Union Not Patriarchy

Ordained Servant

March 2026

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: UNION NOT PATRIARCHY

March 2026

From the Editor

Lots of ideas are floating about among the chattering class about the relationship between church and state, and the nature of authority in the family and the church. Christian Nationalism and Patriarchy are among the labels used frequently.

Aaron Mize takes issue with the idea that patriarchy in the Bible gives us a model for the authority structure of family, church, and state. "In Defense of Union, Not Patriarchy" contends that "The Fatherhood of God is not an archetype of hierarchy but the source of communion, to imitate that Fatherhood is not to rule but to give life. The church's task, therefore, is not to restore a patriarchal system in the world but to embody the new humanity . . ."

Darryl Hart's review article, "Bite-Sized Christian Nationalism," reviews a new book on this topic, *King of Kings: A Reformed Guide to Christian Government*, by James Baird.

> That Baird can call for a government powerful enough to promote the true religion, only five years after governments ignored civil liberties to enforce public health, is well-nigh amazing. And yet, the author does not appear to be bashful in calling upon government to implement the idea of the public good affirmed by a minority of the American people.

Shane Lems reviews a remarkable new book about Meredith G. Kline's work on Revelation, *Christ and His Church-Bride: Meredith G. Kline's Biblical-Theological Reading of the Book of Revelation*, by Danny E. Olinger. As a brilliant linguist, although an Old Testament professor by vocation, Kline was as capable with Koine Greek as he was with Hebrew and New Testament theology. Combine this with insightful biblical theology in the Vosian tradition and you have a treasure trove. The first half of the book is Olinger's exposition of the sources of Kline's theology and exegesis from Kline's other writings, which form the basis of his commentary.

Jack VanDrunen reviews *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe*, by Stephen C. Meyer. As commendable as Meyer's insistence is that the existence of God and modern science are not antithetical, VanDrunen cautions Christians about the principles of the philosophy of science employed by Meyer to prove intelligent design. He recommends Meyer's work on the history of modern science. On this important topic, I recommend Bryan Estelle's article "Preachers in Lab Coats and Scientists in Geneva Gowns" in the 2010 *Ordained Servant Online* (https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=223).

Our poem this month is Sonnet 65 by William Shakespeare (1564–1616). Sonnets 15, 17, 18, 19, 55, 60, 63, 65, 81, and 107 each explore the ability of Shakespeare's poetry to

defy time and death. This is one of the most beautiful. It reminds us of Ecclesiastes which deals with mortality, concluding with a poetic description of our diminishment ending in death (Eccl. 12:1–7). Like Shakespeare's poetry this biblical book has survived the ravages of time. But unlike the bard's poems Ecclesiastes points beyond the under-the-sun world to a Redeemer.

The cover photo is an unusual selfie. It is the shadow of a Nordic skier on deep powder at Derryfield Country Club in Manchester, New Hampshire. It is I!

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.

ServantTruth

In Defense of Union, Not Patriarchy

by Aaron P. Mize

Introduction

In his February 2024 *Reformation21* article, "In Defense of Patriarchy," Peter Van Doodewaard urges readers to reclaim a word and doctrine he believes modern Christians have wrongly abandoned. He writes that "patriarchy simply means father-rule," and that "acquiescence to the popular equation patriarchy-is-evil will result in the loss of our nation, the Christian home, the church and the Gospel."[1] His argument rests on a sweeping identification of fatherhood, male leadership, and divine order: "Reality was designed a good patriarchy, ruled by the Triune God."[2] To reject patriarchy, he contends, is to reject God's Fatherhood and the very grammar of redemption.

The aim of this essay is to show that Van Doodewaard's defense of patriarchy is not a defense of biblical fatherhood, but a confusion of categories—of Creator and creature, of providence and redemption, of headship and hierarchy. Scripture never presents patriarchy as the created or redeemed norm. It is a feature of the fallen world Christ overturns, not a structure he institutes.

The Confusion of Fatherhood and Patriarchy

Van Doodewaard's central claim is that patriarchy "is God's language with profound meaning and import," so that to question it "runs against the grain of the nature of God and His creation."[3] This reasoning conflates divine fatherhood with human male authority. Our catechism teaches that God is Spirit (John 4:24). He "does not have a body like man."[4] Thus, to read gender back into God's fatherhood actually runs against the grain of the nature of God and confuses him with his creation. The Westminster Standards guard against precisely this kind of confusion. They confess that the Father, Son, and Spirit are "the same in substance, equal in power and glory" (Westminster Confession of Faith 2.3, Westminster Larger Catechism Q.9, Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.6). The distinctions among the persons are not ranks of authority but relations of origin—begetting, being begotten, and proceeding. The Son's obedience belongs to his mediatorial office according to his human nature, not to his eternal divine nature.

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[1] Peter Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy," *Reformation21* (February 5, 2024): https://www.reformation21.org/blog/in-defense-of-patriarchy.
[2] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."
[3] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."
[4] *First Catechism* (Great Commission Publications, 2003), Q/A 9.

It is a poor "grammar of redemption" that confuses linguistic grammar with divine ontology. In Scripture, "Father" is used in several ways: to define an eternal, internal relation between divine persons (1 John 1:1–4), to describe God as Creator of all (Eph. 4:6), and redemptively, "Father" is revealed as a covenantal name that discloses God's gracious relation to his people, not a model of gendered rule.

When the Lord calls Israel his "firstborn son" (Exod. 4:22) or Christ teaches us to pray "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9), fatherhood signifies adoption and mercy. It is not a masculine principle of government but a revelation of love within the economy of grace. God's self-revelation in this language is analogical, not biological or political. Isaiah can just as readily say that God comforts his people "as one whom his mother comforts" (Isa. 66:13). The divine fatherhood from which all families derive their name (Eph. 3:15) transcends sex and social structure.

