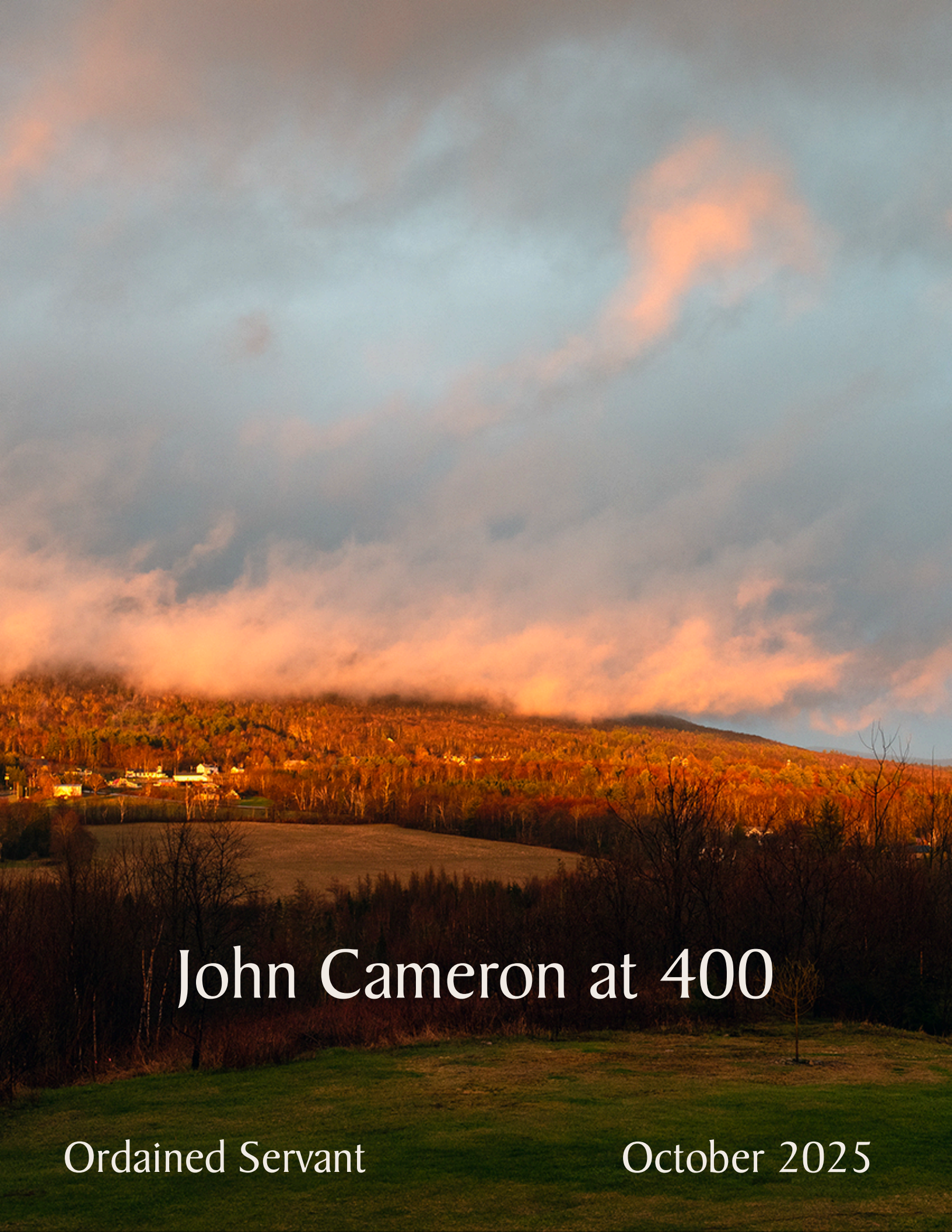

John Cameron at 400

Ordained Servant

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CURRENT ISSUE: JOHN CAMERON AT 400

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From the Editor

Each October I ransack my church history files and library to find a notable birth or death year. Michael J. Lynch's "John Cameron at 400" (1555–1625) explores a little known but important post-Reformation pastor-theologian. Throughout "his turbulent career, he was a faithful Reformed minister and professor without any significant moral failings." Dr. Lynch is a member of Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, Delaware, and teaches classical languages and humanities at Delaware Valley Classical School. He is the author of *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism* (OUP, 2021).

As I said last month, I have begun a series of brief editorials on topics of interest to me that I think will be enjoyed by you my faithful readers. As a train lover in the line of Machen, I offer "The Train: Belittled and Beloved."

Danny Olinger continues the series "Jesus, Stab Me in the Heart! Flannery O'Connor at 100" with an analysis of the O'Connor short story "The Displaced Person." Each month Olinger will be reflecting on a sample of O'Connor's short stories (I recommend *O'Connor: Collected Works*, The Library of America, 1988). After reading this month's offering, I came across a quotation in a new biography of poet John Keats from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V, scene 1)[1] that perfectly sums up the trajectory of O'Connor's fiction. Mr. Olinger agreed.

> The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Andy Wilson's review article, "Redefining Good and Evil," reviews Carl R. Trueman's *To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse*. This eye-opening book instructs us about a theory that has been around for more than a century but has recently taken on popular expression in the cultural turmoil we are experiencing throughout the West, especially in our educational institutions, which of course influence every other institution.

Shane Lems reviews John Swinton's *Finding Jesus in the Storm.* This book is a healthy reminder for those who counsel, that mental health challenges are a real part of our human condition as fallen people.

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[1] Lucasta Miller, *Keats: A Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* (Knopf, 2022), 61.

Ryan McGraw reviews Ford and Wilhite's *Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls*, which was written to assist pastors and elders in learning the art of pastoral ministry from the church fathers.

My poem this month, "Summer's Lease," was inspired by Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

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.

ServantThoughts

The Train: Belittled and Beloved

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Geoffrey Crayon—under the pen name of Washington Irving—hated the train coming through Sunny Side on the east side of the Tapan Zee in the mid-nineteenth century. It was a noisy industrial intrusion on his poetic solitude. Yet in our world the train is the most relaxing mode of travel compared to flying or driving. It was a fascination of our mentor J. Gresham Machen, as he famously sat outside the Westminster Theological Seminary in Chestnut Hill, Pensylvania and watched the trains pass, identifying each one, per his extraordinary observational skills.

The train, a century after Machen, despite all the complaints about Amtrak, is still a delightful mode of transportation. When my wife Robin and I travel to New York, the Red Cap assistance in boarding is a huge stress relief. We get to our seats at South Station in Boston without competition. Then the views of Long Island sound with the moored sailboats and motorboats, and the marshy inlets with casual docks are so relaxing. The food in the café car—Acela is slightly better—is just fun but not fancy. No traffic to navigate, no constant attentiveness, no security clearances, these make train travel a dream. We can converse if my wife is with me, or I can just write, read, or sleep if alone in the quiet car—library silence. Many hours later I arrive at the Moynihan Train Hall with its marvelous architecturally restored, light-filled space. It always reminds me of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's illuminated discourses on issues that targeted the public good. Now I am in the Big Apple, a place of extraordinary international consequence. And I ponder how the gospel may impact this remarkable cosmopolitan space. I am grateful to the sacrificial ministry of men like Tim Keller.

