surprisingly?) more stringent than Calvin about acceptable rates of interest, Summers explains this as a consequence of the circumstances in which the former found himself:

The historical realities in Geneva during Beza's lifetime should mitigate our understanding of his seemingly hardline stance. In practice, Beza did not prevent a market economy from moving forward in Geneva. He and the Company of Pastors understood that Geneva's financial system required the availability of credit; they were willing to accept this so long as the rate was measured and balanced against the needs of the most vulnerable citizens. When Beza arrived in Geneva in 1559, the rate of interest in private loans already stood around 6.6 percent by law, which he in no way condemned or tried to overturn. (240)

4 His citation of Ambrose from *De Tobia* 3.9–11 as a "for example" gives us the impression that he considers Ambrose a Cappadocian, though I'm sure he does not.

Though canvassing a wide array of sociological and historical sources both primary and secondary for the development of his argument, Summers goes beyond generalities and uses a number of particular cases to maintain his central point of Beza's unified vision and consistency. The story of Nicholas Colladon, for example, is presented as an illustration of the flexibility Beza could demonstrate while still pursuing his principles. Colladon left Geneva because he thought the 10 percent rate of interest that Beza supported was too high, and because Beza had forced his hand. Both men were given the opportunity to present their case to the city council, and Beza—as in most things—won out. Although his defense of a 10 percent rate of interest may seem contradictory when read in light of his attack on usurers in the Cato poem (*In Foeneratores*), Summers shows that this is primarily a matter of genre and circumstance: "Beza represents his Cato censuring sinners, not scrutinizing the problem of usury with the subtleties of scholastic reasoning" (242).

Chapter 6, "Sanctifying Physical Relationships," is one of the shorter treatments and yet satisfying in its thoroughness. Here as well Summers deals with particulars and relies heavily on the recent work of Robert Kingdon and Philip Benedict, as well as the nineteenth-century efforts of Paul Henry. He also gives us an extensive look at the work of one of Beza's most important contemporaries, the pastor and jurist Lambert Daneau. Daneau's *Ethices Christianae* was more influential than any work of Beza himself for Reformed thinking on practical ethics, and Daneau's inclusion serves to bring this important scholar to a broader audience.⁵ Throughout the chapter, Summers is keen to demonstrate Beza's highlighting of the natural law basis of the need for fidelity and monogamy, and how fornicators (*scortatores*) were considered "dangerous to the human race as a whole, because they ignore the institutional order and mutual faith through which God gives increase" (277). Earlier in the same chapter,

5 Summers does the same for Simon Goulart (1543–1628), whose ideas are carefully and responsibly assessed.

Summers tells us of the case of Jean Bietrix, who in 1557 sought divorce from his patrician wife Marie de la Maisonneuve. Though they had been married only three years at that point, Jean knew from

numerous witnesses [that] Marie [had] committed adultery with a servant named Rollet des Noyers from the house of the wealthy Mme. de Chamoix. The Consistory and Council exerted much effort on prying these two apart, and the two countered with equally impassioned efforts to continue their communication. In the trial dossier are letters that had been discovered in which the two can be seen engaging in an inversion of social roles, with Marie playing subservient and Rollet assuming the position of master. In some letters she complains about her husband to Rollet. Even though there were lingering doubts about sexual misconduct, her disobedience toward her husband and subversion of domestic order seemed to be evidence enough of her guilt. She was sentenced [*sic*] to imprisonment for life. (265)

Summers is careful to present such cases in a way sympathetic to differing perspectives on such a practice, and not through the insular lenses of twenty-first century prejudices. In other words, he shows admirable restraint in presenting the issues evenhandedly: Beza is neither blamed for every questionable decision in which he had a part nor exonerated blithely through special pleading.

In the chapter on “Outliers” (ch. 6), we receive a thorough explanation of Beza’s attitude and practical approach toward Geneva’s societal ills of monasticism, gluttony, drunkenness, and other persistent problems. Summers describes persons beset with such woes as

those who abuse their bodies and dull their capacity for reason through the excess consumption of wine. They give themselves over to the appetites within them, like animals or something even more monstrous and demeaning, and ignore their potential to share in the

divine image. A more dangerous segment of this class is the Jesuit monks. (294)

The discussion of the relationship between Beza and the Jesuit Counter-Reformation movement as a whole (306–22), and that of the Jesuit pilgrim to Geneva Luca Pinelli (306–10), is itself worth the price of the book.

Though Beza is the work’s central figure, and therefore his perspective on ethics and their cultivation in a society leaving several hundred years of Roman Catholic control is featured, the reader can also gain much knowledge of Daneau and Goulart (already mentioned), Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and a host of other Swiss Reformers of that time.