To equate divine Fatherhood with male authority collapses the distinction between the Creator and the creature. The relation between the Father and the Son is eternal, internal to the Godhead, and utterly unlike temporal relations of rule. When God creates humankind male and female in his image, he communicates shared dominion and fellowship—not subordination of one to the other.

Creation: Mutual Dominion, Not Male Rule

Van Doodewaard writes that "God instituted fatherhood when he made Adam (first), then Eve, then marriage, and then gave the command to be fruitful and multiply."[5] Yet the text of Genesis does not identify Adam's chronological creation as an office of rule. The divine commission in Genesis 1:26–28 is joint: "Let *them* have dominion" (emphasis added). Both man and woman bear God's image, both receive the mandate, both share the blessing.

Patriarchy appears nowhere in the pre-fall order. And to import it into Genesis 3:16 misses the redemptive promise found there. Genesis 3:16 must be read in immediate continuity with 3:15. The verse is not instituting marital hierarchy or even describing domestic disorder; it carries forward the *protoevangelium*, unfolding as it were the covenantal dimension: The woman's desire and the man's rule signify not subjection but the coming union between the Redeemer and his people. The woman's תְּשׁוּקָה (*teshuqah*, "desire") is oriented toward her אִישׁ (*ish*, "Man")—not Adam as husband, but the promised Redeemer of 3:15. This reflects the mutual desire on display in Song of Songs 7:10, "I am my beloved's, and his *desire* (תְּשׁוּקָה, *teshuqah*) is for me."

The canonical parallel in Genesis 4:7 confirms this redemptive frame: There the חַטָּאת (*chatta't*), "sin-offering,"[6] "lies" at the door; its "desire" is toward the sinner, and he must "rule *with*"[7] it—language of sacrificial union, not interpersonal subjugation.[8] Read this way, Genesis 3:16 announces the church's longing for her sin-offering Man and

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[5] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."

[6] Aaron P. Mize, "The Church's Desire toward Christ Her Sin Offering in Genesis 3:16," *Ordained Servant Online* (Apr. 2024): https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1115.

[7] The Hebrew particle ב can be translated "in, at, with."

[8] Some may note that "sin offering" in Hebrew is feminine in gender. How then can it refer to Christ, a man? A similar parallel can be found in Exodus 29:14 where a male bull is a חַטָּאת (*chatta't*), "sin offering." See also Lev. 4:21, 23–24.

anticipates his shared, life-giving rule with his bride. It is a promise of union amidst enmity, not a charter for patriarchy.

Genesis 2 deepens the picture by portraying the woman as the עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*ʿēzer kenegdô*), "a helper corresponding to him." The term עֵזֶר (*ʿēzer*) is most often used of God himself as Israel's helper (Deut. 33:29; Ps. 33:20). It conveys strength and partnership, not subordination. The climactic phrase "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) reveals a union of communion, not hierarchy.

The Misreading of Genesis 3:16

Van Doodewaard advocates for "father-rule" *as part of divine order*. While he does not cite Genesis 3:16 explicitly, he works within the broader complementarian/headship framework in which that verse is often presumed. Genesis 3:16, read in its redemptive context, speaks of something far deeper. In my earlier study, "The Church's Desire toward Christ Her Sin Offering in Genesis 3:16," I argued that the text should be read in light of the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the vision of Revelation 12.[9] The woman's pain and desire are not domestic emotions at all but redemptive travail.

Revelation 12 describes a woman crying out in birth pangs while the dragon seeks to devour her child—the Seed promised in Eden. This woman symbolizes the covenant community laboring toward the birth of the Messiah. Her agony is the persecution of the faithful, not the discomforts of motherhood. When Genesis 3:16 says, "Your desire shall be for your man (אִישׁ, *ish*)," the term points forward not to Adam but to the promised Man, the Redeemer whose bruised heel will crush the serpent's head. Eve's first exclamation, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen. 4:1), reflects this expectation—in fact, grammatically the Hebrew "אֵת" (*ʾêṯ*) could be a preposition ("with"), but can also mark a direct object, yielding, "I have received a man, *the LORD.*"

Thus Genesis 3:16 is not a charter for male authority but the first announcement of the church's hope in Christ. It reveals the woman's desire for union with her sin-offering, not her subjection to her spouse. The verse looks to redemption, not regulation.[10]

The Failure of Patriarchal Logic in Redemption

Van Doodewaard insists that "the church's government notably has as its head a man, the man Christ Jesus."[11] True—but the character of that headship is decisive. Van Doodewaard once again confuses and conflates categories. Christ's mediatorial rule in the church is based in his Davidic kingship, not conjugal[12] headship. In Scripture, Christ's headship is organic and mystical, not hierarchical or official.[13] Christ's headship signifies vital union—the living bond of grace by which he communicates his life to the members of his body (John 15:5). It belongs to the order of redemption, not to the order of authority. Thus, Isaiah 9:6–7, which Van Doodewaard believes supports his thesis as it describes Christ's fatherly relation to his spiritual children, actually argues against him,

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[9] Mize, "The Church's Desire."

[10] This is contrary to the forced reading of Susan Foh, who views the woman's desire as only insidious, and the reason for the need of husband-rule. "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* (1974).

[11] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."

[12] from *con-* ("together") + *jugum* ("a yoke")

[13] Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Lexham Press, 2014), 179.

as the text depicts a familial communion, wherein the life and interests of the members are extensions of Christ's life, and his interests intertwined with that of the members of the household.