I have always been fascinated by Machen's delightfully human appreciations. He loved walking, mountains, and trains. Machen would surely have had similar thoughts as Henry Coray reminisced:

> Another of his hobbies was to ride trains. When the schedule of the Broadway Limited eventually recovered from the slowdown of World War I under government control and was restored to sixteen hours from New York to Chicago, Das was really excited. He took a ride to Chicago and back just to see how that crack train ran at its new high speed.
>
> One evening in the winter of 1932, I drove him to a railroad station in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where he was to board a night train for Philadelphia. I expressed my sympathy because of the rough trip ahead.
>
> "Listen, don't feel sorry for me," he said. "I love to curl up in a berth and fall off to sleep." "How in the world do you manage it?" I said. "I can never sleep on trains. They're too noisy." "Not to me they aren't," Das said. "The good old sound of wheels rumbling over tracks—that's a lullaby in my ears."[1]

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

[1] Henry W. Coray, *J. Gresham Machen: A Silhouette* (Kregel, 1981), 25–26.

ServantHistory

John Cameron at 400

by Michael J. Lynch

The year of our Lord 2025 marks the 400th anniversary of the death of the oft maligned but rarely read Scottish theologian John Cameron. Among modern Reformed theologians, Cameron—the so-called father of Amyraldianism or Saumur theology—has often played an ignominious role in early modern Reformed orthodoxy. Indeed, Herman Bavinck is representative in portraying Cameron's theology as paving the way towards "deism and rationalism."[1] Cameron's most well-known English biographer characterized Cameron as having "very much of a turn to innovations in doctrine, and seemed to have an inclination to depart from the received truths in the Protestant Churches, and to differ from the sound divines in his time."[2] Regardless of whether one sees Cameron as a blight or a light upon the development of Reformed orthodoxy, the French historian François Laplanche is undoubtedly right to claim that "every history of French Protestant theology in the seventeenth century should begin with a systematic study of his work."[3]

Born in Glasgow in 1579/1580, Cameron attended the University of Glasgow around the age of fifteen. His exceptional abilities, particularly with Greek, earned him a teaching position at the University in Greek.[4] Soon, however, he made his way to France (Bordeaux), where he was given a position at the Collège de Bergerac to teach Latin and Greek, both of which he spoke extemporaneously. His scholastic ability soon caught the eye of the Duke of Bouillon, and he was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the Collège de Sedan. A couple years later, in 1604, the Scotsman made his way back to Bordeaux, where the Reformed church offered to finance Cameron's further theological education in exchange for his promise to minister there upon completion. Cameron accepted this arrangement and went to study in Paris, Geneva, and Heidelberg. In 1608, at the end of his four years of education, he returned to Bordeaux to fulfill his commitment, pastoring there for the next decade. Amusingly, he was known to be an unusually long-winded preacher, often preaching two-hour sermons!

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[1] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Baker, 2003–2008), 1:186–87, 4:71.

[2] Robert Wodrow, *Collection Upon the Lives of the Reformers and Most Eminent Ministers of the Church of Scotland*, 3 vols. (Glasgow, 1834–48), 2:81.

[3] François Laplanche, "Antiquité et vérité dans la controverse de Cameron," in *Conflits politiques, controverses religieuses: Essais d'histoire européenne aux 16^{e}-18^{e} siècles*, eds. Ouzi Elyada and Jacques Le Brun (Éditions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2002), 131–42, 131. Cited by Albert Gootjes, "John Cameron (ca. 1579–1625) and the French Universalist Tradition," in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (Reformation Heritage, 2014), 169–96, 169.

[4] The following biographical sketch follows the aforementioned Wodrow biography.

Cameron's first significant public theological controversy arose during this Bordeaux period, concerning his denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ (IAOC).[5] In 1612, amid the debate raging among European Reformed Protestants over the IAOC, the French Reformed held a national synod in order to provide a gloss favoring the IAOC on the eighteenth article of the French Confession (1559), which all ministers and ministerial candidates (*proposans*) would be required to sign. Cameron, along with many other French ministers, refused to sign the gloss. A subsequent French Synod in 1614 essentially doubled down on this requirement. Cameron continued to refuse to sign, but his former classmate at Glasgow and fellow French minister Andre Rivet (who affirmed the IAOC) convinced the Synod not to censure Cameron, with the latter promising not to teach or write on the subject.

Soon, however, Cameron would have to face a much more powerful faction, the Roman Catholic French political machine, which eventually forced him out of Bordeaux. He found his way to Saumur, where the prestigious Protestant Academy sought him to replace Franciscus Gomarus. At the Academy of Saumur, Cameron served as a professor of theology until 1621. In this relatively brief period, he became the theological father of the Saumurians, working alongside Louis Cappel and teaching Moïse Amyraut and Josué de la Place—all of whom would form, as Albert Gootjes notes, "a 'triumvirate' which educated French pastors for more than thirty years and shaped them in the Cameronian theological tradition."[6] In 1620, nearing the end of his tenure at the Academy, Cameron unintentionally ignited another intra-Reformed controversy, regarding the nature of spiritual regeneration upon the soul. Daniel Tilenus, once Reformed but by then Arminian, requested a conference with Cameron to discuss "the grace of God and the powers of free choice in the business of our (effectual) calling."[7] In the ensuing debate, Cameron predictably defended the standard Calvinistic approach to why some are graciously saved and others are not, while Tilenus defended the Arminian position. The controversy arose not from Cameron's basic position but from his willingness to concede certain points to Tilenus, particularly regarding the nature of regeneration itself. Cameron argued that because the human will always and necessarily follow the last judgment of the practical intellect (in accordance with the prevailing faculty psychology), spiritual regeneration works not directly upon the will but only upon the intellect. Seeing that "the will depends upon the intellect, with the renovation of the intellect, it [i.e., the renovation of the intellect] produces the renovation of the will."[8] Hence, God's action of regeneration "does not attach itself only to the human intellect, but reaches (*pertingit*) to the will itself," yet mediately, as the intellect serves as the instrument by which that action of regenerating the will takes place.[9]

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[5] Wodrow (*Collection*, 2:107) tantalizingly suggests that Cameron picked this position up while in Heidelberg. This would hardly be surprising given that the denial of IAOC was the position of many renowned Heidelbergians, including Zachary Ursinus, Caspar Olevianus, and David Pareus. Cf. Gert van den Brink, "Obedience, Punishment, and Merit: The Heidelberg Catechism on the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 18.4 (2024): 279–301.

[6] Gootjes, "John Cameron (ca. 1579–1625) and the French Universalist Tradition," in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 173.

[7] John Cameron, "Lectori Salutem," in *Amica Collatio de Gratiae et Voluntatis Humanae Concursu in Vocatione & Wuibusdam Annexis . . .* (Leiden, 1622).

[8] Cameron, *Τα Σωζομενα Sive Opera* (Geneva, 1658), 720, Thesis IX.

[9] Cameron, *Opera*, 720, Thesis X.

Cameron's apparent denial of God's immediate regeneration of the will in conversion prompted the theology professors at Leiden to write to Cameron:

> We cannot approve of the fact that you seem, throughout your whole writing [against Tilenus], to either allow or require no other change in the will besides that moral one which arises from an object being presented [to the intellect] and from the judgment of reason about choosing, rejecting, or preferring it, without any immediate influence of God upon the will itself, especially in supernatural matters.[10]

Though this debate may appear academic and labyrinthine, both positions were motivated by pastoral concerns. Cameron, for his part, wished to avoid any position which supposed that God's work, by the Spirit, upon the soul in conversion was somehow irrational or dependent upon immediate revelation—think charismatic enthusiasm. The Leiden theologians, for their part, were concerned that Cameron was downplaying the supernatural aspect of the Spirit's action upon the soul during conversion by locating the Spirit's work as primarily a work upon the intellect through provision of right teaching (i.e., the preaching of the Word)—think rationalism. At a deeper level, however, this controversy was driven by anthropological differences regarding faculty psychology and the ostensible ambiguity over precisely how God's grace works with and upon the intellect and will more generally.[11] This correspondence between Cameron and the Leiden professors occurred amid further political turmoil in France which forced Cameron to return to the British Isles. King James I immediately appointed him professor of divinity at the University of Glasgow, but after less than a year, he returned to France in 1623, only to be denied a teaching post by King Louis XIII's court. The following year, the king permitted him to take up a position at the University of Montauban, but Cameron died the following year, in 1625, trying to break up an anti-royalist mob.

