The Beatific Vision

Ordained Servant

May 2026

Ordained Servant Online

A Journal for Church Officers

E-ISSN 1931-7115

CURRENT ISSUE: THE BEATIFIC VISION

May 2026

From the Editor

The beauties of spring should point us to transcendent realities "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). In "Two Kinds of Seeing" Andy Wilson explores the difference between instrumental seeing and seeing by faith through special revelation. Since the Enlightenment, the former, especially the seeing of the image media, has taken precedence, even as special revelation has been relegated to personal feelings as if instrumental seeing is the only way of truly knowing. The beatific vision almost sounds to Protestant ears like a monastic or Roman Catholic idea. But the beauty and goodness of God in the Bible are the only location for human happiness—he is the chief end of man.

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.

Mr. Baird will respond in the June-July edition.

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.

Our cover this month is a picture of clouds over sun rays at Camp Shiloh in Jefferson, New Hampshire, where twelve Orthodox Presbyterian Shiloh Institutes have been held.

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.

ServantLiving

Two Kinds of Seeing

by Andrew S. Wilson

In *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien used the image of a single, lidless eye to describe the way Sauron seeks to secure total control over Middle Earth. This is an apt picture of the distortion that results when creatures strive to become like God, who with his all-seeing eyes looks down upon all creation as beneficent ruler and righteous judge (see Pss. 11; 33; 113; 139). While the Lord's looking down upon the world is a matter of holy love and providential care, Sauron exerts his gaze so he can use whatever he sees to advance his imperious agenda. And even though the wide-ranging scope of his eye makes it seem almost godlike, it is really subhuman. This is evident in the fact that it is a *solitary* eye, marked by a deficiency in perspective that makes his seeing a matter of blind lust. The contrast between the eye of Sauron and the eyes of the Lord points to the difference between two kinds of human seeing: seeing as using and seeing as knowing and loving.

Seeing as Using

When the Lord commissioned the prophet Isaiah for a ministry in which he would harden rebellious Israel in their unbelief, he told him, "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive'" (Isa. 6:9). This shows that the mere use of the human senses does not guarantee that they will be employed toward their proper end. Due to the fall, we use our senses to advance our own sinful and selfish ends, and the result is not knowledge but misery. The Scriptures make this point in their treatment of idolatry, telling us that, when men fashion deities according to their own imagination, they end up becoming like the deaf and dumb gods they revere (Ps. 115:4–8). This takes place because the idolater is not interested in knowing the supposed god he worships, but in using it to advance his purposes. We see the same thing in our day when people construct and embrace an ideology, a vision of the world that is imposed upon reality rather derived from it. The adherent of an ideology seeks to make reality conform to the contours of his imagination, thus unmooring his innate moral impulse from the natural moral order and rendering himself morally blind. This explains why a significant number of people in our society have condoned and even celebrated such murderous acts as the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israeli citizens and the assassinations of healthcare CEO Brian Thompson and conservative activist Charlie Kirk.

As far as how the fall affects the way we see our fellow human beings, this is especially evident in the impact pornography has had on so many people's lives. When a person consumes images of others for his own gratification, he is objectifying and debasing those made in the image of God. As with idolatry, the effects are tragic. While God designed sex to bring people into the most intimate of creaturely unions, porn use impedes the forming of healthy relationships and often leaves people stuck in a tawdry virtual world. Moreover, porn addiction is not merely a matter of disordered sexual desire but is a coping mechanism that

intersects with a wide array of sins, including apathy, self-pity, despair, and the lust for control.[1]

Given the power that porn can exert over people's lives, it is important to stress that those ensnared by it are not doomed to such a bleak existence. Jesus really can break the hold of this or any other sin because he has already paid sin's debt in full for all who will come to him (Rom. 6:14; 8:1–2; John 6:37–40; 1 John 2:1–2). Of course, as with all other areas of sanctification, there is no silver bullet that makes for easy victory. Nevertheless, those who resist temptation and pursue holiness in reliance upon Christ by making diligent use of his appointed means of grace will experience the weakening of sinful patterns and the forging of holy habits and character. We will learn to look at others with a respect for what has been called the "spousal meaning of the body," the power it has been given to express love in the self-giving union of man and wife.[2] Of course, as we fight the good fight against sin, we always must remember that Jesus came to save sinners, not people who have already cleaned up their lives on their own. Through faith in him, the blessing of purity of heart and its corresponding reward of seeing God are conferred upon believers (Matt. 5:8).