When the New Testament calls Christ "head of the church" (see Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:18), it describes inward communion and union, not a chain of command. Every believer—male and female—is directly united to the head through the Spirit. No human "headship" mediates this union. To model male rule on Christ's headship is therefore a category mistake: It collapses mystical union into governmental hierarchy.

Van Doodewaard's patriarchal logic treats authority as an ontological property of maleness. But in redemption, authority is cruciform and ministerial. The One who reigns does so by serving, washing feet, and dying for his bride. His kingship serves His headship by bringing his people into shared life, not subordinate ranks.

Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Peter 3:1–7: One-Flesh Communion, Not Hierarchy

Paul and Peter both situate marriage within the larger drama of redemption, not within the social conventions of empire. The household codes of Greco-Roman society are not baptized into Christian ethics but transfigured by the apostles into expressions of cruciform communion. In Christ the ordered household is no longer a miniature kingdom of male empire but a sign of the new humanity in which head and body, husband and wife, are joined by the same Spirit who unites the church to her Lord.[14]

Ephesians 5: Christ and the Mystery of Union

Paul's exhortation that wives "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22), cannot be read apart from verse 21: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." The entire passage unfolds within that mutual posture. The wife's submission mirrors the church's receptive faith toward Christ—the trust that rests in his self-giving love. Yet that same love defines the husband's vocation. Christ's headship is not administrative rule but personal union: He "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (v. 25). His giving is the act by which the two become one flesh—and that one flesh union with Christ is one upon which both spouses of any human marital union depend for life.[15]

To call Christ κεφαλὴ (*kephalē*, "head") is to speak of organic relation, not domination. Life and nourishment flow from the head to the body; the body lives in the head's vitality.[16] So the husband's headship signifies not hierarchy but communion—an embodied participation in the self-offering that makes the church his own. He loves her "as [his] own bod[y]" (v. 28) because she is his body; the metaphor collapses the distinction between giver and receiver into a single life of shared grace.[17]

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[14] Contrast this with the litigious and misogynistic view of household in the Persian imagination that Israel experienced in Exile (Esther 1:16–22). See Rev. Adam Wells, "Master of the House," sermon, Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Middletown, PA, February 13, 2023, accessed Nov. 4, 2025.

[15] Gal. 2:20–21.

[16] See Eph. 4:15–16; Col 2:19.

[17] See Eph. 5:29-32; John 17:21-23.

Paul quotes Genesis 2:24—"The two shall become one flesh"—to reveal that marriage was always ordered toward Christ. "'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31–32). It is an enacted prophecy of the union accomplished in the cross. In that union, authority is transformed into service, and obedience becomes worship. The husband's "giving up" and the wife's "receiving" converge in the same cruciform pattern: Both live toward one another in the Spirit of him who emptied himself. The result is not hierarchy maintained but enmity healed; not roles preserved but communion restored.

1 Peter 3: Witness in Cruciform Faith

Peter's instruction to wives and husbands continues this same pattern. The call for wives to "be subject to your own husbands" (1 Pet. 3:1) is framed by his earlier exhortation that the entire community live "for the Lord's sake" as sojourners in a hostile world (1 Pet. 2:13–17). Submission here is an act of witness, not subordination.[18] The wife entrusts herself to God's justice even when her husband does not yet believe. Her adornment is not external power but "the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4)—a posture of faith that reflects the meekness of Christ before his accusers.

Likewise, husbands are summoned to dwell with their wives "in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7). The phrase does not assign rank but calls for reverence. The husband, mindful of his wife's bodily vulnerability in a fallen world, is to honor her as a co-heir of grace. His failure to do so disrupts communion with God himself ("so that your prayers may not be hindered"). Peter's vision is profoundly symmetrical: Both husband and wife stand before God as fellow pilgrims, both sustained by the same inheritance, both called to suffer well in conformity to Christ, both being disenfranchised from this earth and enfranchised into heaven where their life is hidden with God in Christ.

From Hierarchy to Holiness

Read together, Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 announce not an order of authority but an order of holiness. The household becomes a miniature liturgy of redemption—a space where the self-emptying of Christ is rehearsed in daily faith and fidelity. Headship and submission are redefined through the cross: no longer mechanisms of control but modes of communion. The husband's vocation is to embody the love that sanctifies; the wife's is to trust the God who vindicates. Both are participants in one mystery, the great mystery Paul names in Ephesians 5:32, where the story of man and woman finds its telos in Christ and his church. "This mystery is profound . . ."

In this light, the modern habit of translating these texts into the language of "leadership" or "male authority" is a reversion to the very power structures the gospel overturns. The apostles do not appoint "leaders" in the home; they unveil a new creation in which all relations are gathered into the obedience of love. The head is not the boss of the body but its life; and the body is not subordinate to the head but the means through

[18] Submission (from submittere, "to yield or place oneself under") denotes a voluntary posture of trust and communion. Whereas subordination (from subordinare, "to arrange under rank") denotes a hierarchial ordering of status—one expresses union in grace, the other gradation in power. *Cf.* Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.vv. "submittere" and "subordinare."

which the head is made visible. Marriage thus becomes an icon of union, not a diagram of hierarchy—a participation in the mystery of Christ who reigns by serving and restores by surrendering.

The False Parallel between Creation and the Trinity

Van Doodewaard writes that patriarchy is "God's language," since "Jesus was not ashamed of His Father."[19] Here again, the analogy fails. "God's language" is his Word (John 1:1–4) who became flesh (John 1:14), not patriarchy. The relation between the Father and the Son within the Trinity is eternal and ineffable; it does not mirror human gender roles. To do so confuses the Creator/creature distinction. The Son's obedience in history is not that of a subordinate creature to a male ruler but the voluntary condescension of the divine Mediator accomplishing redemption. To draw a straight line from the eternal Father–Son relation to human patriarchy is to confuse ontology (theology proper) with redemptive economy (soteriology) and to turn the mystery of the Trinity into a sociological model.[20]

Scripture guards this distinction. "The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing" (John 5:20); "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Equality of essence and unity of will define the divine life. The gospel does not reveal hierarchy within God but perfect communion. When humans imitate that communion, they reflect divine love, not divine hierarchy.

