

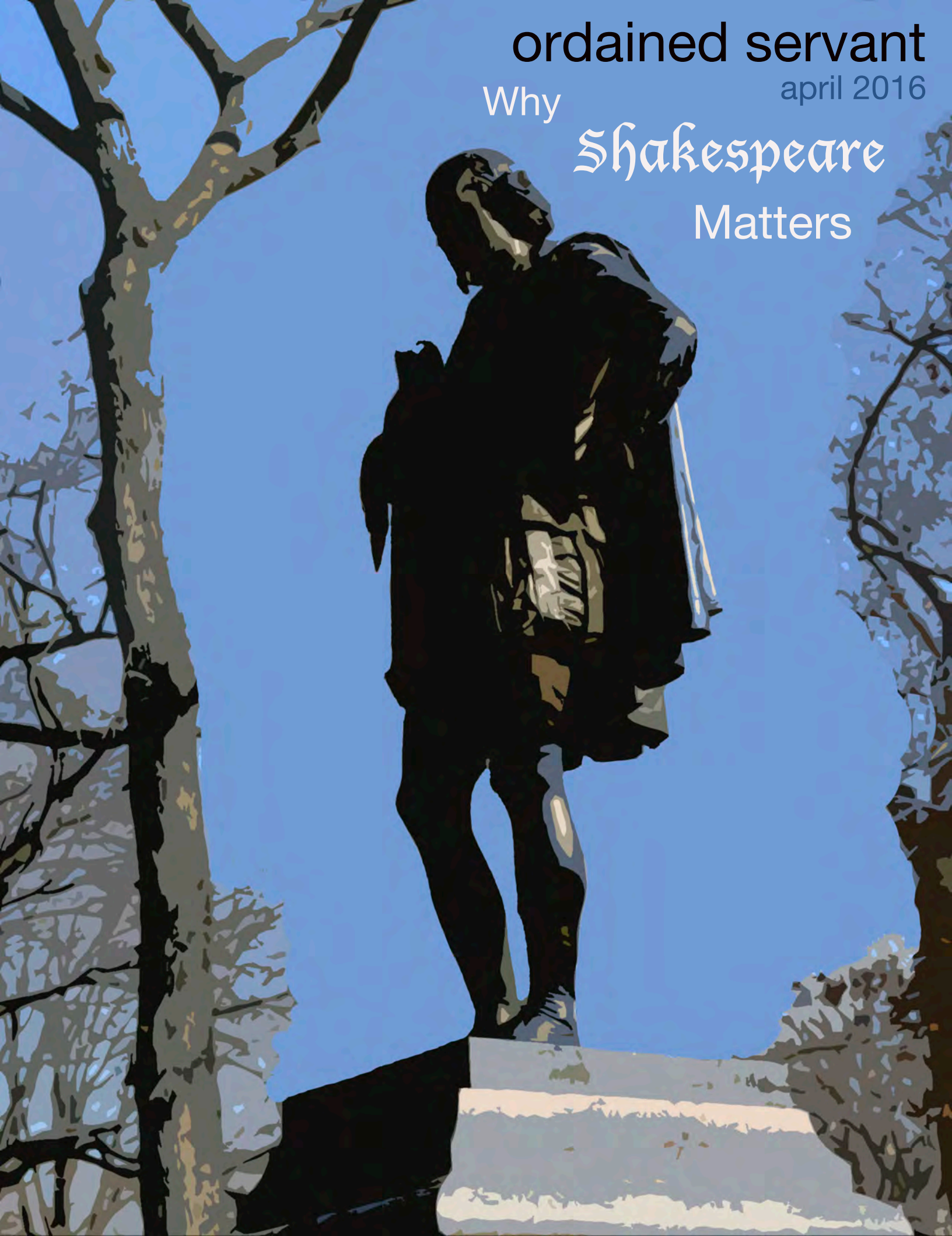
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Why

Shakespeare

Matters



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CURRENT ISSUE: WHY SHAKESPEARE MATTERS

April 2016

From the Editor

This month marks the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. It has been my habit over the last decade to memorize the Bard's Sonnets among other poems on my daily walks—no sense wasting time just exercising. In honor of this important anniversary I have analyzed Sonnet 29 in "The Bard for Preachers" to articulate the benefit of the Sonnets for preachers. I have chosen Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 as this month's poem. It is a profound reflection on mortality.