Another manifestation of distorted seeing has to do with the way modern people see and relate to the world in general. C.S. Lewis wrote about this over eighty years ago in *The Abolition of Man*, noting that, while the wise men of old sought to conform the soul to reality, modern man seeks to subdue reality to his own desires and wishes.[3] This is evident in our society's embrace of a managerialism whose impulse is to commodify and control everything. One of the ways this impulse is manifested is in the fact that, for a great many people, their interface with reality largely takes place through the mediation of technological tools that let them curate the kind of world they inhabit. While there are upsides to this, we should be aware of the way it not only tends to isolate us but also diminishes the possibility of being surprised. This is more significant than we may realize, as the experience of surprise reminds us that there is a reality outside ourselves, an awareness we need to have if we are truly going to love others and not merely use them. As Iris Murdoch once observed, "Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real."[4]

Seeing as Knowing and Loving

This brings us to the second kind of seeing—seeing as knowing and loving, the seeing for which our eyes were created. This kind of seeing finds its ultimate end in the beatific vision, defined as follows by theologian Samuel Parkison:

> The beatific vision is the telos of humanity: the vision of God the saints will enjoy in the eschaton. The beatific vision is a vision of love, a participatory vision of God's essence, in resurrected bodies, wherewith we will see this vision immediately and everywhere, particularly in the person of Christ, on account of our union with him. . . . United to Christ, his perfect vision of God will be our perfect vision of God, for he is the author and perfector of our faith, our forerunner and perfect federal head and restorative source. . . . Every happiness that has partial fulfillment here will be

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[1] See Matthew Loftus, "Misunderstanding Porn," *Mere Orthodoxy* (Dec. 2, 2025): https://mereorthodoxy.com/misunderstanding-porn.

[2] See Christopher West, *Our Bodies Tell God's Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender*, (Brazos, 2020), 38-40.

[3] C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Touchstone, 1996), 83.

[4] Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (Penguin, 1999), 203.

> realized in full in this vision, since this vision is the destination to which all natural desires lead.[5]

While we cannot attain the beatific vision in this present age, we do nevertheless see God through faith in his redemptive revelation (2 Cor. 5:7). This is why David could speak of *looking* upon the Lord in the sanctuary (Ps. 63:2), even though there was no visible representation of the Lord in Israel's tabernacle or temple. In that era of redemptive history, the sacrificial system was the key means by which the Lord mediated his saving presence to his people. The Lord continues to do this in the present day through the faithful proclamation of the gospel, by which he graciously frees people from their spiritual blindness and brings them into "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This means the Lord's Day is a day of mystical ascent, through the church's administration of the Word and sacraments, to the mountain of the Lord (Isa. 2:3).

One of the key features of the beatific vision, and our shadowy experience of it in this life, is that seeing God transforms us so that we become like him. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, as we behold the glory of God in Christ, we "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." Similarly, John says in his first epistle that "when [the Lord] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2–3). Thus, our future hope of glory has the present effect of causing us to strive for holiness in this life. This transformation marks the fulfillment not only of our moral nature but also of our aesthetic sensibilities. As C.S. Lewis explained, "We do not want merely to *see* beauty. . . . We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it."[6] As another writer puts it, human beings are marked by a "spiritual longing to metabolize the beautiful."[7] Only the beatific vision can satisfy that longing.

