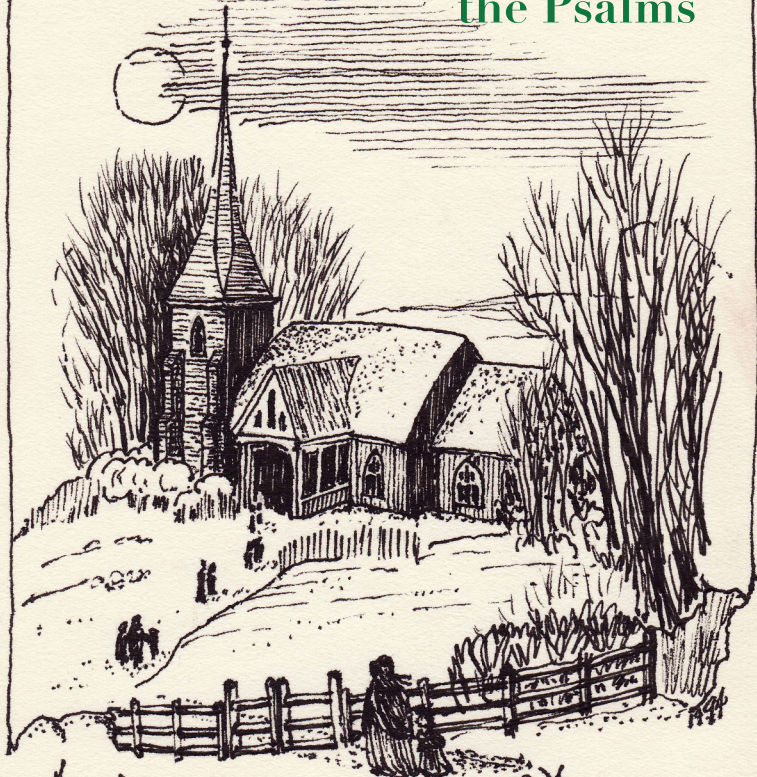


Ordained Servant Preaching  
December 2024  
the Psalms



Soli Deo Gloria

# Ordained Servant Online

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### CURRENT ISSUE: PREACHING THE PSALMS

December 2024

#### From the Editor

Poetry is always on my mind. It is a special treat to have Craig Troxel write about poetry and the heart in preaching the Psalms. As a former pastor of two congregations, presently a professor of homiletics, and a lover of good literature, his thoughts should be very instructive for preachers. He promises a follow-up article on preaching Christ from the Psalms.

I offer my reflections of poetry, poets, and historical theology, “How Did You Become a Poet?” and the way both are constructed on the history of their respective disciplines and craft.

John Mallin gives us the second and last part of “The Clerk and His Work.” He has served as stated clerk of the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York for more than twenty years. He covers the work of clerks of sessions, presbyteries, and general assemblies. This should serve as a helpful manual for years to come.

Bryan Estelle reviews Marilynne Robinson’s bestselling new book *Reading Genesis* in his review article “A Beautiful Mind and Pen at work Reading the Book of Genesis.” Here is a Pulitzer Prize winning American author (*Gilead*, a novel, 2004) taking Genesis seriously. This is a very illuminating review.

Shane Lems reviews *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* by Jonathan Haidt. This is a disturbing book on the dangers of the “phone-based childhood.” It is also a good example of why Christians should read widely outside of our Christian circles.

Mark Green reviews another gorgeous anthology by Leland Ryken: *A Treasury of Nature: Illustrated Poetry, Prose, and Praise*. Ryken’s choice of poetry along with his sagacious commentary gives us another treasure of his literary legacy. The illustrations and artwork chosen by the editors are superb. This would make a wonderful Christmas gift.

Our poem this month is by a favorite, Robert Herrick (1591–1674): “To My Sweet Saviour.” Educated at Cambridge University, Herrick was mentored by Ben Jonson. Herrick became the pastor of the Anglican church in Devonshire. Literary critic Harold Bloom observes that unlike the Metaphysical poets like John Donne, “Herrick charmingly transmutes his classical models—Horace, Catullus, the Greek Anthology—into a Devonshire pastoral poetry.”<sup>1</sup> He was also somewhat unique in publishing his sacred devotional poetry (*Noble Numbers*, 1648) separately from his secular love poetry (*Hesperides*, 1648).

The cover is my drawing for my 1994 Christmas card—a whimsical view of an antique

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 157.

Christmas, when worship trumped consuming.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

# Servant Thoughts

## How Did You Become a Poet?

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

When asked “How did you become a poet?” Robert Frost answered, “I followed a procession down the ages.”<sup>1</sup> As I thought about the procession I have followed as a poet, I had to ask myself who my favorite poet is. In many ways it is an impossible question to answer, because I have so many favorites based on various criteria and influences. For sacred poets, George Herbert would be a favorite, then John Donne; and for contemporary poets, who are both sacred and profane (meaning poets whose subjects are secular), T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden. There are dozens of others. Shakespeare’s sonnets are in a unique category and were studied well by my all around favorite poet, Robert Frost, the consummate New England poet. We share many things as New Englanders, but his exclusive love of New Hampshire seals the deal for me. From a historical, cultural, and natural perspective (not political) it is the Shire for me.

Oddly, he was born in San Francisco, becoming a New Englander at age eleven. I was born in Boston and became a New Hampshireite at age two. He was not a believer, but as a classicist he revered the King James Bible for its literary and oral excellence. He was deeply affected by both its content and beautiful Elizabethan cadences. He was a philosophical dualist, always sensing something beyond what we see. His poetry was outwardly accessible, unlike so much modern poetry, because it is couched in the rural realities of early twentieth-century New England, especially New Hampshire. Hence, he is the secular or profane bard with whom I most resonate and seek to emulate. In the end, the exclusively profane Frost and the exclusively sacred Herbert have made excellent mentors.

Frost believed in structure and the influence of the history of poetry. I discovered both of these qualities years ago in the first poem of his first published book, *A Boy’s Will* (1913 in England, 1915 in the United States). “Into My Own” is a Shakespearean sonnet with an allusion to the Bard’s Sonnet 116 in line 4, “unto the edge of doom.” Frost looked beyond the visible. In that sense he is just like me. E. e. cummings was the first to catch my interest in poetry after a childhood of hearing my father’s repetition of lines from Shakespeare’s plays and the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Just recently I came across a poem by Cummings that I would have used for my Thanksgiving issue of *Ordained Servant* but for copyright problems: “65” XAIPE (1950), the first line of which is, “i thank You God for most this amazing.” The final quatrain reads:

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Morrison, *Robert Frost: A Pictorial Chronicle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 6.



how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any—lifted from the no  
of all nothing—human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?<sup>2</sup>

His juxtaposing of words and their use in odd ways assures the reader's attention. Yet unlike much modern poetry his unusual wording yields meaning. This stanza nicely encapsulates the flavor of Cummings's last book, titled *XAIPE*, meaning rejoice or greetings in ancient Greek. Paul uses this word almost thirty times in his letters.

Cummings and my father's recitations paved the way for me to love the sound of well-ordered words. Then as Frost, "I followed a procession down the ages." Several years ago at Shiloh Institute, after I had taught on the importance of appreciating and reading poetry for preaching, one of the students asked me to read one of his poems. It was doggerel, but I did not tell him so. Instead, I asked him who his favorite poets were. He answered that he did not read poetry, he only wrote it. I encouraged him to start following the "procession down the ages."

I am reminded that we embark on a similar journey in theology, and perhaps any intellectual discipline. Theology cannot be done without historical theology. Our world of expressive individualism has spawned the dangerous idea that we should create unique spontaneous poetry or theology, spun out of the whole cloth of our imaginations. But unless our imaginations are filled with the best poetry and theology of the past, our creations will be of little value.

In closing, let me recommend several books that exemplify the "procession down the ages." In historical theology, Crawford Gribben's *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*<sup>3</sup> is a gem, providing a different perspective on Owen, appreciative without being hagiographic. Tracing the influences on Owen's theology, Gribben provides a rich picture, including an initial powerful influence from Thomas Aquinas.

For poetry, the 2015 two-volume biography by Robert Crawford of T. S. Eliot is a superb exploration of the influences on Eliot's poetry and criticism, ranging far beyond poetry itself. This is especially true of the first volume, *Young Eliot*.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, for exploring the literary influences on Frost, William Pritchard's *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* provides a thorough and fascinating account.<sup>5</sup>

I hope these suggestions will help my readers to enjoy investigating the "procession down the ages" in theology and poetry, and many other disciplines.

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<sup>2</sup> e. e. cummings, *Poems 1923–1954* (Harcourt, Brace, 1954), 464.

<sup>3</sup> Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford University Press), 2016. See Darryl Hart's review in *Ordained Servant* 26 (2017): 121–23. *Ordained Servant Online* (August–September 2017) [https://opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=643](https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=643).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to the Wasteland* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> William Pritchard, *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 1984).

# Servant Word

## Poetry and the Heart in Preaching the Psalms

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by A. Craig Troxel

I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure. . . . Certainly it is my desire that there shall be *as many poet rhetoricians as possible*, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily. . . . Therefore I beg of you that at my request (if that be of any weight) you will *urge your young people to be diligent in the study of poetry* and rhetoric.