Ironically, Cameron is most well known in modern Reformed churches not for any of these public controversies in which he was embroiled during his lifetime, but for his doctrine of "universal grace", or hypothetical universalism. Although Cameron clearly bequeathed his hypothetical universalism to the later Amyraldians, his views on the extent of the atonement "were, with very few exceptions, simply not known to anybody" while he was alive.[12] This changed when, in 1628, Louis Cappel published private letters Cameron wrote to him during 1610–12. In these letters, within the context of adjudicating the relationship between divine justice and the atoning work of Christ, Cameron explained the universality of Christ's satisfaction, how he interpreted various Scripture passages (such as 1 Tim. 2:4 and John 3:16), and how he understood the so-called Lombardian formula (Christ died for all sufficiently; Christ died for the elect alone

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[10] "Epistola Facultatis Theologicae Academiae Leydensis ad Cameronem" in Cameron, *Opera*, 709.

[11] For an overview of how Cameron's position is both embraced and modified among the later Saumur theologians, see esp. Albert Gootjes, *Claude Pajon (1626–1685) and the Academy of Saumur: The First Controversy over Grace* (Brill, 2014).

[12] Albert Gootjes, "The Theologian's Private Cabinet: The Development and Early Reception of John Cameron's Universalism," in *The Doctrine of Election in Reformed Perspective: Historical and Theological Investigations of the Synod of Dordt 1618–1619*, ed. Frank van der Pol (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 137–64, 153.

effectually).[13] With the publication of Amyraut's *Brief traité de la predestination*, it became apparent that many of Cameron's best students had absorbed this doctrine of universal grace—a doctrine Cameron had presumably been teaching privately to them. Moreover, while Cameron's teaching on the universality of Christ's death, broadly speaking, was not considered outside the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy (even by those who strongly disagreed[14]), given the other positions his students began to teach—positions which one does not find Cameron clearly defending—the posthumous Cameron would inevitably be caught in the crossfire of Amyraldian controversies.[15]

Evaluating Cameron's legacy is a difficult business. On the one hand, Cameron was clearly very learned and beloved by his students. The French Protestants repeatedly elected him to debate Arminians and Roman Catholics. Some of his students, especially those connected with the Academy of Saumur, became not only avid defenders of his legacy but also bulwarks for the Protestant faith as religious minorities in Roman Catholic France.[16] Indeed, by the 1650s in France, Cameron's teaching on universal grace had become widely accepted among French Reformed Protestants through Paris ministers and his disciples at Saumur.[17] Even the Genevan Company of Pastors (admittedly with some misgivings related to Cameron's aforementioned controversial theological positions) permitted the famous Genevan printer Jacques Chouet to first publish Cameron's one-volume *Opera* in 1642! Cameron's influence, via the Saumur theologians, extended into England. For example, Robert Baillie, one of the five Scottish commissioners at the Westminster Assembly, complained that "Unhappilie Amiraut's Questions are brought in on our Assemblie. Many more loves these fancies here than I did expect."[18] Stephen Charnock, in his magnum opus *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*, cites Amyraut more than any other author.

On the other hand, some of Cameron's teachings were undeniably ambiguous, quirky, and prone to heterodox interpretations. For example, the famous English hypothetical universalist and delegate to Dordt, John Davenant, had concerns about the Cameronian position on universal grace as described to him secondhand.[19] Davenant observed that the language of "universal grace" troubled many orthodox theologians because what modern theologians call "common grace" should rather be assigned to God's common philanthropy toward mankind, not the grace of Christ. Additionally, the Augustinians

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[13] John Cameron, *Praelectionum* …, 3 vols. (Saumur, 1626–28), 3:571–88. Republished in Cameron, *Opera*, 530–35.

[14] Andre Rivet, *Disputationes Tredecim, De Justa & Gratiosa Dei Dispensatione, circa Salutem Generis Humani* in *Opera Theologica*, 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1651–60), II:1167–68 (Disp. VI, Theses 9 and 10).

[15] I make a similar point when trying to distinguish Amyraldianism from English Hypothetical Universalism: "Amyraldianism and English Hypothetical Universalism: What's the Difference?" *Modern Reformation* (2022): https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/amyraldianism-and-english-hypothetical-universalism-whats-the-difference.

[16] Cf. Louis Cappel, Moïse Amyraut, and Josué de la Place, *Syntagma Thesium Theologicarum in Academia Salmuriensi* …, 2 vols. (Saumur, 1665).

[17] Gootjes, "John Cameron (ca. 1579–1625) and the French Universalist Tradition," in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, 189.

[18] Robert Baillie's letter to Mr. William Spang, October 24, 1645, in *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1841), II:324.

[19] See John Davenant, "Davenant's Response to the French Reformed Churches about the Will of God towards Human Sinners," in *On the Death of Christ & Other Atonement Writings*, ed. Michael J. Lynch (Davenant Press: 2024), 347–55.

(Augustine, Prosper, and Fulgentius) held as a dictum that the grace of Christ is not universal.[20] Even Cameron's own students recognized some deficiencies in Cameron's theologizing about the order of the divine decrees. Moreover, his disciples could not agree on how he understood divine grace working relative to the intellect and will during conversion.[21] The Arminian Simon Episcopius may have been correct in claiming that "according to Cameron's hypothesis, the objective revelation of the divine will alone is sufficient to convert a person, without any other internal grace which is impressed immediately on either his mind or will."[22] This interpretation was consistent with the Saumurian Claude Pajon's sympathetic interpretation of Cameron, and it does sound Pelagian insofar as the only grace necessary for man's conversion would be the outward administration of gospel preaching.

To some, Cameron stands as a cautionary tale of theological ambiguity, if not heterodoxy; to others, he represents a creative, if uneven, attempt to reconcile fidelity to the Reformed tradition with the intellectual battles of his day. However, it should be noted that throughout his turbulent career, he was a faithful Reformed minister and professor without any significant moral failings. The Huguenots appreciated Cameron's ministry even when some Genevans and Dutch Reformed expressed misgivings. It is important to remember that early modern Reformed theology was not monolith but continued to develop as new sciences and philosophies entered European thought. Perhaps the best tribute on this anniversary is to read him afresh (after learning some Latin!), not only through the lens of Amyraldianism or his later critics, but as a pastor-theologian who sought to confess the gospel of Christ faithfully in his own age.

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[20] Davenant, "Davenant's Response to the French Reformed Churches," in *On the Death of Christ*, 351–52.
[21] Cf. Gootjes, *Claude Pajon (1626–1685) and the Academy of Saumur*, 133–67.
[22] Cameron, *Opera*, 724.

ServantLiterature

The Displaced Person

by Danny Olinger

Jesus, Stab Me in the Heart!
Flannery O'Connor at 100

A constant complaint registered against the fiction of Flannery O'Connor, even by those who acknowledge her literary talent, is that it is marred by her seeking a Christian meaning. The *Time* (June 6, 1955) review of O'Connor's collection, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, is an example of such a literary viewpoint. The reviewer applauded the "witheringly sarcastic stories" that came from the "talented Southern lady whose work is highly unladylike." He also approved her instruments in slashing through the buckthorn hedges to make the South simper, storm, and snivel, namely, "brutal irony, a slam-bang humor and a style of writing as balefully direct as a death sentence."[1] The reviewer believed, however, that O'Connor exhibited a signature flaw in groping for higher meaning in "The Displaced Person."