The Gospel Against Patriarchy

Van Doodewaard concludes that "patriarchy is good news" because "the Father's rule is safety."[21] Yet in Scripture, the good news is Christ (Luke 2:10–11) and his Kingdom (Luke 4:43). God delivers his people from the dominion of sin and death—not restores them to old systems of power. The gospel proclaims a kingdom "not of this world" (John 18:36), a rule established through self-giving love, not through the reassertion of hierarchy. Van Doodeward has substituted patriarchy for Christ as both "God's language" to us and "Good news for us." In so doing, he would turn redemptive marriage back to the mastery of Egypt.

Christ explicitly contrasts his kingdom with worldly patriarchy: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. . . . But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:42–43). To claim that patriarchy is the divine pattern of rule is to ignore the form of power revealed at the cross, where authority is redefined as sacrifice.

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[19] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."

[20] One of the deeper problems underlying Van Doodewaard's argument is his uncritical use of the relation between the Father and the Son as a model for human hierarchy. This error arises, in part, from the way the modern distinction between the ontological and economic Trinity is misunderstood. What was once a careful dogmatic distinction meant to preserve divine immutability and freedom has, in some modern formulations, become a conceptual gap between who God is in himself and who he appears to be in his works. This separation has proven fertile soil for subordinationist thinking.

[21] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."

Van Doodewaard warns that rejecting patriarchy will destroy "our nation, the Christian home, the church and the Gospel."[22] But the survival of the gospel cannot depend on the preservation of male hierarchy. The kingdom of God does not fall with the fall of patriarchy. It stands in the resurrection of Christ, who has made one new humanity in himself (Eph. 2:15).

The gospel does not rehabilitate fallen structures; it creates new life. As Paul declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This is not the abolition of creation's goodness but the restoration of its communion. Grace does not legitimize what sin has created; it restores what sin has destroyed.

It is very concerning that Van Doodewaard warns that rejecting patriarchy will result in "the loss of our nation, the Christian home, the church, and the Gospel." This progression—from nation to home to church, as well as the possessive pronoun "our"—reveals more than rhetorical flourish; it exposes a theology of cultural preservation masquerading as biblical order. The argument reveals a kind of Christian nationalism and social gospel: Patriarchy becomes the linchpin of a sanctified civilization, the structure by which divine authority flows from fathers to families, from families to churches, and from churches to nations. Is this not the literal argument of the counselors of Xerxes in Esther 1:16–22 as footnoted above? Van Doodwaard's warning that the fall of patriarchy will mean the fall of civilization repeats the anxiety of exile, not the hope of redemption.

Van Doodwarrd's logic is not the logic of the gospel, but of the bestial kingdoms of this world. Under the New Covenant, Scripture never presents the stability of earthly nations as the measure of faithfulness. The cross does not uphold civilization; it judges it. Christ gathers his people not by preserving a patriarchal order within a single culture but by calling a new humanity out of every tribe and nation. To identify the continuance of patriarchy with the preservation of the gospel is therefore to confuse the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of men. It is to barter the birthright of Christ's kingdom for the thin stew of worldly order.

The Redemptive Movement Towards Communion

The biblical story moves from domination to fellowship, from Cain's city of man to the New Jerusalem. Every social hierarchy introduced by sin is progressively undone in Christ, who gathers a new humanity of shared life and love.

Headship, rightly understood, dismantles patriarchy. It is an organic union—the living bond by which Christ imparts his life to his body, not hierarchy. Having ascended to the Father's right hand, he reigns as the incarnate Son whose kingship flows from his hypostatic union and is exercised through his mystical union with his people. As Vos observes, "His outward rule proceeds from this inward life; his kingship serves communion, not control."[23] Authority is provisional, serving love until all things are made new. Patriarchy, by contrast, corrupts this pattern—a counterfeit that turns communion into control.

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[22] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."
[23] Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:179.

Kingship Fulfilled in Communion

Christ's kingship does not cease; it is eternally his. Yet in the consummation, his reign, now exercised over a world still marked by sin and division, will be unveiled in its fullness as perfect communion. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15). The Head reigns not through the structures of this age but by his Spirit and Word, gathering his people into one body where his life fills all in all.

The hierarchical arrangements that have come to shape fallen human life—whether civil, cultural, or domestic—are not divine designs or providential instruments but distortions born of sin's disorder. They persist under God's sovereign patience, not his prescription. Redemption neither perfects nor purifies fallen orders; it replaces them with the communion of saints in Christ. In the new creation, every vestige of subordination gives way to the unmediated communion of the saints with their King.

Kingship is glorified in the Lamb's righteous rule; patriarchy is condemned and ended by his redemption. The reign of the Lamb becomes the life of his body.

Conclusion

Van Doodewaard closes his essay by calling fathers to embrace patriarchy as their mantle: "You rule your home. To make this a pretext for abuse is vile."[24] In that warning against abuse we can agree; the tragedy is that his chosen framework ensures the very abuse he decries, because the heart of abuse flows from *entitlement*. If the husband is divinely entitled to his wife's obedience, then there is either no practicable definition of abuse, or it is non-existent altogether in the relation between husband toward a wife. Patriarchy's problem is not only moral but theological—it mistakes the outworking of sin for the shape of grace. It seeks redemption in the rehabilitation of fallen earthly power rather than in the cruciform life of Christ.