—Martin Luther, “Letter to Eoban Hess, 29 March 1523”<sup>1</sup>

A minister of the Word aims for the heart no matter what Scriptural text he is preaching. But he is never more conscious of this as when he handles biblical poetry. All poets insist upon making an impression—one that is to be felt. They draw from an ample collection of devices and images to provoke the imagination. Lyrics compress language in one stanza, while metaphors expand horizons in the next. Poetry sets the heart on fire.

Divine poetry goes even further. Its revelations dive as deep as the human heart can bear. Words of flesh and blood are authorized to bear the “living and active” word, which pierces and divides unseen things within. What first appears in swaddling clothes proves to shroud eternal truth.

Application is always a challenge, but with poetry, the test begins with exposition. The most compressed, stylized, symbolic, metaphorical language in all of Scripture causes even the most experienced preacher to be confronted by his literary limits and quietly muse, “Who is sufficient for these things?”

Nevertheless, the “approved worker” must “rightly divide” all the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), including the one third that is shaped poetically. It is a sobering stewardship. Yet rarely does the preacher’s task admit such beauty or permit him to pull at the intimate strings of a pilgrim’s heart as when preaching poetry, especially the psalms. His task is to rise to this challenge and handle these elegant forms with care, using every God-given aid to take aim at his quarry, the hearts of God’s people.

### Our Aim: The Heart

We aim at the heart in preaching because man’s entire inner self is governed from this one point of unity. The heart is the fountainhead of every motive, the seat of every passion, the center of every thought, and the spring of conscience.<sup>2</sup> It is the “hidden control-center” in every person.<sup>3</sup> All of your inner life is bound with it and from it “flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). As Abraham Kuyper stated, the heart is “that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity.”<sup>4</sup> It is the helm of the ship that sets the bearing

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<sup>1</sup> in *Luthers Briefwechsel*, in D. Martin Luthers Werke, 120 vols. (Böhlhaus, 1883–2009), 3:50. As quoted in *The Beauty and Power of Biblical Exposition*, 153.

<sup>2</sup> O. R. Brandon, “Heart,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Ellwell (Baker, 1984), 499.

<sup>3</sup> John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Eerdmans, 1989), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (Eerdmans, 1943), 20.

your life will follow. Everything in your life—whether it is your treasure, inner beauty, repentance, faith, service, obedience, faithfulness, worship, love, daily walk, or seeking the Lord—all of it is to be done “with all your heart.”<sup>5</sup> The preacher must not aim at anything less.

The word heart is different from the other words in the Bible that describe our interior life (like “soul,” “spirit,” “conscience,” or “the inner man”). Within the unity of the heart there resides a triune complexity of functions: the mind, the desires, and the will. That is to say, the heart includes what we *know* (which is our intellect, knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination); what we *love* (what we desire, want, seek, crave, yearn for, feel); and what we *choose* (our decision-making—whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong, whether we will say “yes” or “no”).<sup>6</sup> The heart “combines the complex interplay of intellect, sensibility, and will.”<sup>7</sup> This threefold scheme of the heart (mind, desires, will) was foundational to the Puritans who understood the importance of preachers aiming for the heart. The word “heart” in Scripture is simple enough to reflect our inner unity and comprehensive enough to capture our inner threefold complexity.

Preaching to the heart means preaching to *all* of it—the heart’s mind, desires, and will. A preacher must bear in mind that the heart’s threefold complexity does not eclipse the heart’s unity. What the heart knows, desires, and chooses are in constant, mutual interaction. Every function of the heart is inseparably related to the rest of the heart’s capacity. We are not capable of dispassionate reasoning. The health of our mind is connected to the health of our desires, just as it is joined to the resolution of the will. The mind, desires, and will work in tandem. It is the way God made us. The poetry he gave us makes that clear.

## Our Terrain: The Psalms

“Just as we taste food with the mouth,  
so we taste the psalm with the heart.”

- *Bernard of Clairvaux*

When discussing the genre of poetry there are a variety of categories one can use. Those of *form*, *thought*, and *image* will guide our reflections here.

## Form

When it comes to form or structure, a poem reminds us that it is not just what is said, but the way it is said. Accordingly, a psalm should be read in the way that it is constructed. Most modern translations print the Psalms with the structure that helps us recognize them as poems. Setting a psalm into verses, strophes, and stanzas displays the lyrical symmetry that gives the psalm shape. It is not a mash-up of phrases. It is a sculpture.

Psalms are structured artistically. Some are arranged *acrostically*, in which the first letter of each colon (Ps. 111), line (Ps. 34), strophe (Ps. 37) or stanza (Ps. 119) is in the successive order of the Hebrew alphabet. Some psalms have a *symmetrical* structure, as in the case of a *chiasmus*—where phrasing or ideas are marked by matched repetition. The main point may lie at

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 6:21; Luke 6:45; 1 Pet. 3:4; Deut. 30:2, 10; 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 8:48; Jer. 24:7; Prov. 3:5–6; Deut. 10:12; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 119:34; 1 Kings 2:4; Ps. 86:12; Zeph. 3:14; Deut. 10:12; Matt. 22:37; Isa. 38:3; Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron. 15:12; Jer. 29:13; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 6:5; Pss. 19:14; 49:3; 77:6; 139:23; Prov. 15:14, 28; Matt. 5:19; Luke 2:19; 6:45; Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:18; 4:18; Heb. 4:12; 8:10

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Zondervan, 2007), 225.

the center of the symmetry (Ps. 22), or it may be repeated in the opening and closing thoughts (Ps. 1). Some psalms are stylized by a *cyclical* form, which repeats one or more themes (Ps. 25).

Although these forms permeate the Psalter, they are unwieldy in the pulpit. How does saying “this psalm is acrostic in the Hebrew” do the listener any practical good? It may come off as elitist or nerdy, but rarely as helpful. The same is true of chiasms. It is a rare day that drawing attention to this structure will benefit the congregation. It would be better to trace the thought of the psalm in an unpretentious way and simply say, “the psalm closes with the same thought it began with” or “look how these same ideas are repeated, only in opposite order.” Even so, whenever we can highlight the aesthetic construction of Scripture to underline its supreme dignity and beauty, we are not laboring in vain. Such moments give the people of God another reason to “look up” with thankfulness to the master designer.

What some have characterized as *the* distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetry is its parallel structure—in which a phrase is repeated (Ps. 19:7, 8), contradicted (Ps. 1:6; 25:3), or explained (Pss. 23:1; 125:2) by the following line. It is “the same in the other” as C.S. Lewis puts it.<sup>8</sup> The wonderful advantage of this feature of Hebrew poetry is that it “survives in translation.”<sup>9</sup> The preacher can readily show how successive lines nuance the earlier line. He can explain how they advance the thought—either by addition, contrast, or specification.<sup>10</sup> After all, the point is to trace the idea no matter which way it develops. A preacher does well to pause and draw his congregation’s appreciative eyes to the sculpted text. Beauty is inevitably the fascination of a curious believer.

The phrasing of Hebrew poetry is also shaped by various devices. Psalms use *alliteration*, in which the same consonant sound is repeated, or *assonance*, in which the same vowel sounds are repeated in discernable ways. Yet here again, a reader must be acquainted with the Hebrew language to detect these features. One feature that transcends the original language is *personification*, where something inanimate takes on human characteristics. For example, the creation is often directed to praise its Creator, as only humankind can do. The “trees of the forest” are commanded to “sing for joy” (Ps. 96:12). The “mountains skipped like rams” (Ps. 114:4, 6). And the heavens are to “bow” (Ps. 144:5). These expressions are readily accessible to the reader, and the preacher can single out their presence and their purpose. God enlists his creation and creatures to carry out his purposes—whether it is raining fire and brimstone; sending locusts, frogs, and hail; causing the sun to stand still; making the sea divide and then drown; or closing the mouths of lions. The psalmists regularly summon creation to prompt God’s image-bearer to give the Creator his due, whether with adoration or allegiance. Where the Proverbs would shame a lazy man to look down and consider the ant (Prov. 6:6), the Psalms inspire a man to look up and consider his God (Ps. 8:3). The psalms dare the heart to soar and the faithful preacher should not get in the way.

## Thought

The first rule, as is true with all poetry, is to read the psalm through without stopping. The second rule is to do it again, only this time reading it out loud.<sup>11</sup> It is better to get a sense of the lay of the land before choosing your spots for mining. The psalm was composed as a complete unit of thought, and it was meant to be heard that way. Isolating a single verse or section from the wider flow of thought stops us from hearing the psalm’s wider patterns and hinders us from

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<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958; reprint, HarperOne, 2017), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dan G. McCartney, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (P&R, 2002), 216.

<sup>11</sup> Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (1940; reprint, Touchstone, 1972), 229–30.

appreciating its overall unity. The poet asks us for patience, since his art is adapted for appreciation and contemplation.

I think of this initial stage as listening for the melody. We recognize and remember a song by its melody, which is usually the song's main theme. The same is true with the Psalms (which after all, are poems put to tunes). Each psalm has its own voice and message that one needs to hear. Eventually the melody emerges with more and more clarity so that you can "hum the tune" of it when you recall it. As soon as we begin to detect this melody or theme, then a second task confronts us. We need to reflect on how the melody of our psalm connects to the wider themes of the Bible.