> Only in her longest story, "The Displaced Person," does Ferocious Flannery weaken her wallop by groping about for a symbolic second-story meaning—in this case, something about salvation. But despite such arty fumbling, which also marred Author O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* (*Time*, June 9, 1952), this is still a powerful and moving tale of an innocent Pole who stumbles against the South's color bar.[2]

Robert Fitzgerald took offense to the notion expressed in the *Time* review that "The Displaced Person" represented an example of authoritorial groping on O'Connor's part.[3] Fitzgerald surmised that the reviewer was aware of a meaning that eluded him, and perhaps because it eluded him he had hard words for it, "'symbolic," "second-story," and "something about salvation." Fitzgerald gathered from the context that the "arty fumbling" the review had in mind was the Age of Criticism lament of fiction writers giving to the *dramatis personae* of their stories representative weight as "symbols" or "archetypes." Fitzgerald agreed that such writing can be distracting and referred to Henry James in an O'Connor-like way. "The first, last, and best criterion for the worth of a work of fiction is probably James's: the amount of felt life it contains. On the other hand, there is no denying representative value to figures in a story if in fact they have it, if they come by it honestly."[4]

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[1] "Such Nice People," review of Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find, and Other Stories*, *Time* (June 6, 1955): 114.
[2] "Such Nice People," 114.
[3] Robert Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and the True Country," *Sewanee Review*, vol. 70, no. 3 (Summer, 1962).
[4] Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and the True Country," 380.

Fitzgerald believed that "The Displaced Person" was not only well-achieved in coming to its meaning honestly, but also that the reviewer had misidentified its protagonist. The protagonist is not Mr. Guizac, the Pole, but the giant wife of the countryside, first personified by Mrs. Shortley, but more fully personified by Mrs. McIntyre. Trying to preserve life in the South, Mrs. McIntyre practices countryside religion, which has no regard for the unseen, "true country," and consequently, little or no regard for others.

Five years before Fitzgerald's defense, O'Connor explained her literary usage of "country" and "true country" in response to an editorial in *Life* magazine about post-war American fiction writers. The editorial argued that the United States as a post-war nation enjoyed an unparalleled prosperity. A nearly classless society had emerged, and yet novelists were not representing the country fairly as the redeeming quality of spiritual purpose in American life was missing in fiction.

O'Connor stated that from the standpoint of a fiction writer with Christian concerns, she had an interest at least equal to that of *Life* editors in "the redeeming quality of spiritual purpose." The question to her was what a writer was going to take his "country" to be? The word "country" suggests everything from the actual countryside that the novelist describes, on to the peculiar characteristics of his region and his nation, on to and through and under all of these to his true country, which the writer with Christian convictions will consider to be what is eternal and absolute.[5] She added that in any other form of writing but fiction one would perhaps write "countries" in laying out the contrast of this world with the world to come, but the peculiar burden of the fiction writer is to write concretely about life in his region. Such observation demands that the writer who emphasizes spiritual values not cover up sin and its consequences. For O'Connor, the reality that the United States was the most powerful and wealthiest nation in the world did not matter in any positive sense. "The sharper the light of faith, the more glaring are apt to be the distortions the writer sees in the life around him."[6]

The Peacock

The story opens (and closes) with the peacock. Instead of being an incidental detail of farm life, the peacock signals the story's perspective, the contrast between that which is seen and temporal and that which is unseen and eternal.

> The peacock was following Mrs. Shortley up the road to the hill where she meant to stand. Moving one behind the other, they looked like a complete procession. Her arms were folded and as she mounted the prominence she might have been the giant wife of the countryside, come out at some sign of danger to see what the trouble was. She stood on two tremendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of a mountain, and rose, up narrowing bulges of granite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced forward, surveying everything. She ignored the white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a ragged wall of cloud as if it pretended to be an intruder and cast her gaze down the red clay road that turned off from the highway. . . . The peacock stopped just behind her, his tail—glittering green-gold and blue in the sunlight—lifted

[5] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners,* eds. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 27.
[6] O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, 26.

just enough so that it would not touch the ground. It flowed out on either side like a floating train and his head on the long blue reed-like neck was drawn back as if his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see.[7]

The sun, as it is in almost every O'Connor story, is an anagogical signal of God and his divine transcendence that oversees the creation. The sun-basking peacock, his regal blue neck and head drawn back "*as if* his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see," represents the reality of the unseen heavenly realm intruding into the present life. Mrs. Shortley is not heavenly minded. Her purpose is standing on the earth. She plants her feet and ignores "the white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a ragged wall of cloud *as if* it pretended to be an intruder."[8]

Mrs. Shortley

From her high place, Mrs. Shortley is watching for the arrival of the Guizacs. The first thing that struck Mrs. Shortley about these WWII European refugees as peculiar, almost sinister, was that they looked like other people. Mrs. McIntyre, the owner of the farm, held out her hand to greet Mr. Guizac, and to Mrs. Shortley's horror, he kissed it. The act shocks Mrs. Shortley, who "jerked her own hand up toward her mouth and then after a second brought it down and rubbed it vigorously on her seat."[9]

In the days leading up the Guizacs's arrival, Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre together nicknamed them the Gooblehooks. What becomes apparent in the story is that Mr. Guizac and his family have swallowed the hook of the gospel.[10] Even though Mrs. Shortley's son was in Bible school and planned to start a church—"he had a sweet voice for hymns and could sell anything"—she believed that "religion was essential for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it. For people like herself, for people of gumption, it was a social occasion providing the opportunity to sing."[11]

The priest who drove the Guizacs to the farm notices the peacock. "The peacock stood still as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all. The priest's homely red face hung over him, growing with pleasure."[12] Mrs. McIntyre raised her eyebrows and exchanged a look with Mrs. Shortley that silently communicated that the priest was in his second childhood. The two women consider the peacock nothing more than a peafowl or peachicken, another mouth to feed.

After the priest leaves, Mrs. Shortley approaches elderly Astor and young Sulk, who together had been secretly watching. She tells them these people were Displaced Persons, that there was no place for them to go. She also warns the two Negros that she heard Mrs. McIntyre say that this was going to put the fear of the Lord in them.

O'Connor then resets the contrast between Mrs. Shortley and the peacock by showing them together again. The peacock had jumped in a tree in front of Mrs. Shortley. His tail, gold in one second's light and salmon colored in the next, might have been a map of the universe, but Mrs. Shortley does not notice it any more than she does the spots of sky that

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[7] Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (Noonday Press, 1995), 194.
[8] O'Connor, *The Complete* Stories, 194 (Emphasis added).
[9] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 195.
[10] Damien Ference, *Understanding the Hillybilly Thomist* (Word on Fire, 2023), 226.
[11] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 203.
[12] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 198. The allusion is to the shining face of Moses after his Mount Sinai encounter with God in Exodus 34.

cracked the dull green of the tree. The reason why Mrs. Shortley does not notice is that she was having an inner vision. In her vision, displaced people, ten million billion, were pushing their way into the land. She was God's appointed messenger to those already on the land that they would need to find another place.

Mrs. McIntyre, however, sees Mr. Guizac differently. After his being on the farm a short time, she tells Mrs. Shortley, "At last I'm saved!" She gushed, "That man there," and she pointed to where the Displaced Person had disappeared, "—he has to work! He wants to work! . . . That man is my salvation![13]

Mrs. Shortley looked straight ahead as if her vision penetrated the cane and the hill and pierced through to the other side and said slowly, "I would suspicion salvation got from the devil."[14] Mr. Guizac represents a place that she cannot comprehend, Europe, that realm of the "devil's experimental station," where the bodies of dead naked people are piled in a heap.