The transformative blessing of having God's face shining upon us has an analogy in something that can take place through the human countenance. We find an illustration of this in the section of *The Lord of the Rings* that describes the fellowship's arrival in the elven realm of Lothlorian. This was an awkward visit for Gimli the dwarf, as there was bad blood between the dwarves and elves of Middle Earth. Nevertheless, when Gimli's eyes met those of the elven queen Galadriel, "it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding."[8] This reminds us that the face is the most basic medium through which we see love and convey it to others. It is no surprise that studies have shown that even the briefest of friendly, face-to-face interactions with strangers and casual acquaintances have a positive impact on one's state of mind.[9] This is also why face-to-face encounters have the best potential to present us with opportunities to talk about the hope we have in Christ.

The significance of seeing human faces brings to mind our recent experience with the mask mandates of the Covid era. While those who implemented and supported compulsory masking may have had good intentions, it does not seem that they ever reckoned with the immense costs of this mitigation strategy. This is all the more tragic given that, in spite of many claims to the contrary, the scientific evidence both before and after the pandemic has

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[5] Samuel G. Parkison, *To Gaze upon God: The Beatific Vision in Doctrine, Tradition, and Practice* (IVP, 2024), 176.
[6] C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (HarperCollins, 2001), 42.
[7] Jason M. Baxter, *Why Literature Still Matters* (Cassiodorus Press, 2024), 30.
[8] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 356.
[9] Robert Waldinger and Marc Schultz, *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness* (Simon & Schuster, 2023), 262–64.

consistently attested to the ineffectiveness of masks in reducing the spread of respiratory viruses.[10] The same is true of the other draconian measures that so radically suppressed human interactions.[11] These factors have led psychiatrist Aaron Kheriaty to offer this counsel:

> I suggest that we never again force one another to become nondescript entities, lacking character or individuality, unidentifiable, anonymous, remote, impersonal, or unseen. The face is not only the locus of human communication; it is the place where the personal dimension is most fully manifest.[12]

As for the way we see the world in general, we should look upon it not as something to bend to our will but as a source of wonder and a gift to be stewarded in a manner that is in harmony with its nature. This will allow the world's vastness, complexity, order, and beauty to enlarge our souls, as we perceive that, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."[13] Or as the Belgic Confession puts it, the "universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God" (art. 2).

Conclusion

In his inventory of things that illustrate the futility of life "under the sun," one of the statements made by Qoheleth is that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing" (Eccl. 1:8). In saying this, he does not mean that God designed the eye to be eternally unfulfilled. Rather, he is pointing to the fact that the telos of human sight is the beatific vision. To adapt the famous words from the beginning of Augustine's *Confessions,* "God made our eyes for himself, and they will be restless until they find their rest in him." This is why we should strive to align all the ways we exercise our sense of sight in this world with the ultimate end for which our eyes were created: to know and love God. Boethius provides us with a model prayer:

> Grant me, O Father, that gift by which my mind can rise
> after its peregrination to the seat of your majesty,
> and give me the light to behold through the thick clouds of our skies
> a clearer heaven in which your brightness flashes forth.
> To the blessed who alone behold it, you are the sole serene
> goal in which we may rest, satisfied and tranquil,
> and to see your face is our only hunger, our only thirst,
> for you are our beginning, our journey, and our end.[14]

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[10] See Aaron Kheriaty, *The New Abnormal: The Rise of the Biomedical Security State* (Regnery, 2022), 195; Jeffrey H. Anderson, "The Mask of Ignorance," *City Journal* (Mar. 21, 2023): https://www.city-journal.org/article/the-mask-of-ignorance; Paul D. Thacker, "The Pandemic That Broke Our Faith in Modeling," *The Daily Economy* (Oct. 14, 2025): https://thedailyeconomy.org/article/the-pandemic-that-broke-our-faith-in-modeling/.

[11] For a summary of the evidence, see Benjamin D. Giffone, *A House Divided: Technology, Worship, and Healing the Church after COVID* (Libertarian Christian Institute Press, 2025), 101–21.

[12] Kheriaty, *The New Abnormal*, 198.

[13] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur.

[14] Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Harvard University Press, 2008), bk. 3, sec. 9, 85–86.

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.