The great themes of the Bible are large rivers, which are fed by a variety of smaller tributaries. Your psalm is one of those smaller streams that probably supplies one of the Bible's great themes—like creation, redemption, covenant, the land, the temple, the king, human suffering and persecution, the faithfulness of God, the hope of future salvation; or perhaps God and his titles, attributes, works, and providence. Your psalm is like a phrase of notes that make a single impression and then contribute to the richer and longer song.

One can link to these larger biblical themes by way of "echoes" and "references." An echo looks back, while a reference looks ahead. Does your psalm echo (repeat or answer) another significant Old Testament text or event? An echo is more than another passage that happens to have a similar word or idea. It reflects a momentous historical event or a conspicuous passage. "The sea" in Psalm 18:15 refers to Israel's crossing the parted Red Sea, not to every verse that mentions water. A reference has in view those places in the New Testament that quote or allude to your psalm (only twenty-nine psalms are not). The real challenge here is deducing how credible an allusion is. What may first appear as an "obvious" allusion may ultimately prove to have flimsy evidence to support it. While upon further study some less obvious connections show themselves to be quite credible.

The final task regarding the thought of the psalm is discerning its flow. Here the task is tracing the direction of thought in your psalm and following its path to the main or final idea. The poet has made specific choices about what to say and how to say it, and all of it is meant to convey a thought. A drawing, painting, photograph, or sculpture is fashioned with beauty, but its creator is still sending a message. Similarly, poetry is stylized with grace and symbolism, but it is still telling a story. It has a point, and it does so by sustained argument. Even the most decorated psalm carries its main idea to a conclusion.<sup>12</sup> Whether its structure is linear (Ps. 73) or loopy (Ps. 25), your task is to find it and follow it to its intended end. An important marker of the success of your sermon will be whether your listeners can trace the psalm's line of thought after you have preached it.

Discerning the melody, echoes, references, and the flow of thought all require our people to engage with their minds. John Flavel wrote, "The mind is to the heart as the door is to the house. What comes into the heart comes through the mind."<sup>13</sup> The preacher does not apologize for asking his people to think. The Bible (especially the Old Testament) teaches that the heart is the seat of our intellectual abilities—our planning, ideas, meditation, imagination, convictions, and wisdom.<sup>14</sup> How does a preacher not appeal to a congregant's mind when explaining the context and meaning of an ancient text before bringing him the significance? A sermon does not always need to "begin" with the mind, but it must never finish before making it a port of call.

## Imagery

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<sup>12</sup> Gordan D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2014), 173.

<sup>13</sup> John Flavel, *Christ and His Threefold Office* (Reformation Heritage, 2021), 79.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress, 1975), 47.



C.S. Lewis wrote, “Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood . . .”<sup>15</sup> Figures of speech not only awaken the imagination, they also spur the desires (affections) of the heart. The language seems “intentionally emotive.”<sup>16</sup> With metaphor, God takes the dead bones of concrete things and breathes life into them to make them walk straight into our hearts.

The psalms use an array of images that touch the believer’s emotional life—feelings like anger, joy, envy, rage, anxious fear, longing, sorrow, anguish, despair, and others. One such desire is the intensity of spiritual longing, which is expressed in the language of “thirst.” Psalm 42 begins, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The pitiful sight of an animal gasping in its desperate search for water portrays the worshiper who is in the spiritual wilderness, despairing and feeling far from God. The absence of communion has him distressed and frenzied. He is starting to panic.

Psalm 42 starts similarly, as David’s thirsty soul dwells in a grim dry place—far away from God’s presence in Jerusalem. Then, abruptly, David addresses his spiritual depression with a completely opposite set of images (in vv. 6–10). Now he hears the roar and turmoil of a waterfall. Like a piece of driftwood, he is cast into the turbulent water and is at the mercy of falling water as it cascades over boulders and rocks. Then the current takes him and spills him into a larger and deeper body of water, where wave over wave comes over his head. He is sinking. First, he was dehydrating, and now he is drowning. Spiritual desertion feels like that. One moment you seek God without satisfaction and the next you are completely overwhelmed and bogged down. What a picturesque way to appeal to God with, “Why have you forgotten me?”

Often insult is added to injury as David’s enemies taunt him with words like, “Where is your God” (Ps. 42:3, 10)? Their ridicule worsens his agony of spiritual desertion. They speak as those “who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows” (Ps. 64:3; cf. 57:4). They are the one whose “speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Ps. 55:21). These cutting words bring deeper wounds when they come from “my close friend in whom I trusted” and “my companion, my familiar friend” (Ps. 41:9; 55:13). Anyone who has been betrayed feels the edge of these words.

Thankfully such despondency is answered by the assurance of God’s promised comfort, whose words are “sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10). When we turn to him in our time of need, he invites us to “drink from the river of your [his] delights” (Ps. 36:8). He is the shepherd who is with us, leading us, guiding us, anointing us, and restoring us, so that our cup overflows (Ps. 23). Our troubles fade when we read that our sovereign God “rides in the heavens . . . on the wings of the wind,” he “makes the clouds his chariot” (Ps. 68:33; 104:3). The images lift the heart to the heights, where God is.

Moreover, we are assured of comfort when we seek refuge in God’s strength and protection. Psalm 18:2 says, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” David produces a cluster of images that highlight the security God provides to all who flee to him. The same word picture appears in Psalm 31. David goes to the rock, because this is what he needs the Lord to be. David once fled from Saul to the stronghold of Adullam and the rock in the Desert of Maon (1 Sam. 22:1; 23:24). But those places of refuge pale in comparison to his true source of security, which is found in the nearness of his God. Like David, our heart finds peace in the Lord’s sure protection.

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 3

<sup>16</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 170.

Interestingly, the same metaphor (rock) can have a different nuance. For instance, David asks God, “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Ps. 61:2). David seeks something more than bare protection. Safety is more than having solid footing. It also means being lifted to a high vantage point, above the fray of the battle, where no one can reach you. Here is true comfort for the embattled soul. God not only lifts you out of the miry bog, but he has also placed you where you could not be more secure (Ps. 40:2).

The same idea can be conveyed by an alternative metaphor. Often the Psalmist asks God if he can “take refuge in the shadow of your wings” (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4; cf. Ruth 2:12). Here is shelter, but it is of a different kind. Whereas the rock conveys the safety of solid strength, finding shelter under God’s wings suggests a safety that is more personal and intimate. It is the difference between what is inanimate and what is alive. One is cold, the other is warm—especially when you consider the maternal insinuation of the metaphor. This seems to be Christ’s intent when he tells Jerusalem, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings” (Matt. 23:37). Feeling the safety and comfort that comes from your mother’s arms wrapped around you is different than the security of a six inch concrete slab under the house. There is a peaceful warmth that rises in one’s heart with the assurance of being enclosed by the “everlasting arms” of God (Deut. 33:27). This is the Psalms at their best—when they reach into the chest of a believer and bring the assurance of God’s enduring peace.

## Conclusion

Augustine wrote that “an eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight, and to persuade . . . to teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph.”<sup>17</sup> This is another way of saying that the preacher must appeal to the whole heart—to the right-thinking mind and a “well-directed love” and a right will.<sup>18</sup> The human heart and dynamic rhetoric of biblical poetry is a match made in heaven. The shape, form, and metaphorical language of the psalter run free in the thought of the awakened heart, inflaming its desires and spurring its courage.

Preaching the Psalms to the hearts of God’s people does this. It reaches into every corner of their heart—testing their thoughts, confronting their desires, and challenging their wills. Anyone who sits under such expositions will feel the effect of the Word of God as a hammer, sword, or fire and sense its comfort as a salve or taste its sweetness as honey. If preaching confronts all the heart, then its hearers will sometimes feel assured, consoled, and at rest; while at other times they will feel exposed, disrupted, and uncomfortable. Why should faithful preaching from the Psalms accomplish anything less? Yes, it is true that no minister of the Word feels equal to this task. But God has given us every advantage to do it, and to do it well. The variety of forms, devices, echoes, references, images, and symbols provide a plethora of tools that are within reach of the preacher. But more than this, what he handles is the “living and active” word of God, and *it* is able to reach the secret thoughts, the deepest of treasures, and the foundations of determination in every believing heart (Heb. 4:12). No genre can hold it back. Just let the lion loose.

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.27, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>), ed. Philip Schaff (Eerdmans, 1988), 2:583.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *City of God* 14.7 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:267).

# Servant Work

## The Clerk and His Work, Part 2

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by John W. Mallin

### II. The Work (continued)

#### B. Reporting

It is important for everyone to remember that the records kept by the clerk do not *belong* to the clerk; rather, they belong to the judicatory which he serves. Therefore, it is necessary for the clerk to report regularly on all his work, particularly submitting the records he keeps to his judicatory whenever additions, corrections, or other changes are made to those records. This especially applies to minutes, the subject of the next comments.

##### 1. To Your Judicatory

Minutes of meetings of sessions and presbyteries must be presented to the judicatory to whom they belong at the next regular meeting following the meeting which the minutes record. Minutes of congregational meetings must be read at the end of the meeting they record. Minutes of meetings of a general assembly are read at convenient points throughout the assembly and finally at the end of the assembly. In each case, this will involve the following three phases.