In order to stop the Pole's evil plans, Mrs. Shortley starts reading the Bible. "She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and she was not surprised to suspect that she had a special part in the plan because she was strong."[15] She also grows weary of the priest's visits, annoyed with his foolish obsession with the peacock and outraged at "his planting the Displaced Person, the Whore of Babylon, in the midst of the righteous!"[16]

Mrs. Shortley was in the pasture when she had her vision. A voice said to her, "Prophesy!"[17] When she opened her eyes, "the sky was full of white fish carried lazily on their sides by some invisible current and pieces of the sun, submerged some distance beyond them, appeared from time to time *as if* they were being washed in the opposite direction."[18]

Spying on Mrs. McIntyre and the priest, she overhears Mrs. McIntyre saying that she plans to give Mr. Shortley notice so that she can give Mr. Guizac the raise he deserves. Mrs. Shortley plops down on an open sack of feed so hard that dust clouds up around her. She stomps away with a volcanic red face and tells her husband, "You ain't waiting to be fired!"[19]

A dark yellow sun was beginning to rise as the car loaded with the Shortleys and their possessions moved away like an overfreighted leaking ark.[20] Her daughters ask, "Where we goin, Ma? Where we goin?" Mrs. Shortley's heated face makes it appear as if she was preparing for a final assault, but she suffers a fatal heart attack. Her daughters are unaware of what has happened and continue to ask, "Where we goin, Ma?" Mrs. Shortley's eyes, closed in her visions, are now opened and "seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country."[21]

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[13] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 203.
[14] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 203.
[15] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 209.
[16] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 209.
[17] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 210.
[18] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 210.
[19] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 212.
[20] See, Ference, *Hillbilly Thomist*, 230. The overloaded car—"They tied two iron beds to the top of the car and the two rocking chairs inside the beds and rolled the two mattresses up between the rocking chairs. On top of this they tied a crate of chickens"—shows their prioritizing of material possessions and their lack of attention to spiritual ones.
[21] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 214.

Mrs. McIntyre

After Mrs. Shortley's death, Mrs. McIntyre emerges as a new prophet of the countryside. Property, possessions, and money, along with what others think about her, define Mrs. McIntyre's religion.[22] Mrs. McIntyre believes that through Mr. Guizac's work she finally was going to have the profit margin she deserved, which turns her thoughts back to her first husband, the Judge.

Wearing her broad-brimmed, black straw hat that blocked out the sun, she repeats the Judge's cliché, "Money is the root of all evil," to Astor. Astor, standing half in the sunlight and half out, prophetically recalls another cliché, "Judge say the devil he know is better than the devil he don't."[23]

The three years that they were married were her happiest, even though when he died his estate proved to be bankrupt. "It was as if as the final triumph of a successful life, he had been able to take everything with him."[24] She had buried him on the farm so that he would always be at home, the grinning deity of the countryside.

Pinching herself about the miracle of the Displaced Person (D.P.), she sees Sulk and Mr. Guizac looking together at something. She intercepts Sulk and has him turn over the picture of a blond-haired young girl. Mr. Guizac had promised Sulk his cousin's hand in marriage if Sulk paid half the cost to transport her from a refugee camp to America.

In Mrs. McIntyre's countryside-religionist eyes, Mr. Guizac could not have done anything worse, he does not understand the outrage. "From Poland. Mamma die, pappa die. She wait in camp." Mrs. McIntyre does not care about the girl's plight. "I can't understand how a man who calls himself a Christian," she said, "could bring a poor innocent girl over here and marry her to something like that." The D.P. wants what is best for his cousin and for Sulk, but Mrs. McIntyre will have nothing of it. She declares, "This is my place . . . I am not responsible for the world's misery."[25]

At night, Mrs. McIntyre climbs to the top of the slope and stands with her arms folded as she looks over the land as Mrs. Shortley previously had done. She narrows her gaze around Mr. Guizac on the tractor, as if she had been watching him through a gunsight. She watches him mow everything until there remained in the center, raised like a little island, the graveyard where the Judge lay grinning.

During the priest's next visit, Mrs. McIntyre informs him that the Pole does not fit in and needs to go. The priest replies that if she casts him out, he has nowhere to go. She refuses to change her mind, but the priest's attention had turned to the tiers of small pregnant suns that floated in a green-gold haze over the peacock's head. "'Christ will come like that!' he said in a loud gay voice and wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there gaping."[26] Mrs. McIntyre's face reddened. Mention of Christ in conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother. "The priest didn't seem to notice her. His attention was on the peacock in all its glory. 'The Transfiguration,' he murmured. Mrs. McIntyre has no idea what he was muttering about." [27] She was talking about that which

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[22] Carter W. Martin, *The True Country* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1994), 32.
[23] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 217.
[24] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 218.
[25] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 224.
[26] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 226.
[27] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 226.

was practical, that she had to release Mr. Guizac. The priest, smiling absently, said, "He came to redeem us," shook her hand and left.[28]

Mr. Shortley returns to the farm and tells Mrs. McIntyre that Mrs. Shortley has died, but not before expressing her belief that Mr. Guizac was the devil. Mrs. McIntyre proceeds to hire Mr. Shortley back, but O'Connor makes clear that Mrs. McIntyre should be able to recognize who the devil is. When Mrs. McIntyre is looking for Mr. Guizac in the barn, she notices Mr. Shortley with his "long beak-nosed shadow glide like a snake halfway up the sunlit open door" and stop.[29] Mr. Shortley, for his part, knows "there was nothing for him to do now but wait on the hand of God to strike, but he knew one thing: he was not going to wait with his mouth shut." Every person that he encountered, black or white, would hear his complaint about what was happening on Mrs. McIntyre's farm.

Still, Mrs. McIntyre struggles with firing the D.P. She desires the priest's blessing to do so, but when they would sit on the porch, his choice of topic was Jesus. "For," he was saying, as if he spoke of something that had happened yesterday in town, "when God sent his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord"—he slightly bowed his head—"as a Redeemer to mankind, He . . .". Mrs. McIntyre cut him off in mid-sentence and barked, "I want to talk to you about something serious!" She glared at him fiercely and announced that as far as she was concerned, "Christ was just another D.P."[30]

The next morning the countryside seemed to be receding from what was happening around the shed where Mr. Guizac was lying under a small tractor, with Sulk standing by with some tools to hand to him. Mrs. McIntyre, wearing a black hat to keep the sun out of her eyes, looks at Mr. Guizac but says nothing. "Of all the things she resented about him, she resented most that he hadn't left of his own accord."[31]

At the same time, Mr. Shortley backs the large tractor out of the shed, brakes the tractor on the incline, and jumps off. Mrs. McIntyre, Mr. Shortley, and Sulk hear the break slip. Frozen in collusion, the three sets of eyes come together. They do nothing and say nothing as the tractor wheel rolls over Mr. Guizac and breaks his back.