The Fatherhood of God is not an archetype of hierarchy but the source of communion. To imitate that Fatherhood is not to rule but to give life. The church's task, therefore, is not to restore a patriarchal system in the world but to embody the new humanity where all are one in union with the Son, the Lamb of God who makes us children of grace, sons and daughters of his Father, gathered into one body under one Head. The Father's glory shines not in patriarchy but in the harmony of the redeemed united to the Son, where every voice joins in the song of the Lamb who was slain and now reigns forever.

Aaron P. Mize *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as the pastor of Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Bothell, Washington.*

[24] Van Doodewaard, "In Defense of Patriarchy."

ServantReading

Bite-Sized Christian Nationalism

A Review Article

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by Darryl G. Hart

King of Kings: A Reformed Guide to Christian Government, by James Baird. Founders Ministries, 2025, xx + 95 pages, $21.98.

The reception to James Baird's book, *King of Kings: A Reformed Guide to Christian Government*, suggests that the author is either a genius or an idiot savant; either he has hit upon a truth that practically everyone else has ignored, or he has combined a few Christian aspirations into a basic textbook on good government. The book itself comes (as many evangelical publications do these days) with eight pages of endorsements from pastors, professors, and even a few attorneys and public officials. The consensus among the blurb writers (twenty-six in all) is that Baird's explanation of government's duty to promote Christianity as part of the public good is not only timely (since the United States is in crisis) but also reiterates basic Protestant political philosophy. As one endorsement reads, in appealing to "history, Scripture, and reason, [Baird] makes a simple case for why the civil magistrate should promote the true religion." Although Stephen Wolfe opened the debates about Christian government with his 2022 book, *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, Baird seems to have scratched the itch that Wolfe exposed. The fact that Baird's book is one-fifth the size of Wolfe's may explain some of the appeal of *King of Kings*.

Another attraction comes from the book's manner. Baird is not argumentative or theoretical. He holds the reader's hand and walks effortlessly through syllogisms that are as obvious as they are airtight. His point is that governments have a duty to promote Christianity. Baird also quotes a host of Presbyterian and Reformed sources, from the Westminster Confession to Archibald Alexander Hodge (Charles Hodge's son), to show he stands in line with the Reformed tradition. His style is personal, even folksy at times, and he refuses polemics. In fact, he avoids all theological labels—he will let theonomists, two-kingdoms proponents, and Kuyperians decide where his book belongs. He is simply explaining the "classical American view" of government.

The problem of avoiding arguments with other views—which would have likely made the book twice as long—is that Baird's argument, no matter how positive and winsome, is wrong. In fact, its simplicity compounds the errors, which fall into at least two categories—ones of definition or logic and others of history.

At the heart of Baird's conception is the language of the public good. He finds it in the twenty-third chapter of the Westminster Confession, and it informs a logical syllogism that is the backbone of his argument. The confession affirms that God ordained civil magistrates to be subject to him and rule their people for God's glory and for "the public good" (Westminster Confession of Faith 23.1). Later, Baird deduces that because

government "must promote the public good," and because Christianity, "the only true religion," is "part of the public good," civil magistrates "must promote Christianity as the only true religion" (22). By including Christianity in the public good, Baird has ipso facto made Christianity part of the civil magistrate's responsibility. Public good then is essential to Baird's argument. He defines it as synonymous with the common good, or "public welfare," or "the people's welfare" (5). He asserts that this idea has been "a permanent fixture in the Western legal and political tradition," though he does not mention that before the fourth century, among the Greeks and Romans, Christianity was hardly part of the ancients' understanding of "public good." Baird also finds the language of "general Welfare" in the preamble to the United States Constitution. Later when discussing the American Founding and the First Amendment, Baird asserts that the Founders wanted the state governments, not the federal authorities, to promote Christianity and that few agreed with Thomas Jefferson's separation of church and state. He avoids entirely the reasons that led all the original states to embrace Jefferson's position and abrogate government support for established churches (the last two establishments to disestablish religion were New Hampshire in 1819 and Massachusetts in 1833). By situating the "public good" in the Western and American political and legal traditions, Baird makes it seem like promoting Christianity has been at the heart of the West's understanding of government's proper function since the days of Aristotle.

Baird's sleight of hand in relying on "public good" avoids any discussion of demographics. Public is, after all, shorthand for the people in a community or society. What happens when the American public is religiously diverse? What then constitutes the general interest of a diverse public? To be sure, the United States was overwhelmingly British and Protestant at the Founding, even as the small number of Roman Catholics and Jews practiced their faiths freely in places like Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. In the demographic mix were African slaves (almost twenty percent of the population) who could not practice their indigenous faiths. But after 1850, immigration changed fundamentally the demographics of the United States at the same time that it increased the number of non-Protestant and non-British Americans. Baird's failure to acknowledge the country's diversity, consequently, leaves his definition of the public good either stuck in the year 1800 or implies support for a policy of deporting non-Christian (more likely non-Protestant) Americans. To be fair, Baird admits that he has no policy prescriptions and also advises prudence when considering how the government should promote Christianity today. "We must adapt to our circumstances," he writes, and to "our fellow citizens" (79). At the level of definitions and logic, however, Baird does not adapt his basic category of "public good" to the current circumstances of the United States.