###### *a. Review*

The minutes are first presented in draft form for *review* by the judicatory (or congregation) for review by the whole judicatory (or congregation) so that corrections can be made. With the exception of minutes of congregational meetings, it is advisable for the clerk to distribute the draft minutes well in advance of the meeting at which they are to be formally reviewed, so that members of the judicatory can review them and suggest corrections to the clerk beforehand, so that the draft as presented at the meeting will be in the best condition for the next phase, thereby saving time at that meeting.

###### *b. Approval*

The second phase is *approval*. After the minutes have been reviewed by the judicatory (or congregation), the minutes will be approved “as presented” (that is, in the final draft form) or “as corrected” or “as amended” (at the meeting at which they are presented for approval). The minutes of the meeting must record the action to approve the minutes of the previous meeting (or of the congregational meeting or of the general assembly as a whole), *as presented* or *as corrected* or *as amended*.

###### *c. Response by the Clerk*

The third phase is the response to the second phase: that is, any follow-up necessary to ensure the record is in its best possible condition, clear and clean. The clerk will, of course, apply all the corrections made and approved by the judicatory (or congregation or assembly). Before printing the minutes, he should also check them for typos, spelling,

punctuation errors, or other minor matters which may have been missed previously. He should not make any substantive changes in wording or content without the approval of the judicatory. He will format the minutes to be consistent with the format previously used, allowing adequate space in margins for binding and in header or footer for pagination.

After final formatting and proofreading, the minutes of a general assembly are ready to be sent to the printer and then for distribution; the minutes of a presbytery meeting are ready to be printed and inserted in the binder.<sup>1</sup> Session minutes are ready for the next phase, which may vary in its details, as discussed in the next paragraphs.

## **2. To the Next Higher Judicatory**

While the clerk is responsible and accountable to his judicatory, the session and the presbytery are responsible and accountable to their next higher judicatory (the presbytery and the general assembly, respectively).<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the clerk of session and the stated clerk of the presbytery must report to their next higher judicatory, presenting for review and approval the minutes which have been approved by their own judicatory. If the reviewing judicatory *takes exception* to any portion of the minutes presented for review, the presenting judicatory will be required to *respond* to each exception (see II.B.2.c, below, Response By Your Judicatory). Reporting to the next higher judicatory is required of presbyteries annually and of sessions at least annually.<sup>3</sup>

### ***a. Review***

As noted above, the stated clerk of a presbytery, after applying the corrections made by the presbytery to the presbytery's minutes, proofreading and making final corrections, formatting and properly paginating the minutes, will print the minutes which have been approved by the presbytery since the presentation of minutes to the most previous general assembly. The minutes should be printed on acid-free paper with pre-punched rectangular holes for the locking posts of the binder, sold with the binder or separately. The minutes of each meeting must be signed by the stated clerk (or clerk *pro-tempore*, for meetings where the stated clerk was absent).<sup>4</sup> After printing the minutes, together with the current bylaws of the presbytery and a copy of the current Rules for Keeping Presbytery Minutes, the pages must be inserted into the binder and carried to the general assembly and

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<sup>1</sup> See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; particularly see “Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” A.1, 18 in that document, which requires that “the minutes of the presbytery shall be kept in lock-type record books with numbered pages.” These record books have become very expensive and of limited availability since many companies, law firms, and others who used them in the past have switched to all digital record-keeping. At the time of writing this note, Wilson-Jones appears to be the only remaining producer of such binders and the specialized paper used in them.

<sup>2</sup> This is the concept of review and control. See Stated Clerk, FG 12.2, 16: “The lower assemblies are subject to the review and control of higher assemblies, in regular graduation.”

<sup>3</sup> See Stated Clerk, FG 14.6, 21 and 13.8, 18 respectively. Note that sessions submit for review the minutes of the congregational meetings as well as the minutes of meetings of the session.

<sup>4</sup> Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; see “Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” A.18, 19 in that document.

presented to the stated clerk of the general assembly for review.<sup>5</sup> Each general assembly erects a temporary committee to review presbytery records and make recommendations for approval.<sup>6</sup>

The clerk of session, after applying the corrections made by the session to the session's minutes, proofreading and making final corrections, formatting and properly paginating the minutes, will have ready for printing a digital copy of the minutes which have been approved by the session since the last presentation of minutes by the session to the presbytery. However, depending upon the process of review used by the presbytery, he may or may not print the pages and insert them in the binder. Because the session minutes must finally be printed on the same expensive acid-free paper with pre-punched rectangular holes for the locking posts of the binder, which are sold with the binder, some presbyteries provide for review of digital copies of minutes, allowing preliminary comments by reviewers and corrections of typos and some errors that would be exceptions before final presentation of the minutes. Although this requires a few extra steps, it may save time ultimately and certainly can save expensive paper; and furthermore, it results in better, clearer, and cleaner minutes. Other presbyteries may review digital or hard copies before the meeting but not allow corrections before a final report of the reviewers. Some presbyteries may do the review at a meeting which takes place over more than one day. Review may be by a standing committee, by a session assigned by a committee to review the records of another session, or by other reviewers assigned by the committee. In any case, printing, signing, and inserting minutes in the binder will be done before the final report to the presbytery by the committee or assigned reviewers.<sup>7</sup>

### ***b. Approval***

The committee of the presbytery or of the general assembly that reviews the records of the session or of the presbytery, after the review is complete, will recommend to the presbytery or to the GA approval of the records which have been reviewed, either with or without exceptions and/or notations. In other words, records which have been reviewed will be approved by the reviewing judicatory. If there are no errors, the records are approved with no exceptions and no notations. If there are violations of the Bible, confessional standards, Book of Church Order (BCO), or Rules for Keeping Presbytery

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<sup>5</sup> Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.19–21, 19; on inclusion of bylaws and Rules for Keeping Presbytery Minutes, see Instrument A; particularly note Instrument A.20–21. On presentation of minutes to the stated clerk of the GA, see Instrument A.19. Rule 19 states that “the Stated Clerk [of the presbytery] shall be responsible for the presentation to the General Assembly for approval of all minutes of the presbytery which have been approved by the presbytery and not previously approved by the General Assembly.” This means that if the stated clerk of a presbytery is not a commissioner or otherwise present at the beginning of a general assembly, he must arrange for the delivery of the minutes of the presbytery to the stated clerk of the assembly by a commissioner or other person or other means on time. Presbytery bylaws may provide for similar responsibility of clerks of sessions vis-à-vis presentation of minutes for approval by the presbytery; if not, such responsibility of the clerk of session may be understood *inter alia* in light of Stated Clerk, FG 19.30.

<sup>6</sup> See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; particularly see SRGA 10.1, 12, and 4.a.(1), 14 within that document; and also Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, B.1, 19 within that document.

<sup>7</sup> Clerks of session should consult the bylaws of their presbytery to learn the presbytery's process of review of sessional records and what is thus required of the clerk of session and when it is to be done.



(or Sessional) Records, the records are approved with *exceptions*, which are numbered and listed in the minutes of the reviewing judicatory. If there are typos, spelling errors, grammatical errors, or the like, the records are approved with *notations*, which are numbered for the record and listed for the benefit of the judicatory whose minutes were reviewed, but the individual notations are not recorded in the minutes of either judicatory.<sup>8</sup> In any case, the minutes for the calendar year 20\_\_ (or from page \_\_ to page \_\_) will be approved.<sup>9</sup> The moderator of the reviewing judicatory will sign the minute book at the end of the minutes which have been reviewed, indicating that they are “approved with (or “without”) \_\_\_ exceptions and/or \_\_\_ notations” along with the date of approval.

### ***c. Response by Your Judicatory***

If the records of the session or presbytery have been approved by the higher judicatory without exception (whether with or without notations), there is nothing further to be done by the clerk or the judicatory with respect to those minutes which have been reviewed.<sup>10</sup> If the records of a lower judicatory have been approved by the higher judicatory with exceptions, the clerk of the lower judicatory must record the exceptions in the minutes of the meeting of his judicatory following the meeting of the higher judicatory at which the exceptions were found and taken, as those exceptions will have been recorded in the minutes of the higher judicatory. The lower judicatory must then respond to each of the exceptions taken (which responses may be proposed by the clerk for consideration by his judicatory), and the clerk must record those responses in the minutes of the meeting at which the responses are adopted by the judicatory.<sup>11</sup>

A response to a given exception may acknowledge the cited error or dispute it. If the exception is disputed, the response as recorded in the minutes will necessarily provide the reasons for reconsideration and removal of the exception. If the exception is acknowledged, the response as recorded in the minutes will state that acknowledgement and provide whatever information is necessary and possible to correct the error, e.g., supplying missing information, clarifying a passage which was unclear, correcting a citation or cross-reference, etc.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that this information or other

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<sup>8</sup> Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021-2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; see Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.22–23, 19.

<sup>9</sup> So minutes may be approved “without exception or notation;” or “without exception and with x notations;” or “with x (perhaps ‘no’) notations and the following x exceptions” (followed by a list of the exceptions, including in each case the rule or provision violated and the page and paragraph at which the exception occurs).