The tractor crushing Mr. Guizac is the cross-like event by which Mrs. McIntyre realizes her culpability. She faints when it happens, and when she awakes, she sees Mr. Guizac's body and others around him. "She was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance."[32]

Mr. Shortley leaves that evening without giving his notice. Sulk leaves also as he wanted to see more of the world. Astor also departs as he felt that he was too old to continue on the farm on his own.[33] Mute and infirmed, Mrs. McIntyre loses the farm, but every week Father Flynn visited. "He came regularly once a week with a bag of

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[28] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 226.
[29] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 231.
[30] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 229.
[31] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 234.
[32] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 235.
[33] Martin, *True Country*, 93–95. Carter Martin observes that Astor is the one character not linked with the guilt of Mr. Guizac's death. Two instances of symbolism indicate Astor's significance to the religious theme of the story. First, Astor occasionally spoke with the peacock, and the peacock in turn "would follow him around the place, his steady eye on the ear of corn that stuck up from the old man's back pocket or he would sit near him and pick himself" (217). Second, in the barn when he is with Mrs. McIntyre, "Bars of sunlight fell from the cracked ceiling across his back and cut him into three distinct parts" (234).

breadcrumbs and, after he had fed these to the peacock, he would come in and sit by the side of the bed and explain the doctrines of the Church."[34]

O'Connor's Commentary

O'Connor stated, regarding the ending, that "the displaced person did accomplish a kind of redemption in that he destroyed the place, which was evil, and set Mrs. McIntyre on the road to a new kind of suffering."[35] If Mrs. McIntyre, now helpless to herself, is to be displaced to the true country, it must be through that which she previously rejected, the priest as God's mouthpiece.

O'Connor also elaborated on the importance of the peacock. "As to the peacock, he was there because peacocks might be found properly on such a place but you can't have a peacock anywhere without having a map of the universe."[1] "The priest," she continued, "sees the peacock as standing for the Transfiguration, for which it certainly is a most beautiful symbol. It also stands in medieval symbology for the Church—the eyes are the eyes of the Church."[36]

Fitzgerald's Conclusion

Robert Fitzgerald maintained that although there was much that the *Time* reviewer did not see in the story, the reviewer especially did not see the significance of O'Connor's handling of the peacock. Fitzgerald asked, "I wonder if the handling of the peacock can justly be called arty. An unpredictable splendor, a map of the universe, doted on by the priest, barely seen by everyone else: this is a metaphor, surely, for God's order and grace. Is it arbitrary and imposed?"[37]

Fitzgerald agreed with the reviewer that the story is a powerful and moving tale, but its message is that the people of the South are displaced, not just the Pole. It is a religious condition common to all. The fantasy in the story belonged to the self-sufficient pragmatism of Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre, the two giants of the countryside. Mrs. Shortley only saw the frontiers of the true country at her death, but Mrs. McIntyre, clearheaded and hard beset, is the worthy protagonist of the tragic action. "Being what she is, she must reject not only the salvation offered, in terms of farm work, by the Pole, but that other salvation that she finds so exasperating to hear of from the priest." Fitzgerald concluded, "It is an ambitious and responsible work of fiction, and there is no fumbling about it."[38]

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[34] O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*, 235.
[35] O'Connor to "A," November 25, 1955, *Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 118.
[36] O'Connor to "A," November 25, 1955, *Habit of Being*, 118.
[37] Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and True Country," 388.
[38] Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and True Country," 394.

ServantReading

Redefining Good and Evil

A Review Article

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by Andrew S. Wilson

To Change All Worlds: Critical Theory from Marx to Marcuse, by Carl R. Trueman. B&H Academic, 2024, xi + 240 pages, $34.99.

Over the past decade or so, ideas that used to be the near-exclusive province of left-wing professors and campus groups have spilled over into mainstream society through things like Black Lives Matter, the 1619 Project, DEI initiatives, and Pride month. At the root of all of this is critical theory, which sees Western civilization (especially its American embodiment) as so morally compromised that it needs to be completely dismantled. In the words of Brian Lozenski, a Minnesota education professor and appointee of Governor Tim Walz,

> The United States as constructed is irreversibly racist. So if the nation-state as constructed is irreversibly racist, then it must be done with. It must be overthrown. . . . You can't be a critical race theorist and be pro-U.S. It is a[n] anti-state theory that says the United States needs to be deconstructed, period.[1]

One of the features of this kind of thinking is that it produces an entirely different conception of morality. As Daniel Mahoney explains, this is an ideological project that says that "whatever promotes world-transforming revolution is necessary and good, and whatever stands in its way is, by definition, retrograde and evil." Mahoney also notes that such "ideological fanaticism is the inevitable consequence of a nihilistic denial of an order of things, of a natural moral order available to human beings through reason and experience."[2] In other words, when man rejects God's moral order, he usurps God's place and creates his own system of morality. One would hope that all Christians would reject ideas rooted in something so radical that it redefines the categories of good and evil. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

In *To Change All Worlds*, Carl Trueman provides the helpful service of tracing the historical development of critical theory by explaining the teachings of the figures who were instrumental to its formation. In his introduction, Trueman notes that an understanding of critical theory is important not merely due to its political significance, but also because of how it relates to the modern world's dwindling ability "to define what

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[1] Cited in "Walz Education Appointee Calls for the Overthrow of the U.S.," Stanley Kurtz, *National Review Online*, September 25, 2024, https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/walz-education-appointee-calls-for-the-overthrow-of-the-u-s/.

[2] Daniel J. Mahoney, *The Persistence of the Ideological Lie: The Totalitarian Impulse Then and Now* (Encounter, 2025), 32, 120.

it means to be a human person" (2). While critical theory is eager to dismantle, it rejects "the very idea of human nature as something stable across time and cultures and that carries with it significant moral implications for how we live." This makes it unable "to articulate a clear vision of what the future of human society should look like" (5). As noted above, for those in the thrall of critical theory, good and evil do not correlate with any objective moral standard or end, but with one's stance towards the way society is fundamentally ordered. Society is so irredeemably corrupt that it needs to be laid waste and rebuilt from scratch into an amorphous "better place." Those on board with this program are good, even when they support things that would traditionally be seen as evil, such as rioting and looting. Those against the program are evil, even when they support things that would traditionally be seen as good, such as preventing men from entering women's restrooms or participating in female athletic competitions.

Trueman explains from the outset that his book is neither polemical nor constructive, but descriptive. That is, his "main purpose is to explain the basic elements of early critical theory—in historical context" (4–5). He begins with G.F.W. Hegel and Karl Marx, moves on to later Marxists Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács, focuses on figures from the Frankfurt School, and then considers later proponents of critical theory. One thread that runs throughout the book is the effort of these thinkers to break down "the illusory absolutism of the established 'natural' ways of thinking and acting" (28) and to show that reality is not objective but is a construct shaped by ideas. Truth claims are dismissed as the manipulative efforts of those with an interest in maintaining the status quo. As Trueman explains, for critical theorists,

> approaches that seem to be objective, commonsensical, or simply stating the obvious are in fact means by which the latent interests of the dominant group within society are asserted and protected. . . . [Critical theorists] believe that the concepts with which society operates—such things as justice, equality, fairness, legality, and the like—are all products of a particular form of society rather than transcendent categories of universal application. (85, 108–9)

This is why proponents of critical theory do not see any need to engage opposing arguments. Anyone who appeals to reason is simply demonstrating his captivity to the false constructs erected by society. One popular example of this is Robin DiAngelo's book *White Fragility*, in which she contends that when white people object to her allegation that all whites are racist, they are only confirming their racism.