The author's abstractions also led to a faulty history of Christianity and government that also deceives readers into thinking that promoting Christianity as the public good will return the United States to its previous order and stability. (By another sleight of hand, Baird manufactures examples of good government from Old Testament kings, the pagan rulers, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus the Great. He does not stumble once over the anachronism of using ancient, divine-right monarchies as examples for modern republican government.) Baird quotes Protestant sources freely from John Calvin and John Owen to Charles Spurgeon and John Murray with no regard to the political circumstances of sixteenth-century Geneva, seventeenth-century England, Victorian

London, or 1960s Glenside, Pennsylvania. Granted, if the purpose is to apply basic definitions, attention to different forms of government and citizenship between 1545 and 1965 might seem unnecessary (and add another hundred pages to the book). Even so, Baird might have at least paid some attention to Calvin's relationship to Geneva's city council and compared it to Owen's relationship to Oliver Cromwell to see how well the Protestant governments in the past adhered to the ideal governments espoused by Calvin and Owen.

An even greater historical weakness comes when Baird fails to situate American norms for government within the broader sweep of Christian history. Again, such considerations would make a much longer book. But it would also acquaint readers with the exceptionalism of the American Founding (and why Calvin and Owen were no longer relevant for Jefferson, Adams, and Madison). Protestants who consider the church as an outsider to government have little trouble finding biblical support. Unlike the Old Testament's divine right monarchy, the New Testament presents a people, persevering and waiting for the return of their Lord. The only political instruction they receive is to honor the emperor, a Roman official who sometimes persecuted and killed Christians. Then out of the blue came Constantine's conversion, and almost as suddenly Christianity became the established religion. Some Christians were not pleased by the worldliness that came with ties to the state. That is why some renounced the world to become monks, and it also explains why so many reform movements before the Reformation came from monastics who wanted church officials to live and minister more like apostles than Roman governors. But from the fourth century to the eighteenth century, Christianity was preeminent in European society thanks to the symbiotic relationship between throne and altar.

The Reformation obviously upset this religious and cultural establishment. Having two or more churches within one Christendom proved contentious, even if historians sometimes go overboard blaming war on religious differences. Even in England where legal and political institutions created checks and balances that Americans celebrate in the Constitution, a Civil War between Parliament and Charles I (1640s) revealed the problems of a monarch as head of the church within the Christendom model. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 finally gave Parliament standing that it may not have had previously and resulted in a constitutional, as opposed to a divine-right, monarchy. But that did not resolve the problems of an established church and what to do with dissenters (such as Puritans and Presbyterians in England).

What the American Revolution (and its later constitutional arrangement) accomplished was both a political framework that limited the power of the civil government (with three branches) and a religious settlement that removed entanglement between churches and the state. To be sure, established churches still existed at the state level, but even these proved unworkable once, for instance, Massachusetts refused to require Unitarians in a specific town to pay taxes to support the Trinitarian pastor (or vice versa).

This fifteen-hundred-year-history is almost entirely absent from Baird's book. He simply and somewhat breezily suggests that if today's Protestants simply followed the ideas of theologians and pastors from the period between 1540 and 1880, Americans could recover a government that promoted Christianity as the public good. That is the heart of Baird's deception. Political change is difficult enough in a society as large, free,

wealthy, and powerful as the United States. Moving a nation from its current political configuration back in time to a golden era is impossible. But positive responses to Baird's book indicate he has touched the nerve of nostalgia. Those reactions also suggest political and historical naiveté.

For all the defects in American government over the past thirty-five years (though many readers of Baird speak often of the "postwar consensus," a reference to the 1950s when liberalism turned secular), the simple assertion that government needs to promote Christianity is no remedy. It has no chance of being implemented and Baird (thankfully) refuses policy recommendations. What is needed is for Christians, as much as their callings allow, to support the existing institutions that secure liberties for churches (and more) and that preserve public order. For over two hundred years Americans knew how to do that without relying on governments promoting Christianity. Where the United States has erred recently has less to do with secularization than with government overreach. That Baird can call for a government powerful enough to promote the true religion, only five years after governments ignored civil liberties to enforce public health, is well-nigh amazing. And yet, the author does not appear to be bashful in calling upon government to implement the idea of the public good affirmed by a minority of the American people.

What the American Founding and subsequent history teaches is that the United States needs less government, not more. Slapping the sticker, "Christian," on big government only adds one more voice to the cacophony of activists who propose more government rather than less.

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ServantReading

Christ and His Church-Bride: Meredith G. Kline's Biblical-Theological Reading of the Book of Revelation *by Danny E. Olinger*

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by Shane Lems

Christ and His Church-Bride: Meredith G. Kline's Biblical-Theological Reading of the Book of Revelation, by Danny E. Olinger. Reformed Forum, 2025, 544 pages, $48.00.

"Besides the fact that the Revelation of John is the most intriguing book in the New Testament, I think it may also be said that no other book of the Bible has as big and practical and inspiring message for the Christian of these days" (151). With these words, Meredith Kline began a sermon he preached on Revelation 6 in 1947. These words, I believe, were also a personal reality for Kline. He indeed found much comfort, hope, and encouragement from Revelation because it so clearly exhibits the glory and victory of Christ, the covenant Lord who shares his glory and victory with his bride, the church. Beginning in his seminary days at Westminster, Kline meditated on, referred to, and expounded upon Revelation throughout his career as a pastor and professor. One might argue that the book of Revelation shaped many of Kline's lectures, sermons, and writings.

In fact, Danny Olinger *has* made such an argument. After reading and rereading Kline's material, Olinger became convinced that Revelation undergirded much of Kline's writing. While reading through Kline's publications, Olinger began investigating this thought, taking notes and writing articles that demonstrated how Revelation influenced nearly all of Kline's work. Very recently, Olinger has gifted us with the fruits of his earnest labor in the book *Christ and His Church-Bride* (*CHCB*). *CHCB* is a volume that summarizes, surveys, and sets forth Kline's excellent biblical-theological insights into the book of Revelation and other biblical apocalyptic literature.