<sup>10</sup> Notations are minor matters which need not be corrected or addressed in any way (and generally, are not capable of correction without changing pages which have already been approved, which would corrupt their status as official, certifiable records. The clerk should, however, take note of the kinds of notations made in order to take care not to repeat those kinds of errors in future.

<sup>11</sup> See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; particularly see Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.22–23, 19. The instruments of the GA explicitly require presbyteries to follow the procedures outlined here. Presbytery bylaws may require sessions to follow similar procedures by way of exercising review and control (see Stated Clerk, FG 12.2, 16); if not, some comparable procedure must be adopted in order that the presbytery will be able to exercise its responsibility.

<sup>12</sup> Responses will vary according to the nature of the particular exception and the particular circumstances surrounding the record to which the exception was taken. For instance, an exception to a presbytery’s

correction by way of response should not be inserted in the minutes where the missing information ought to have appeared originally; it should be recorded in the minutes that record the response adopted by the judicatory (minutes that have not yet been reviewed by higher judicatory). The responses to the previous year's exceptions will thus be submitted to the higher judicatory at a following meeting of the higher judicatory *and* in the minutes presented for review and will be explicitly deemed sufficient (or not) together with approval of the minutes of the period under current review.

## **C. Correspondence**

In addition to bearing the responsibility to prepare and maintain records, the clerk is also responsible for correspondence. In judicatories where there are two clerks, their labor may be divided so that one is a recording clerk and the other a corresponding clerk.<sup>13</sup> The "Standing Rules" and the bylaws of some, if not all, presbyteries enumerate in some detail the duties of their respective clerks, many of which will involve various types of correspondence.

### **1. Regular Correspondence**

Regular correspondence includes all correspondence properly addressed to the judicatory or sent on behalf of the judicatory. Correspondence may be regularly transmitted by digital means (that is, by email, or email attachment; generally, not via texts, chats, etc.), by electronic facsimile or by postal service, or hand-delivered; but not by voice, whether in person, telephonically, or over video-conference connection.

#### ***a. Received***

Correspondence received regularly will include that from members (individuals or judicatories) of, or under the jurisdiction of, the receiving judicatory. For example, a session might receive a request from a member of the congregation for a letter of transfer, or a presbytery might receive correspondence from a session or an individual member of the regional church or from a ministerial member of the presbytery.

Regular correspondence will also include that from judicatories (or their representatives) under the same jurisdiction. For example, a session might receive correspondence from another session in the same presbytery, or one presbytery might receive correspondence from another presbytery.

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minutes might be for failure to record the appointment of a moderator or clerk *pro tempore* in the absence of the previously elected officer; the response might acknowledge the failure and state that Mr. So-and-so was appointed to serve *pro tempore* for the duration of the meeting. An exception to a session's minutes might be for failure to record the full name, including middle name, of a candidate for baptism (required by the rules for keeping sessional records in the presbytery's bylaws), where the minutes provide only "A B Smith;" the response might provide the clarifying information that the "A B" in Mr. Smith's name are not initials but rather his actual name, thus arguing for removal of the exception.

<sup>13</sup> The roles of recording and corresponding clerks may be analogous to a recording secretary and corresponding secretary in some organizations. This is not the division of labor among the general assembly's stated clerk and assistant clerk, however, where the assistant clerk's primary responsibility is to assist the stated clerk in preparation of the minutes of the assembly for approval and printing for distribution. See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; particularly see SRGA 3.B.6, 6 for the duties of the assistant clerk of the general assembly.

Regular correspondence will also include that from higher judicatories or from fraternal bodies. Sessions and presbyteries may receive correspondence from the stated clerk of the general assembly or from a committee of the general assembly; sessions also may receive correspondence from the stated clerk or a committee of their own presbytery. Generally, correspondence from a fraternal body, including formal fraternal greetings, will be from a general assembly or synod or ecumenical organization (i.e., North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches or the International Conference of Reformed Churches) to GA, from a presbytery or classis to a presbytery, or from a session or consistory to a session.

All of these communications will be considered formal correspondence; so will judicial appeals, complaints, protests, information regarding requests that require action such as proposals from a higher judicatory to amend a governing document (i.e., confessional standards, BCO, Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly, or bylaws of a presbytery), requests from a congregation for assistance in some situation of distress or opportunity for ministry, and calls to a minister in the presbytery or from a congregation in the presbytery.

Routine correspondence for information will include distribution of minutes of meetings of a higher judicatory or exchange of minutes from a fraternal body.

Information regarding changes in an officer's status will also be received routinely.<sup>14</sup> Notice of changes in the status of mission works or congregations may also be received.<sup>15</sup> This information, which the stated clerk of the GA requires for directories and databases and the GA statistician requires for his annual report, should be distributed by stated clerks of presbyteries to the stated clerks of all the presbyteries, together with the stated clerk of the GA and his assistants, as well as New Horizons.<sup>16</sup>

***b. Sent***

See the immediately previous paragraphs on correspondence received regularly and the footnote to the last paragraph for the correspondence that must accordingly be sent by the stated clerk of the GA, the stated clerks of presbyteries, and the clerks of sessions.

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<sup>14</sup> Instances of changes, notice of which should be received by all presbyteries and the stated clerk of the general assembly, include: ordination, installation, transfer in or out (whether from or to another OPC presbytery or to a judicatory in another denomination), dissolution of a called relationship, suspension, erasure, demission, deposition, retirement and/or emeritization of ministers. Similarly, ruling elders' and deacons' ordinations, installations, additions to or removals from active service on the session or board of deacons, etc., would be instances of changes received by the stated clerk of a presbytery from clerks of sessions within the regional church.

<sup>15</sup> Organization of a mission work as a particular congregation, realignment of a congregation to or from another denomination, reception of an independent or unorganized group as an organized congregation, closure of a mission work or an established congregation would all be instances of changes that may be received.

<sup>16</sup> A recent trend might be observed in an increasing number of stated clerks of presbyteries distributing to other presbyteries and to the stated clerk of the general assembly more than the aforementioned information, such as the bringing of men under care, licensures, and the like. It is generally not necessary to distribute such information, although it should be included in minutes. In some instances, changes in status of a candidate for ministry should be communicated to a GA committee, such as the Committee on Christian Education (e.g., in the case of a funded intern) or the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (e.g., in the case of a man who is prospectively to be called as organizing pastor of a work to be funded by the committee).

Note particularly that the “Book of Discipline” requires that when a minister has been indefinitely suspended or deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Note also that the “Form of Government” requires that the presbytery “shall also report to the general assembly each year the licensures, ordinations, the receiving or dismissing of members, the removal of members by death, the organization, reception, union, or dissolution of congregations, or the formation of new ones, and in general, all the important changes which have taken place within its bounds in the course of the year.”<sup>18</sup>

Stated clerks of presbyteries are required to report annually to the stated clerk of the general assembly the names and contact information of commissioners to the next general assembly. Notification regarding those commissioners shall be given no later than ten weeks prior to the beginning of the next assembly.<sup>19</sup> Changes in commissioners and/or their contact information should be likewise reported.

## **2. Other Correspondence**

Other correspondence may be received or sent.

### ***a. Received***

Any correspondence which a judicatory *officially* receives, and especially on which a judicatory takes action, should be noted in minutes as having been received and kept in a separate file (not otherwise recorded in minutes).<sup>20</sup>

### ***b. Sent***

Any changes in contact information for ministers or congregations, or changes in moderators or clerks of presbyteries or sessions, should be communicated to the stated clerk of the general assembly as soon as possible.

Clerks should note the requirements of the “Book of Discipline” to submit the entire record of a judicial case on appeal or the papers related to a complaint in an appeal to a higher judicatory, and the reference in the “Form of Government” to extracts of records whenever properly required.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stated Clerk, BD 6.B.3.c and sec. 4.d, 113; the stated clerk of the GA should be copied on this notice.

<sup>18</sup> Stated Clerk, FG 14.6, 21; this information is included in the annual statistical report to the general assembly’s statistician, which should be inserted at the end of the presbytery’s minutes for the calendar year. Sessions also provide relevant similar information on their annual statistical report, which is to be included in similar fashion in their minutes. See above, 2.A.4, “Other Items” in “Records.” Some of this information from presbyteries should be sent to the stated clerk of the general assembly before the submission of the statistical report, namely information that will be included in denominational records, such as the Directory of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Ministerial Register of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the OPC website, and a current mailing list for churches and mission works. See the previous paragraphs in this section, 2.C.1, “Regular Correspondence.”

<sup>19</sup> Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; see Standing Rules of the General Assembly, Chapter 1, rule 8, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Not all communications received by the clerk are necessarily *acknowledged* by the judicatory, as some such may be inappropriate for consideration, but the clerk should present all communications for the *judgment* of the judicatory. Communications officially received should be listed with identifying information, such as the date of the communication, the sender, and a brief description of the communication, but the text of the communication is generally not transcribed in the minutes.

<sup>21</sup> Stated Clerk, BD 7.5, 116 and 9.4, 119–20; Stated Clerk, FG 19.30.

## **D. Standards (Bylaws)**

The clerk of session, the stated clerk of presbytery, or the stated clerk of the general assembly is responsible for keeping and distributing the bylaws of the congregation or presbytery or *Book of Church Order* and the Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, respectively, together with a record of amendments to those standards, which he will generally have some responsibility for editing and formatting, at the direction of and subject to the approval of the judicatory.