Another area explored by Trueman is how critical theorists have responded to the way the modern world has assigned supreme authority to science, a move based on the (scientifically unprovable) assumption "that the whole of reality can be encompassed and exhaustively understood by the scientific method of measurement and calculation" (127). Frankfurt School members Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer critiqued this as serving the interests of bourgeois capitalism because it objectively reduces people into things. They also noted that when reality is reduced to that which can be measured and calculated, there is no basis for the morality upon which bourgeois culture depends. While Immanuel Kant sought to address this through his categorical imperative, this is "an ethic predicated on treating the others as subjects, as free individuals of unique value, to be treated not as means to an end but as ends in themselves," Adorno and Horkheimer

astutely pointed out that such an ethic "runs afoul of a view of the world that turns the other into an object of study and analysis" (131). In spite of this insight, the fundamental problem remains with Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis: "The failure to have any normative notion of human nature" leaves us "with nothing more than the pious hope that an unalienated humanity will emerge from the historical process, though we have no way of knowing in advance of that moment what such might look like" (143). This is why the Christian response to critical theory needs to focus on the fact that human nature is more than a social construct, and that the church, with its announcement of the grace of God in Christ, "is the place where alienation is overcome" (143).

Critical theory also relates to much of what is being said in our day about matters of sex and gender. Because Freud played a key role in shaping contemporary thinking on this, Trueman spends many pages summarizing his thought and the ways it influenced others. Especially of note is the claim that sexual desire is the essence of a person's identity. Those who embrace this idea see society's sexual codes as repressive because they prevent "people from being who they would desire themselves to be" (149). This is why proponents of critical theory call for the destruction of the institution of monogamous marriage and the traditional family, an effort that has made significant headway in the world in which we live today. Yet once again, the rejection of the natural moral order has wreaked havoc, emptying sex of any intrinsic meaning. This leads Trueman to contend that "perhaps human beings do have a nature, an essence, and perhaps the careful regulation of sexual behavior in a manner that reflects and reinforces natural dependencies and obligations is essential to human freedom" (180).

One profitable insight from critical theory has to do with the way popular culture and mass forms of communication are used "in the manufacture of social conformity and political passivity" (183). Even though this originated as part of a critique of bourgeois capitalism, it is something to which Christians should pay careful attention in a screen-dominated age. Image-based forms of communication operate on us in a different manner than word-based forms. Because the viewer is largely passive in his engagement with image-based media, he is also rendered highly suggestible. As philosopher Colin McGinn explains, "What we see on the screen is intended to engage our emotions directly. This is the sensory manipulation of emotion. . . . The kind of seeing we experience in the cinema is *emotional seeing*—the seeing *of* emotions *with* emotions."[3] If we want to avoid being manipulated, we need to be aware of the way today's cultural products can subtly shape how we understand the world.

The reason why every society bears the taint of evil is due to the universal sinfulness of man. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously observed,

> If only it were so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart? . . .

[3] Colin McGinn, *The Power of Movies: How Screen and Mind Interact* (Pantheon, 2005), 104-105. Italics original.

> . It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.[4]

Due to its embrace of such notions, "the West has a capacity for self-criticism and self-correction that sets it apart from other present and past civilizations. . . . The highest virtues of the West do not stem from self-satisfaction but from an aspiration to meet an objective standard of natural right."[5] This stands in sharp contrast to critical theory, whose rejection of the notion of a natural moral order does not result in the destruction of its advocates' innate moral impulse, but in its inversion. No longer having any basis for a sense of moral restraint, those inspired by critical theory regard as righteous *anything* that is done to destroy the hopelessly corrupt status quo. As Michael Polanyi explains, this is a mindset in which the "moral needs of man, which are denied expression in terms of human ideals, are injected into a system of naked power, to which they impart the force of blind moral passion."[6] This should be reason enough to reject critical theory.

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[4] Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–56: An Experiment in Literary Investigation,* abridged ed. (Vintage, 2018), 75, 312.
[5] Luke Foster, "For the Glory of France," *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2025, 56.
[6] Cited in Mahoney, 123.

ServantReading

Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges, *by John Swinton*

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by Shane Lems

Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges, by John Swinton. Eerdmans, 2020, 245 pages, paper, $27.99.

In recent years, mental health has become an extremely popular topic. It is, of course, a very important one. No one wants to be mentally unhealthy. We all want mental well-being, psychological stability, and clear thinking. At the same time, since we live in a fallen world, we know that people face serious and severe mental health issues. Mental health difficulties affect all sorts of people—Christians, non-Christians, men, women, younger people, older folks, and people of all different ethnicities. If you have struggled with mental health challenges or know someone who does, you know how dreadful they can be. It is nothing to joke about or take lightly. Sadly, Christians do not always respond to mental health challenges with wisdom and love. Sadly, sometimes mental health issues are even stigmatized in some Christian circles.

Thankfully, there are helpful resources for Christians struggling with mental health issues or supporting people with such issues. One of the best resources on this topic I have read is *Finding Jesus in the Storm* (*FJS*) by John Swinton. Swinton spent over fifteen years as a nurse in a mental health clinic before obtaining a PhD in theology from Aberdeen University. He has spent much of his adult life ministering to people with mental health challenges and has also written various helpful Christian books and articles on topics such as dementia, disability, medication, dying, and other similar topics. In *FJS* Swinton looks into depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. More specifically, this book is about Christians who suffer from those mental health challenges. What is it like to follow Jesus while seriously depressed? How can a bipolar Christian serve Christ faithfully? How does schizophrenia affect a Christian's walk with the Lord? Swinton masterfully tackles those types of questions in *FJS*.

This book has five main parts. The first part is "The Art of Description." This section is where Swinton talks about the various labels people use for mental health challenges. Sometimes descriptions such as "bipolar disorder" or "schizophrenia" are very unhelpful. All too often, Swinton argues, these descriptions are "thin." For example, if you have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a thin description means you are stigmatized, labeled, dehumanized, and misunderstood. Although descriptions are not bad in themselves, we need to have "thick" descriptions. That is, we need to understand that labels in and of themselves do not tell us all we need to know about the person and his or

her mental challenge. There are many aspects and layers to mental health issues that defy a brief definition. I appreciate how Swinton interacted with the *DSM* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) in this section. He did explain how the *DSM* can be helpful, but it is not a be-all-end-all resource for mental health issues. "If we assume that it [the *DSM*] is adequate for understanding, then we have a problem" (41). Someone may have a mental health challenge and label, but that challenge and label should not define the person.

"Redescribing Diagnosis" is the title of the second section of *FJS*. It is a short section that gives more information about labels and descriptions for mental challenges. It also gives a short story about someone with bipolar disorder who struggled with the label. The story is helpful for readers to understand what it is like to be labeled with a mental health term. It is a very difficult reality for some Christians!

The third part of *FJS* covers the topic of depression. This is an excellent overview of what depression is like. Depression is not merely sadness. It is "antifeeling." Depression is not a simple thing. It has layers and various aspects. It is not just "the blues." We cannot talk about depression as if it is a one-dimensional thing. It includes biological issues, social issues, spiritual issues, and other issues. And sometimes they are all mixed together. In this section of the book, Swinton also discusses the psalms of lament, joy, the silence of God, medication, and Christian meditation.

Swinton's insights into medication are especially valuable. He has a balanced and nuanced approach. It's not just "throw medicine at depression." But it is also not a biblicistic response: "Your depression is because of sin. Medication is just a band-aid." Swinton wisely says that if medication "aids in the process of communing with God and the enjoyment of God, it may be functioning faithfully" (107). That is the "chief end of medication" (107).

Schizophrenia is the topic of the fourth section of *FJS.* This is an especially important chapter because Swinton explains what psychosis is like, including when a person hears voices. This part of the book was very informative for me. Typically, we may react poorly when we hear someone say they hear voices when they are in a difficult mental state. It is hard for most people to understand what it is like to hear voices. But hearing different stories about this and learning from Swinton's insights have given me some important things to think about when it comes to schizophrenia. If you know someone with schizophrenia, this part of *FJS* will be a valuable resource for you in understanding it from a Christian perspective. And yes, sometimes solid Christians struggle with psychosis and schizophrenia. Swinton understands this and discusses it with a pastoral emphasis.