Before offering a slight word of criticism and concluding, as well as mentioning a few errors, this reviewer wishes to highlight a remarkable example of Summers’s skill as a translator. On page 317, fn 64, the Latin word *Satan* is separated by seven lines from the personal pronoun *tu* with which it is used in apposition. Summers astutely places them together in his English construal for maximum clarity and effect. A lesser translator would never have been able to accomplish such a feat in a way that is both true to the sense and pleasing to the ear. And it is important to note that this is not the main point of the book, i.e., translation of Beza. But Summers’s work here aptly suits the larger argument he is making.

Nevertheless, there are places in the work where Summers’s profound philological erudition likely exceeds the interest and ability of his readers. For example, when Summers is discussing (342–43) the proper understanding of the phrase *Ah! quam* in Beza’s poem on the hen that produced fifteen chicks (itself a moving comparison of Beza and his unproductive old age to the chicken that surprisingly still lays eggs), those without extensive training in Latin and the tools of philology will soon feel bogged down. Similarly, an argument could easily be made that this work should have been divided into two smaller volumes: one on Beza as poet, theologian of ethics, and continuator of Calvin, and a second on less well-known figures

like Daneau and Goulart, and the general social climate of Geneva. It is tempting to think that the scope of Summers's ambition and skill exceeded editorial restraint.

In closing, that the reader may come away with a good understanding of the importance of this book and the author's skill in its execution, we return to the conclusion, worth quoting at length:

Beza's moral indignation is unambiguous and profound. This book has sought to uncover the ideas giving shape to it. What ethical theory organizes and sustains this indignation? What gives it internal cohesion? As we noted in the introduction, the editors of Beza's correspondence describe his ethics as a "delicate and little-known subject." Their statement assumes that a set of guiding principles, or what Beza called "heavenly wisdom" lies behind the flurry of disciplinarian moralizing activity at Geneva in this period. Numerous studies have demonstrated the practical mechanisms at work: they have examined, among other things, the functioning of the Reformed consistories, the sociological and political forces behind discipline at Geneva and elsewhere, and the struggles between ecclesiastical and civil authorities throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. The studies have provided a valuable foundation for our own. Our investigation into the theological and ethical underpinnings of the disciplinary activities of Beza and his colleagues have led us to ask a different set of questions of the evidence available to us. Driving their discussions about discipline and morality are not political theory per se, but a well-conceived theoretical rationale based on their reading of God's Word. This rationale informs everything these reformed leaders do. If they harbored other motives for what they were trying to accomplish, they never express them, either openly or by implication. (362–63)

This is a well-researched and charitable conclusion. We ought not to read the lives of these men through rose-colored spectacles. But because

we understand that they were not congenitally more stupid than we, and indeed in Beza's case and that of most of the men of that generation their learning surpasses our own by a laughable margin, we should have the courtesy of saying nothing but good about the dead (*nil nisi bonum dicendum est*) except when the evidence clearly demands a pointed critique. In the case of Beza, contrary to many years of slander, it does not.

Readers of this review will likely come away thinking that there is almost nothing but good to say about Summers's work and that they should promptly acquire a copy for themselves and read it. That is the correct conclusion.

However, a number of small errors mar the work, most of which are the fault of the editor. These include: page 85, fn 13, Apoc. 6. c. [*sic*] 10; page 126, fn 7, *imagniariae* for *imaginariae*; page 133, fn 24, "*Peccatum Linguae* the and . . ."; page 134, "But Daneau also follows denounces dutiful lying . . ."; page 159, fn 79, *scrarum* for *sacrarum*; page 178, 42, *furest* for *fures*; page 268, "Nevertheless, Beza adds, the Pharisees were not asking about divorces on account of adultery specifically, nor was Christ responding to that; they were asking whether divorced [*sic*] was permissible no matter what the reason"; page 270, "Since adultery deserves death, in God's law, it follows that adultery can be used used [*sic*] to dissolve a marriage"; page 333, "In reality, the [*sic*] say, the so-called creation continues on as it always has, and God never comes; he is not paying attention to it at all"; page 358, "He therefore throws himself on the mercy of the omnipotent, omniscient [*sic*] God, praying that he will forgive his mistakes and direct his future."

Other errors, as they concern matters of Latin-ity, translation, and comprehension, are probably to be laid at the author's feet. These include: page 81, fn 3, *agistis* for *egistis*; page 88, fn 26, irregular comma placement before and after *humilitas*; page 97, fn 48, *potuisse* wrongly translated as a present tense, i.e., 'can'; page 257, fn 116, ἀπόγραθειν for ἀπόγραφειν, while *apografein* is in the text on page 256; page 350, fn 30, Summers quotes from Beza, *Tractationes Theologicae*, 15: "quoniam electionem necessario consequitur fides Christum apprehen-

dens, per quem iustificati et sanctificati.” This he translates in the body of the text as “. . . for a faith apprehending Christ necessarily follows election, through which we are justified and sanctified.” He has misconstrued the antecedent of “quem” as “fides,” which is a feminine noun. The actual antecedent is the masculine noun “Christum.” This changes the meaning somewhat. ☺

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1. *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.
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