## **E. Dockets**

Presbytery and general assembly stated clerks are responsible to prepare a proposed docket or agenda for each meeting of their judicatory. Preparation of proposed dockets for session meetings may be the responsibility of the clerk or moderator of the session. These are generally prepared by using previous and customary dockets and minutes of previous meeting(s), as well as correspondence received since the previous meeting and other items that have come to attention.

## **F. Directory**

The clerk of session may be responsible for compiling, printing, and keeping a directory of the congregation; he will at least contribute the necessary information to the church secretary or other person who compiles and prints it. Likewise, the stated clerk of presbytery and of the general assembly is responsible for producing a directory of their respective body.

## **G. Filing and Reminders**

Because the clerk is the custodian of records and correspondence as indicated above, he will need to have a filing system, which enables accessibility to these materials. His system must be usable by others, particularly his successors. This certainly includes a system that retains and organizes hard copies of these materials (filing cabinets and file folders appropriately labeled). Organization should be arranged in a chronological order, storing correspondence, dockets, and minutes pertaining to a given meeting together, so that the order of meetings becomes a key to finding relevant materials. An index of meetings will then be useful in finding particular files.

### **1. Computer Filing**

In addition to hard copies, the clerk today will also have digital copies of much, if not all, the materials which he produces and receives. His computer filing system should be similarly organized with a view to accessibility by himself and others. Digital copies in .pdf format are not subject to change on different computer devices, applications, or systems, so materials in other digital formats should also be saved as .pdf files. This avoids the problems that can arise because of different or obsolete computer hardware and/or software. Digital files should be backed up and stored in multiple locations (e.g., external drives, cloud storage, or sent to multiple members of the judicatory) in case of catastrophic loss. Hard copies should also be made of digital files and included with other hard copy materials.



## **2. Calendar Reminders**

In view of the many and varied tasks of the clerk, he will benefit from having reminders in a digital calendar, which can be repeated easily. He will thus avoid failure to do regular or occasional tasks, such as some specific required correspondence.

## **H. Other**

The clerk may be called upon to function in other ways apart from his regular duties because he is the most convenient servant of the judicatory to do so.

### **1. Parliamentary Assistance**

As noted below (III.C. Resources: *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*) (RONR), the clerk is often the *de facto* parliamentarian for his judicatory. This is, perhaps, naturally the case, because he must record the motions made and actions taken in a manner which conforms to parliamentary standards. (This is not the place to make the case for having such standards, but the case can certainly be made that without them no actions can have been certainly made with any sure effect.) The clerk is, then, the final gatekeeper for what is parliamentarily admissible before review of records by the next higher judicatory. It will be advantageous to him, to the moderator, and to the judicatory he serves, if he is able to raise or suggest points of order or perfections of language, at the time motions are being made, in order to avoid parliamentary and/or record-keeping problems at a later time.

### **2. Temporarily Functioning as Other Officers**

The Clerk may be requested to serve as acting chair or moderator if circumstances make it impossible or inappropriate for the designated chair or moderator either to remain in the chair or to request another to take the chair at his discretion. Frequently, in our circles, it is customary for a moderator to ask the most immediately previous moderator available to take the chair when the moderator needs to leave the chair to give a report, make a motion, enter debate, or otherwise engage in activity which would be inappropriate while in the chair. However, RONR describes a circumstance in which the chair should be turned over to the clerk.<sup>22</sup>

### **3. Calling Special Meetings**

When an emergency or other occasion arises upon which a request is properly made for a special meeting of the judicatory, it is the responsibility of the stated clerk of the GA or of a presbytery to call the judicatory to meet.<sup>23</sup>

### **4. Congregational Meetings**

The clerk of session serves as clerk at congregational meetings, whether annual or special meetings.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Henry M. Robert III, et. al. eds., *RONR: 11th Edition*, §62, “Removal of Presiding Officer from Chair for All or Part of a Session,” 651, lines 24–27 through 652, lines 1–2 and footnote \*, 652; or Henry M. Robert III, et. al. eds., *RONR: 12th Edition*, §62, “Removal of Presiding Officer from Chair for All or Part of a Session,” 616–17, paragraph 62:11 and footnote 4, 617.

<sup>23</sup> See Stated Clerk, FG 14.7, 21 and 14.5, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Stated Clerk, FG 16.4 and 5, 26–27.

### III. Resources

Because the clerk is an ordained officer in the church, it may be presumed that he will be sufficiently familiar with the Bible to enable him to commit himself to submit to it unequivocally. Similarly, it may be presumed that he will be sufficiently familiar with the doctrinal standards of the church (i.e., the *Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*) to enable him to take vows to “receive and adopt” them “as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, more need not be said here about the significance or imperative necessity of these as resources for the clerk. However, a few remarks may be helpful regarding the following resources.

#### A. *The Book of Church Order*

While it may be presumed that the clerk, as an ordained officer in the church, will have read the *Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (comprised of “the Form of Government,” the “The Book of Discipline,” and the “Directory for the Public Worship of God”) in order to affirm his approval of them, real familiarity with the BCO by any ordained officer may not be presumed. The clerk must have at the least, sufficient familiarity with the BCO to know: a) what it requires of him as clerk and of the judicatory he serves (including what must be recorded in certain circumstances); and b) how and where to find relevant passages of the BCO in order to supply the appropriate citation of the BCO when required.

#### B. Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly

The clerk of the GA and the clerk of a presbytery (as well as assistant clerks) should be sufficiently familiar with the current Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to know what bearing these will have on their work, including what may be required of them. The clerk of session may benefit from acquaintance with the Standing Rules and Instruments but will not usually need to cite or refer to them.

#### C. *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*

The “Standing Rules” state that “all cases that may arise which are not provided for in the foregoing Rules shall be governed by *Robert's Rules of Order [Newly Revised]*”<sup>26</sup> The bylaws of many, perhaps most – possibly all – presbyteries have a similar provision. Congregational bylaws may have such a provision. (If a presbytery or congregation does not have a similar provision, they should have one, whether the governing document is RONR or some other similar comprehensive set of parliamentary rules.) The current edition of RONR prescribes language and forms of procedure for making motions and taking actions (and thus recording these). It is thus incumbent upon the clerk to be familiar with RONR and any equivalent parliamentary authority serving as a standard for the judicatory he serves or for another judicatory to which his judicatory is subject.

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<sup>25</sup> Stated Clerk, FG 23.8, question (2), 47 and 25.6.b, question (2), 70.

<sup>26</sup> Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–2022, <https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf>; see Standing Rules of the General Assembly, 14.1, 16.

Additionally, because the clerk is often the *de facto* parliamentarian of the judicatory he serves, it will be wise and prudent for a clerk to read the current edition of RONR in order to acquaint himself, if not to familiarize himself, with its contents. It is the only way to know all that might be required, especially in unusual circumstances.

The clerk does not necessarily need to be an “expert in the book” (either BCO or RONR), but he ought to know how to find applicable passages of the book in question and, importantly, know when he needs to look for them.

#### **D. Presbytery Bylaws (For Stated Clerks of Presbytery and Clerks of Session)**

The stated clerks of presbytery and clerks of session should be quite familiar with the bylaws of the presbytery that they serve or that govern the regional church of which their congregation is a member. The presbytery’s bylaws will state the duties of the stated clerk of presbytery and provide the rules for keeping sessional records in detail not included in the BCO or RONR.

#### **E. Congregational Bylaws (For Clerks of Session)**

The clerk of session should be familiar with the bylaws of the congregation he serves, so he will know particular requirements to which the session and congregation are subject, which requirements apply to the congregation and which may vary somewhat from congregation to congregation. He may thus give some guidance to the session and the congregation in their meetings.

#### **F. Directories**

The clerk will need to have directories of the judicatories subordinate to and superior to his own, as well as the directory of his own judicatory (and/or congregation).

#### **G. Minutes (Yours and Those of Higher Judicatories)**

Finally, the clerk will benefit from familiarity with the previous minutes of his judicatory and acquaintance with the current and previous minutes of higher judicatories, so he knows what actions have been taken which may bear on his own work and the work of his judicatory.

### **Conclusion**

Presbyterians have a reputation for their desire to adhere in all things to 1 Corinthians 14:40, “But all things should be done decently and in order.” The clerk is in a position to help ensure that the work of his judicatory is orderly, and is, of course, responsible to see that his own labor is also done decently and in order. The work of the clerk is varied and sometimes tedious and may sometimes, in meetings, tax the patience of the body he serves. However, it is work done in service to the Lord of the Church. So, he can do it with joy and zeal.

**John W. Mallin**, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is an independent counselor, and has served as stated clerk of the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York for more than twenty years.

# ServantReading

## A Beautiful Mind and Pen at Work Reading the Book of Genesis

A Review Article

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By Bryan D. Estelle

*Reading Genesis*, by Marilynne Robinson. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024. 344 pages, \$29.00.

Most readers will recognize the name Marilynne Robinson. She is a Pulitzer Prize winner in fiction for her novel, *Gilead*. This speaks for itself. Need this reviewer tell you other reasons why you should read her new book on Genesis? Although I will allude to a couple of her books below, I will not rehearse her many other books and awards. They are numerous. The reader can easily access that information. Yet, despite these accolades, Robinson's writing does not come across with panache, but rather with humility. There is a steady constancy in God and his covenant, she claims, even while stating, "My language is entirely insufficient to my subject, but I hope to draw attention to an important consistency to be found in Genesis" (217).