The fifth part of *Finding Jesus in the Storm* is all about what it is like to live with bipolar disorder. Swinton specifically explains the suffering involved in bipolar disorder. It is a "strange kind of loneliness," as the title of chapter 8 suggests. Swinton does an excellent job in his discussion of the spirituality of bipolar disorder—the highs and lows, the shame and regret, the distress and disruption of life involved in it. There is also a level-headed examination of spiritual warfare and the demonic realm in this section of the book.

The conclusion of *FJS* is called "Redescribing Healing." It is a short section, but it is helpful. Swinton talks about relational healing, theological healing, cultural healing, liturgical healing, and other aspects of healing mental health challenges. I was happy to

see a list of websites and resources for people to learn more about various mental health challenges. In fact, I have been listening to a helpful podcast from a website Swinton recommended.

All in all, I believe *Finding Jesus in the Storm* is one of the best Christian books on mental challenges such as bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia. Swinton wonderfully weaves in stories of Christians he knows who face these challenges and helps the reader understand what it is like to live with such difficult challenges. I learned so much about mental health from *FJS*. It has helped me understand mental health challenges more than anything else I have read. This book has helped in my sermon application, counseling, and thinking about discipleship. I believe this would be a good book for pastors and elders to utilize in their local shepherding situations. It will keep them from stigmatizing or mistreating those with mental health challenges, and at the same time give them a deeper understanding of common mental health issues.

I also enjoyed Swinton's pastoral tone throughout the book; it was a tone of love and understanding. Certainly, individual Christians and Christian churches need more love and understanding when ministering to those with mental health challenges. And for you Christians who live with serious mental health challenges, know that other Christians are facing the same challenges. Also, know that other Christians do care! Be patient with other believers as we try to walk with you following Jesus together. And best of all, *Jesus himself* will walk with you through the deep, dark shadows of each and every mental health challenge you may face. And one day, when you are enjoying Christ's healing presence in glory, each and every mental health challenge you have had will be forever gone. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

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ServantReading

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers, *by Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite*

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by Ryan M. McGraw

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers, by Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite. Crossway, 2024, 234 pages, paper, $14.99.

The Holy Spirit breathed out Scripture, resulting in a divinely inspired, authoritative, sufficient text (2 Tim. 3:15–17). Yet the same Spirit works through the church, gifting her teachers to serve as Christ's gifts, steering the church away from false doctrine, and driving her towards unity and maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:11–16). On principle, then, this means both that Scripture alone has magisterial authority, teaching us what we must believe and do, and that the church has ministerial authority, teaching us what others have seen God requiring us to believe and do. This makes the early church fathers our fathers in the faith, who are at once both faithful and fallible. Recognizing these facts, Ford and Wilhite offer samples of early church styles of pastoral ministry, mostly drawn from the fourth and fifth centuries, Origen, Irenaeus, and Gregory the Great excepted (chapters 4–5, 9), to retrieve spiritual wisdom for Christian ministry today (10–15). Though sometimes letting their own reflections on ministry eclipse their treatments of the selected fathers, this easy-to-read book will push modern pastors toward fruitful spiritual virtue, theological depth, and faithful labor in caring both for their own souls and those of others.

The book's ten chapters are arranged under virtue, theology, and ministry. Every chapter is devoted to a single church father, opening with a quotation from the figure treated as well as a key Scripture passage related to the topic. The arrangement of individual chapters is thematic and progressive rather than chronological. Thus, the four chapters in part one illustrate humility, spirituality, sacramental piety, and scholarly skill via Basil of Caesarea (329–379), Gregory of Nyssa (336–394), Ambrose of Milan (340–397), and Origen of Alexandria (d. 254), respectively. Origen excepted, all these theologians were pro-Nicene, and two of them wrote before and after the final edition of the "Nicene Creed" framed at Constantinople in 381. Part two turns the clock back to Irenaeus of Lyons (130–202), demonstrating his seismic influence on biblical interpretation (chapter 5). Returning to the fourth century, the remaining three chapters in this section focus on Athanasius of Alexandria's (297–373) Christological bent, Augustine of Hippo's (354–430) deep theological reflection, and Gregory of Nazianzus's (329–390) Trinitarian doxological tone. Most of the above material directs readers to character and

characteristics of pastors, leaving pastoral work to two chapters in part three. The net effect is giving the salutary impression that who pastors are and how they live their lives in communion with God is more important than how impressive their ministerial labors and activities are, which is a vital point in promoting vitality and vibrancy in ministry today. Regarding ministerial labor, chapter 10 uses Gregory the Great (540–604) to press pastors to slow down to devote time to the contemplation of God, and chapter 10 appeals to John Chrysostom (347–407) as a model for searching applicatory preaching. Like any good book on historical subjects, this one will likely leave readers with a voracious appetite to read some of the classic Christian texts mentioned here.

Though dedicated ostensibly to pastors and pastoral ministry, it is actually hard to classify this book. In many respects, readers could conceive of it as a hermeneutics text, and not merely a piece of pastoral theology. Heavily reflecting both the church fathers' fusion of sound doctrine and sound living, the authors recognize that interpreting (and teaching) Scripture is an intellectual-spiritual exercise. Illustrating the point, and perhaps surprising readers, they note that Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* was "his most influential work" (127). Yet the chief aim of this biography was to demonstrate both that false doctrine and false living, and sound doctrine and solid living, always go in pairs. Rather than mere sets of rules, pre-modern hermeneutics began with God and God's action, both in the Bible and in the Bible's readers. Hermeneutics and theology were thus Spirit and character driven rather than method driven. Alternatively, one could class this work as a modern pastoral theology drawing from church fathers, instead of a study of the fathers on pastoral theology. By infusing so much modern pastoral counsel and so many examples into their chapters, the authors sometimes risk eclipsing the fathers they highlight. Most pointedly, the chapter on Origen (chapter 4) dedicates more space to the need for learned pastors (73–85) than it does to Origen himself (85–94). Though less pronounced, chapter 7 on Augustine gives too much attention to John Webster's *Domain of the Word*[1] before allowing Augustine to speak with his own weighty and profound voice (138–141). Though reflective and soul-nourishing, the authors risk blurring lines between historical voices and modern ideas. One could say that the book is an exercise in spiritual hermeneutics as it comes to bear on pastoral ministry, extracting lessons primarily from the fourth century, developing a spirituality of pastoral ministry rather than a mere skill-based model.

Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls is an easy entry point for contemporary pastors who find reading the church fathers like visiting a strange country. Though the fathers are not on par with Scripture, they often help us see scriptural emphases, especially related to Trinitarian piety, that get lost in our modern theological and cultural climate. This book is a helpful blend of hermeneutical and teaching principles, ancient counsel, and pastoral examples that will benefit anyone interested either in serving the church or learning from the past, and hopefully both.

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[1] John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (T&T Clark, 2012).

ServantPoetry

G. E. Reynolds (1949–2050)

Summer's Lease

I sit reading for the first time
In months inside because
The lease nears its end rhyme;

The poetry of summer is as short
As a poignant sonnet, whose limit
May evince a lawyer's terse tort:

"The dipladenia and the primrose
Must not be allowed to fade and die;
My brief against this demise will depose

The perennial rose to be a witness
Against the palette of leaves that fall,
Although the frost undoes its fitness."

The lease then has a termination
Determining the sure decline of fair
Summer's hint of paradise's determination

That beyond four season's rhythm lies
A summer that will neither fade nor end
In which neither flower nor person dies.