CHCB has a straightforward structure. The first part contains an overview of Kline's writings on the book of Revelation. In this section, Olinger provides a study and summary of Kline's many essays and books, including "The First Resurrection," "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," *Images of the Spirit*, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon,* and so on. These surveys and summaries are not just dry book reports. They provide very fine synopses of Kline's writings and are beneficial for those who want to learn more about his biblical-theological insights into the book of Revelation and eschatology. I found the surveys and summaries to be good overviews of the central ideas and principal themes in Kline's writings. I also benefited from how Olinger nicely wove together Kline's comments on Revelation with other apocalyptic biblical literature, such as Daniel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The second part of *CHCB* is made up of Kline's sermons on Revelation and Daniel. These sermons were new to me; I had not previously read them. I found Kline's messages entirely encouraging, uplifting, insightful, and faith-strengthening. These sermons certainly show the pastoral side of Meredith Kline. In them he used everyday language and illustrations to explain the texts in a way that is understandable and Christ-centered. It is true that many of Kline's writings can be technical and academic. But I believe almost any reader will benefit from these excellent sermons. Not only do they provide wonderful Reformed, amillennial expositions of difficult apocalyptic texts, they also give the reader much hope in Christ and the reality of his return to make all things new. I will no doubt read these sermons several times. As a side note, it would be nice to see these sermons published as a single book.

The third part of *CHCB* is something quite brilliant: a sort of commentary on Revelation by Meredith Kline. In this section, Olinger did the difficult and tedious work of gathering Kline's writings on the various texts of Revelation and putting them in textual order. For example, if you turn to the heading "Revelation 19:11–21:8," (375) you will find the ESV text. Following the Scripture text, you will find Kline's comments on various phrases of the text. Some of the comments on the text are quotes from Kline. But many of them are Olinger's summaries of Kline's writing on the particular text. Olinger calls this section of *CHCB* a "commentary and anthology of biblical-theological insights from a reconstruction taken entirely from Kline's writings and sermons on Revelation" (270–71). In my opinion, this section of the book is a gold mine. Reading through this section will be a treat for those interested in Kline's penetrating and perceptive observations on Revelation, which also include other biblical apocalyptic literature. In fact, I believe this is one of those "must-have" commentaries for the book of Revelation. And I never use the term "must-have" lightly when recommending books.

The fourth part of *CHCB* is titled, "Biblical and Theological Insights Related to the Book of Revelation Alphabetically Arranged." This section reads like a concise dictionary or glossary of terms, including terms such as covenant of works, Gog, the intermediate state, New Jerusalem, theocracy, typology, and so on. The summaries are taken from Kline's writings and arranged topically and alphabetically by Olinger. For example, if you turn to "Sabbath," you can find paragraph-length summaries of Kline's explanation of "Sabbath," "Sabbath Rest," "Sabbath Rest and Enthronement," and "Sabbath Rest and Jesus." After each summary, you will find the reference from Kline's writings if you want to follow the source. I appreciate this section because it serves as a concise and easy-to-use reference guide to some fundamental concepts in Kline's writings on Revelation and other apocalyptic literature.

At the end of *CHCB,* you will find a bibliography and an appendix that contains Kline's paper on the structure of Revelation that he wrote as a twenty-three-year-old seminarian at Westminster. The essay is somewhat difficult to read, but, like Kline's other writings, it is overflowing with profound insights into the book of Revelation and its structure. Although I already agreed with Kline's view of Revelation's parallel structure (building upon W. Hendriksen), Kline's explanation provided me with many more helpful points for consideration. The end of *CHCB* also contains a name and subject index as well as an invaluable Scripture index. As always, I am thankful for the Scripture index. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning here that the footnotes in *CHCB* are extremely helpful and full of interesting information.

On a practical level, I believe *CHCB* will be a significant help in providing readers with a sensible and biblical understanding of eschatology and the book of Revelation from a historic Reformed perspective. Christians today are faced with the sometimes bizarre views of dispensationalism and premillennialism. Kline engages with these, pointing out their weaknesses with exegetical, theological, and biblical acumen. Christians today are also faced with the sometimes bizarre views found in postmillennial circles characterized by extreme preterism, theonomy, and the Christian nationalism fad. Kline also engages with these views, highlighting their assorted flaws and errors through a detailed exegesis of Scripture and interaction with biblical theology. In many ways, Kline was ahead of his day, marking what he calls "tenacious preterism" and reconstructionism as highly flawed interpretive conclusions that are quite out of step with Scripture.

CHCB is a lengthy book of over five hundred pages. However, the reader need not be intimidated by its size. It is not necessarily a book that needs to be read from cover to cover, beginning to end. In fact, I started reading this book in the middle by reading Kline's sermons as part of my morning devotions. Then I selected Olinger's summaries of Kline's writings in an order based on my preferences. Finally, I read the commentary section for a stimulating review of the book of Revelation. In other words, this *CHCB* serves as a versatile resource for gaining insight into biblical eschatology, with a particular focus on the book of Revelation. I will no doubt be referencing this book for years to come whenever I study eschatology and apocalyptic literature in Scripture. Kline was right. Revelation is indeed a wonderful resource for Christians to read, mark, and study as they look up to the risen, glorified Lord in this age and look forward to his glorious return on that Day to bring them into the eternal Sabbath rest, the age to come. Christ is the one who leads us through the wilderness of this world to the "true and eternal Canaan, the new Eden" (463).

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ServantReading

Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe *by Stephen C. Meyer*

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by Jack VanDrunen

Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe, by Stephen C. Meyer. HarperOne, 2021, 576 pages, $32.50.