I will tell you why you should read this book. I have come up with nine reasons. Therefore, this will not be your typical book review. Yes, she is one of my favorite authors; however, any good review should include strengths and critiques (in her case, there are not many of the latter). Even so, she has weighed in on a masterpiece of Old Testament literature. Since I am an Old Testament scholar and biblical theology professor by trade, my duty is to report how she may have come up short in certain respects. I will recount ten reasons why officers in the church should read this new book. Then, I will add some notes of caution about how she may have over-argued her case.

1. *She emphasizes the point that Genesis is unique among contemporary literary texts in the ancient Near East (hence, ANE), although influenced by its neighbors. She talks about the myths of Babylon, Carthage, the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, and Egypt, and she is well informed about these other cultures and their epic myths (e.g., 17–19, 27, 29, 30). Nevertheless, she makes no equivocations: "Hebrew Scripture is intended as history" (122).*

She is also conversant with the classics, making numerous references to Greek literature. But these are not superfluous allusions, they are used to good effect. For example, when she compares the wily Odysseus and his "ecstasy of rage" in the great slaughter at the end of Homer's memorable epic (*The Odyssey*) vis-à-vis the denouement of the Joseph narrative, the differences could not be starker. She states,

In another literature a character in Joseph's place could have made a choice of this kind, could have demonstrated wiliness and power while he satisfied a crude definition of justice. But this is Scripture, and in place of catharsis there is an insight that casts its light over the narrative of Joseph and over the whole book of Genesis. (226)

2. *She is not shy about "poking the bear" of mainstream scholarship, with which she seems conversant.* This is especially the case with regard to source critical methodologies that have been so dominant (e.g., 22, 26) in commenting on the Pentateuch. More below.

3. *Throughout her new book, she emphasizes in detail, with humanist insight, the great mystery of this sublime literature.* She recaptures the awe and mystery revealed in the Bible time and again (e.g., 28, 36–37, 40, 42, 45, 60–64, 95–96, 126, 149). Melville-like, she narrates the story with great attention to small details and suddenly states a blazing insight that applied to the ancient Hebrews as well as to us (e.g., 70, 130). Towards the end of the book, she even alludes to Herman Melville's character Father Mapple twice and to good effect, who calls Scripture "'a mighty cable.' Its intertwined strands of narrative exist in time, which they also create, or assert" (224).

4. *Even though her training and expertise is in the humanities, she does not shy away from commenting on the vexed relationship between science and Scripture* (e.g., 26, 30, 126). This is not surprising since she wrote *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*<sup>1</sup> and delivered the prestigious Terry Lectures, published as *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*.<sup>2</sup> Both books, especially the latter, delve into the complex and tumultuous waters of the modern problem of the relationship between science and Scripture.

5. *She plumbs the depths of this biblical book by demonstrating that it introduces great themes having to do with theodicy, i.e., the justification of God's ways before humankind.* She declares it in the opening pages, and it never goes away, even though it recedes into the shadows.

6. *She has an intelligent, critical and thoughtful approach to the mainstream idea that the Old Testament is comprised of "sources"* (see, e.g., 4–5, 138, 145). On the one hand, she thinks any idea of a theory of redactors dealing with "disparate, unreconciled documents with no unifying vision behind them" cannot stand (183). On the other hand, she is committed to the notion of oral tradition in this ancient culture (who could not be?) and therefore allows for redactors being involved with different versions of the story being transmitted on minor elements in the story, e.g., whether Joseph's captors were Ishmaelites or Midianites (184). Towards the end of her book, Robinson assumes Moses is not the author of Genesis when she says, "Since Genesis would have been written, or have received its last refinement, long after the time of Moses (219)." This claim may not

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (Picador, 1998, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (Yale, 2010).



be well-received by readers of this journal; however, in my opinion, such an opinion should not keep readers from engaging this fine book.

7. *She writes in exquisite prose, and the mere reading of her, paying close attention to how she constructs a sentence, is bound to improve the writing [and preaching] of any minister.* It is well known that J. G. Machen and a few other contemporary Christian authors (e.g., Frank Gaebelin) developed a reputation for their beautiful and clear prose. If Machen “could work a verb” like very few in our day, Robinson is a master at construing artful prose, and she can “work a comma” like few in our day. Many modern Reformed writers fall far short of this ideal. Could this contribute to the modern malaise of why confessional Reformed theology has not achieved a significant following for one of the greatest systems of theological thought? To paraphrase a Federal Vision author, which I rarely do, Reformed theology is the best looking ship in dry dock. We desperately need authors like Marilynne Robinson to help us learn how to capture our sublime theology in captivating prose: she can help us achieve that goal. Not many authors can make the claim about Genesis, that this is a “masterpiece of compression” (24) and “the extreme compression and efficiency of a fragment of narrative like this one makes it feel as though it has been turned and turned, considered in every light, but first of all in light of the belief that God is one and that He is loyal to the whole of Creation” (74). But an author who has achieved this style herself can make such claims (with exquisite self-effacement). Robinson takes it a step further. I am no stylist, and my prose is chubby. I am thankful for good editors throughout the decades that have made it less so. But Robinson is a master. I stopped counting her artful use of commas at the end of a sentence (to focus on a point being made). Her timing and cadence are impeccable. She educates on the narrative’s “point of view” (or lack thereof, cf., 187) throughout the book. She is intimately aware of how the narrative arc of a story works and even more so how narrative tension occurs in a story. Additionally, she knows how characterizations are intertwined with these, or should be.

8. *She is unafraid to step into the rarified atmosphere of theology.* For example, she addresses God’s impassibility (65), God’s justice (e.g., 204, 226) tempered by grace (216), making moral sense of history, and the vengeance claimed by God alone.

9. *She (and the publishers) has provided a translation of Genesis at the end of the book, which in my opinion is not a weakness or liability; rather, it is a strength (for reasons explained below).* Although she quotes the KJV throughout her book, she is not slavishly bound by it. Some readers may be wondering if she is committed to the *textus receptus* version of the Old Testament. My guess is that because she is a woman of letters who appreciates good prose, she chose the KJV for that reason (for anyone who knows anything about the process that the KJV went through, this is answer enough). However, there may be another reason why it is good that she chose the KJV, whether or not she is even aware of this. The KJV sounds archaic and “other worldly” to most Americans and to most English speakers around the world. Thus, Robinson has (whether inside of conscious awareness or outside, I do not know) chosen a version that communicates something “distant” and “far away” from our language and culture, though beautiful. Our Old Testament is written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Therefore, her choice fits like a glove.

That is exactly what she should and did communicate in her translation choice. Even so, she seems somewhat familiar with Hebrew, and I am glad she is willing to cite other translations (e.g., 93) to alert the reader to differences of opinion. Consider her comparison between the JPS translation and the RSV on pages 140–41. Concerning whether English can correctly capture the nuances of a preposition in Hebrew, she concludes the discussion with, “English has no way of expressing the ambiguity of this utterance.”

Additionally, there is a final reason one should read this book, more important than all others: she exquisitely demonstrates how this archaic literature prefigures Christ, showcasing his glorious work of forgiveness and grace through figural language in these stories (e.g., 104).

In our day, many officers in the church are still overly exercised and flirting with such minor topics as “the length of the days” expressed in Genesis, or how old the earth really is. But the fact of the matter is that the bastion of Reformed orthodoxy has been sieged by attacks on graver and more consequential topics, such as the historicity of Adam, let alone Abraham or the Exodus.<sup>3</sup> Robinson’s book is a breath of fresh air on Genesis and for us who are trying to reach a lost and decaying culture crying out for answers.

The one area I wish she had discussed is the difficulty attached to considering the relationship of the Old Testament (Genesis in this case) to her ANE neighbors. This is an extremely complex task and involves risk, especially considering the antiquity of the data in question.<sup>4</sup> Some grouping on a continuum along a spectrum, ranging from minimalist to maximalist, about influence and polemics regarding Genesis and contemporary myths would have been helpful. I would consider Robinson a maximalist, in the sense that Genesis is indeed polemicizing against its neighbor’s myths. But here, as an example, she could have employed the work of the great Harvard Semitic scholar W. L. Moran,<sup>5</sup> who was convinced that Genesis 9:1ff. was a direct polemic or rejection of the Atra-Hasis epic, even though other scholars (Lambert and Millard) saw the differences between Atra-Hasis and the Genesis account as too great for any direct connection.<sup>6</sup> For the record, Atra-Hasis is not a mere variant of the Gilgamesh epic, it is in this Akkadian work that we find the standard account of man’s creation from the Babylonian sources. Here I quibble, and it may sound to the reader like Chesterton’s quip from another context, “The doctors disagree, as it is the business of doctors to do.”

Even so, more important here is her weighing in against any view of “mythological revisionism.” This is the position that Genesis is merely a reflex based upon previous

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<sup>3</sup> “Genesis prepares us for the book of Exodus of course.”

<sup>4</sup> For further information, including bibliography, the reader may consult my discussion in Appendix 1, “Ancient Near Eastern Context” of *The Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation*, printed pages 270–91 of the Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly (June 2–8, 2004) or available online at the denomination’s site: <https://opc.org/GA/creation.html#Ancient>.

<sup>5</sup> W. L. Moran, “Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood,” *Biblica* 52 (1971): 51–61.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Estelle, “The Old Testament and the Comparative Method,” *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Volume 6, (2010): 145–66, especially at 164. See, e.g., W.G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis” in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96–113, especially at 102–03.

mythological pagan texts like the *Enuma Elish*, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, or *Atra-Hasis*. No, she has eloquently shown that in the Genesis account of creation there is no polytheism. There is no theogony. There is no theomachy. Indeed, she has shown that the portrayal of God and his deeds is fundamentally and categorically different than its neighbors. In another context, writing against the mythological revisionists, I said, “It seems to me that the church would best serve its people by situating the biblical creation story in its cultural setting and then demonstrate how it is different and unique in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern worldviews.”<sup>7</sup> This is the kind of mandate Robinson has fulfilled.

One gains the impression that Robinson has chewed upon, meditated upon, reassessed time and again, and finally understood the story of Genesis. She has not only sipped but drunk deeply from this well. She has insights to share. She assists the reader in recapturing the mystery and surprise of God’s grace through the messy lives found in the book of Genesis. She is astounded by and communicates exquisitely the realism of the ugliness, darkness, and horror of earth dwellers, the humanity of saints, and how challenging plodding through life can be. But above all, and this is where the beauty of the book captivates, she unveils the encouragement of God’s grace working back of and behind the outworking of the mystery of iniquity narrated in the story line.

She concludes her essay on Genesis with this clash of cymbals,

I know of no other literature except certain late plays of Shakespeare that elevates grace as this book does . . . Joseph’s act of forgiveness in effect opens the way for them to assume their essential, though unexplained and unrecorded role in sacred history. In every instance where it arises, forgiveness is rewarded by consequences that could not have been foreseen or imagined. (228–29)

Take up and read, you will not be disappointed.

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<sup>7</sup> Bryan Estelle, “The Old Testament and the Comparative Method,” *The Confessional Presbyterian*, (Vol. 6, 2010), 145–66, especially at 164.

# The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, *by Jonathan Haidt*

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*The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, by Jonathan Haidt. Penguin, 2024, 395 pages, \$30.00.

by Shane Lems

I know I am not alone when I think this: there seem to be more people struggling with mental health issues now than there were twenty-five years ago. When I was a child, I did not know of many other adolescents dealing with severe mental problems. However, today, I know of quite a few young adults and people in their twenties who have mental health complications. Why is this? What is going on?

If you have these same questions and want reasonable, well-researched answers, you need to get Jonathan Haidt's book *The Anxious Generation*. Haidt is an American social psychologist who has extensively studied this recent mental illness crisis among teenagers and twentysomethings. This book summarizes his findings, mainly focusing on people born after 1995. Haidt's central claim in the book is this: "Overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation" (9).

There are three main parts in the book that prove his point. In the first part, Haidt gives some detailed stats and information showing that mental health problems have significantly increased in the last twenty years. The second part of the book explains the decline of play-based childhood. This section of the book describes how children used to play with other kids, go outside, take risks, face some danger, learn to fail, navigate various social situations, and develop their physical and mental skills while playing. However, due to the ubiquity of screens and the modern parenting emphasis on safety and overprotection, children are no longer developing various skills by playing in person with other children. Haidt argues that the loss of children playing with other children is one reason Gen Z struggles with anxiety, depression, and other mental issues.

The book's third part is called "The Great Rewiring: The Rise of Phone-Based Childhood." Haidt examines and explores the detrimental aspects of a phone-based childhood in this section of the book. Since the arrival of the smartphone around 2007, many children have grown up in front of phones and other screens. Haidt says this screen-filled childhood causes social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction. Haidt summarizes numerous studies and research that show how excessive screen use by children has various adverse effects on their mental health. There are separate chapters on how phone-based childhood differently affects girls (e.g. body image) and boys (e.g. pornography).

The fourth and final section of the book is constructive. It is called "Collective Action for Healthier Childhood." In this part of *The Anxious Generation*, Haidt gives instructions on how schools, parents, technology companies, and government agencies can help

remedy the mental health crisis related explicitly to phone-based childhood. There is much practical advice in the last part of this book that is helpful for parents, teachers, and school administrators. Parents who have young children will want to read this book as they think about when—or if! —they let their child get a smartphone.

*The Anxious Generation* is not a Christian book. However, it is a book that will help Christians navigate one aspect of the mental health crisis on our hands. *The Anxious Generation* does not just answer the question of “why” some younger people struggle with mental issues. It also gives some helpful instructions and wise advice on moving forward to help youth avoid these difficult mental struggles. As a pastor and father, I found this book very worthwhile. It has also helped me think about various counseling issues and sermon application. If you are concerned about excessive phone usage among younger people, or if you want to learn more about it so you can better help youth struggling with mental health issues, *The Anxious Generation* is an excellent book to read. It will even challenge readers to rethink their own screen usage.

**Shane Lems** serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin.

# A Treasury of Nature: Illustrated Poetry, Prose, and Praise, *by Leland Ryken*

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by Mark A. Green

*A Treasury of Nature: Illustrated Poetry, Prose, and Praise*, by Leland Ryken. P&R, 2024, 176 pages, \$ 24.99, paper.

In his latest work, *A Treasury of Nature*, Dr. Leland Ryken offers readers a journey through the beauty of nature. Through an exquisite selection of poetry and prose, he highlights God's handiwork in creation. Dr. Ryken, professor emeritus of English at Wheaton College, brings over forty years of expertise in literature and its connections to the Christian faith. A respected scholar, he has written extensively on topics such as the Bible as literature, Puritanism, and the integration of faith and the arts.

Ideal for reflective readers and those who appreciate the intersection of faith and literature, this book provides a sanctuary of meditative readings, offering both beauty and insight. Whether for morning devotionals, study groups, or personal enrichment, it inspires a deeper engagement with God's creation.

In an illuminating introductory essay, Ryken provides a thoughtful framework for exploring each of the forty selected works, explaining a three-part structure: first, the writer sets the scene, drawing readers into a particular place in nature; next, readers delve into "analyzing the meaning of what we [they] observe or experience;" and finally, many selections end with a call to reflect or take action, as in Pierpont's hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" (25–27):

For each perfect gift of thine  
To our race so freely given,  
Graces human and divine,  
Flowers of earth, and buds of heaven:  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise.

This careful structure provides a balanced rhythm for the book, blending prose and poetry with reflective commentary to guide readers through an immersive experience. The pacing allows readers to pause, contemplate, and return to each selection with fresh eyes.

After each selection, Ryken offers insightful commentary and background, drawing from decades of teaching and deep appreciation of these works. His guidance here feels akin to a master tutor's, leading readers through some of the Western canon's finest literature on nature. For example, Ryken's commentary on Keats's final poem, "To Autumn" (58–60), reveals the depth and intricacy of Keats's imagery and structure. Ryken observes that Keats layers sensory experiences in each stanza, moving from touch to sight to sound, shifting agents from plant to human to animal, and tracing harvest

cycles of fruitfulness, labor, and decline. Each stanza progresses from morning to midday to evening, presenting nature's temporal flow with a remarkable intensity.

P&R has also complemented Ryken's selections with stunning visual artwork carefully chosen to enhance the text. The volume's aesthetic and tactile qualities make it a delight to hold, ideal for reflective reading. I find these selections a fitting complement to morning Bible readings, a reminder that just outside my office lives the glory in "our Father's world."

Ryken's choices are broad and wisely extend beyond strictly Christian authors. Alongside Calvin, Luther, and Herbert, we find superb passages by writers inspired by the beauty of God's creation—whether consciously aware of its divine source or moved by nature's wonder. This inclusive approach allows readers to enjoy nature's majesty as reflected across different perspectives, affirming God's presence and power in all the areas of common grace through "the things that have been made."

One minor critique: In a few instances, overlapping images with text or abbreviating the paintings or photos to fit the page feels limiting. Presenting complete works in unaltered form would better honor the original artists and maintain their intended impact.

In summary, *A Treasury of Nature* is Dr. Ryken's remarkable labor of love, inspiring readers to view creation with renewed wonder and gratitude. This volume elevates our spirits, lifting our eyes to behold and contemplate the Lord's goodness through the art of those who capture nature's beauty with the elegant eloquence of our English language.

**Mark A. Green** *is a retired minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and is a member of Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Vienna, Virginia.*

# ServantPoetry

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Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

## To My Sweet Saviour

Night hath no wings to him that cannot sleep,  
And time seems the not for to fly, but creep;  
Slowly her chariot drives, as if not she  
Had broke her wheel, or crack'd her axletree.  
Just so it is with me, who, list'ning, pray  
The winds to blow the tedious night away,  
That I might see the cheerful, peeping day.  
Sick is my heart! O Saviour! Do thou please  
To make my bed soft in my sicknesses:  
Lighten my candle, so that I beneath  
Sleep not for ever in the vaults of death;  
Let me Thy voice betimes i' th' morning hear:  
Call, and I'll come; say Thou the when, and where.  
Draw me but first, and after Thee I'll run  
And make no one stop till my race be done.