Stephen C. Meyer holds a PhD in the history and philosophy of science from the University of Cambridge. He is best known for his work promoting the theory of "intelligent design"—that complex biological organisms could not have arisen through natural processes, and thus that the existence of complex biological life requires us to hypothesize a supernatural (in particular, an immaterial) designer. *Return of the God Hypothesis* is his third major book on the topic, alongside *Signature in the Cell* (2009) and *Darwin's Doubt* (2013). Because Meyer is a professing Christian with serious academic credentials challenging the evolutionary status quo, most readers of *Ordained Servant* will find it easy to appreciate this latest installment. Nevertheless, I urge caution in appropriating many of his arguments.

The book has five parts, with twenty-one chapters in total. In the first part (chapters 1–3), Meyer traces modern science from its origin in late medieval theology through the eventual elimination of its theistic underpinnings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the second part, Meyer traces the resurgence of what he considers to be compelling evidence for God over the past two hundred years of scientific discovery. This evidence includes the following: (i) the discovery that the universe had a beginning (chapters 4–6), (ii) that the physical laws and early conditions of the universe have been "fine-tuned" for the development of complex life (chapters 7–8), and (iii) that the complexity of life itself could not have arisen through natural, materialistic processes (chapters 9–10). In the third part (chapters 11–14), Meyer discusses how scientists choose between competing hypotheses. Based on the evidence in part two, Meyer evaluates the competing "metaphysical hypotheses" of theism, deism, pantheism, and atheism, arguing that theism comes out on top. In part four (chapters 15–19), Meyer addresses more recent discoveries and criticisms of intelligent design. Part five concludes the book with two chapters. In chapter 20 he argues that intelligent design is not a "God-of-the-gaps" proposal, and in chapter 21 he encourages us to take "the big questions" of life seriously.

Meyer is a gifted science communicator. His writing is reasonably accessible (considering the heady subject matter) in the style of science journalism.

I especially commend the first chapter, which deals with the origins of modern science. So often we hear that science has theistic presuppositions, but I suspect that few of us could articulate what it is about Christian theism that makes it so friendly to science—beyond vague appeals to the regularity of the natural world. In chapter 1, however, Meyer argues that the conditions for modern science arose from two trends in late medieval theology. The first was the insistence of some theologians that God had absolute power to create any world that he wanted. (This is often lumped under the blanket category of "nominalism," due to its

affinity with other trends in late medieval thought.) If God could create any world he wanted, the natural philosopher could no longer learn about the world by sitting in his armchair and theorizing about how God *must* have created. Instead, he would need to put down Aristotle (22–23, 27–28) and go out into the world to see what God *actually did* create. The second trend was the resurgence of Augustinianism, which inspired a healthy doubt about the ability of the human mind to come to the right answers without careful investigation. Together, these produced the empiricism that birthed modern science.

Also laudable is Meyer's insistence that the existence of God is a question that science can inform us about. Many theologians and scientists over the years have suggested that science is completely incapable of answering questions about the existence of God. The aim is often noble: to protect religion from being refuted by science. But such a position is weak biblically and confessionally, and implausible philosophically. To that end, the great strength of the book is showing that science has not *refuted* (or even *disconfirmed*) the existence of God. Rather, theists can make perfect sense of the world that science is discovering.

Nevertheless, I doubt the book will convince many people who are not already inclined toward the "God hypothesis." This is because the subject-matter experts will be able to see through much of the rhetoric of the book—rhetoric which often makes Meyer's arguments seem more compelling than they are. A good example of this comes in chapter 9, where Meyer traces the history of the scientific study of the origin of life. He wraps up the chapter, "During the last seventy years, every proposed naturalistic model has failed to explain the origin of the functionally specified genetic information required to build a living cell" (187). An examination of the endnote and the bibliography reveals that the most recent source he cites for this claim—besides his own previous book—was published in 1994. So, to demonstrate a claim about "every proposed naturalistic model" in "the last seventy years" he cites works that are more than thirty years old. In some fields this might be acceptable—but not in biology, where the past decades have been incredibly productive. Although he (briefly) addresses some of his more contemporary critics in chapter 15, one can also find the rhetorical pattern elsewhere.

For example, Meyer appeals to a particular notion of "law of physics" to argue that physical laws *cannot in principle* explain the fine tuning of the universe and the origin of complex life. This (he claims) is because (i) laws cannot include boundary conditions (269–71) or (ii) be probabilistic (284–85), and (iii) scientists cannot propose laws and boundary conditions "arbitrarily" (367). Space does not allow for much discussion of this but suffice it to say that none of these three stipulations are settled matters in philosophy of science.[1] The same rhetorical pattern comes into play: in support of (i), Meyer cites Michael Polanyi, who died in 1976. Polanyi is neither a recent authority on the matter, nor has his work had a sustained influence in contemporary philosophy of science.[2] By failing to draw attention to ongoing debates on the subject of what the laws of physics are, and by citing old and (now) obscure philosophers on the matter, Meyer crafts a case that sounds more convincing than it has warrant to be. I have only drawn attention to instances of this tactic that I have noticed and am qualified to comment on. I suspect that relevant experts will find more. Caution is therefore appropriate as one reads this work.

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[1] The interested reader may find an overview of contemporary debates in the book by Eddy Keming Chen, *Laws of Physics* (Cambridge University Press, 2024). The preprint is available free of charge on the PhilSci-Archive: https://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/22513/.

[2] For example, a standard contemporary textbook does not include any mention of him at all. Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality* (Chicago University Press, 2021).

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Sonnet 65

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o’ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

O! how shall summer’s honey breath hold out,
Against the wrackful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong but Time decays?

O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time’s chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

O! none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.