The main strands of a Christian account of the world are woven through the fabric of all of Shakespeare's works. That is the thrust of Leland Ryken's persuasive essay, "Why Shakespeare Matters."

On other matters John Muether reviews Rodney Stark's overly optimistic *The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious than Ever*. Jeffrey Waddington ponders the value of a collection of articles on eschatology, *As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on the Last Things*. Finally, Diane Olinger reviews *God and Mrs. Thatcher* by Eliza Filby, an analysis of Margaret Thatcher's religious views.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

Servant Thoughts

The Bard for Preachers

by Gregory E. Reynolds

It has been my habit over the last decade to memorize the Bard's Sonnets, among other poems on my daily walks—no sense wasting time just exercising. In honor of the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death I want to briefly analyze Sonnet 29 in order to demonstrate the benefit of the Sonnets for preachers.

The main strands of a Christian account of the world are woven throughout the fabric of all of Shakespeare's works. That is the thrust of Leland Ryken's persuasive essay, "Why Shakespeare Matters," in which he claims Shakespeare as an implicitly, rather than explicitly, Christian writer:

Over the course of my career as a literary scholar, Shakespeare's works came to seem more and more Christian until I reached the point of not hesitating to claim him as a Christian writer. The rewards of reading his best works are the same as those of reading Donne, Herbert, and Milton: we view human experience from a Christian perspective. This is not to say that Shakespeare's works are as overtly Christian as those of Milton, but sometimes a work in which Christian patterns are latent can be all the more powerful for that understated quality. There is a place for implicitly Christian literature as well as explicitly Christian literature. . . .

Ryken sees Shakespeare's implicit Christianity in numerous biblical "references and echoes," a perspective on human experience consonant with Christianity, and the world Shakespeare creates is based on Christian premises such as the reality of God, the supernatural, and the existence of heaven and hell.

An earlier author, George Morrison, in *Christ in Shakespeare* (1928), agrees entirely with Ryken. His ten addresses to the Wellington Literary Club in Wellington Church, Glasgow, explore the following themes in "some of Shakespeare's greater plays": the reality of providence, the concern of God, the nature of man, the worth of woman, the fact of temptation, the peril of delay, the power of choice, the passion of jealousy, the tragedy of egoism, and the sovereignty of love.¹

The Bard's exploration and articulation of the human is without parallel in English literature, and he was the first to do it with the range and genius he exhibited in his best works. This I think is the gist of the subtitle of the indomitable Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*.² "The Shakespearean difference" is Bloom's summation of the Bard's greatness as a writer.

I designate three primary aspects of his power: cognitive originality, totally answerable style, and—the miracle—creation of utterly persuasive human personalities, here Hamlet

¹ George H. Morrison, *Christ in Shakespeare: Ten Addresses on Moral and Spiritual Elements in Some of the Greater Plays* (London: James Clarke, 1928), 9.

² Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998).

and Lear are particular. . . . Shakespeare endows his people with the capacity to change, either through the will or with involuntary force. . . . To have thought his way into *their* [Hamlet and Falstaff] inwardness is Shakespeare's most startling originality. . . . The rich strangeness of Shakespeare gave us hundreds of personalities, each with his or her highly distinctive voice. So many separate selves seem scarcely possible as emanations from a single consciousness, itself a permanent enigma to us.³

Bloom, however, minimizes the influence of Christianity on Shakespeare, and, as Ryken notes, Bloom wrongly insists that "Shakespeare invented us (whoever we are)," echoing the anthropological and cultural relativism of modernity.⁴ Bloom declares that Shakespeare's "sensibility is secular, not religious."⁵ This is where Ryken's insight is so important to the preacher. As I have memorized a number of the Sonnets, the implicit Christian assumptions of Shakespeare have had an indefinable but real impact on my thinking and preaching. Bloom observes that Wittgenstein "objected to the wide opinion that Shakespeare is lifelike, but then the great philosopher very fiercely insisted that Shakespeare was primarily 'a creator of language.'"⁶ But, it seems to me that the medium of language is inextricably connected with the meaning of the human so adroitly and masterfully communicated by Shakespeare. The universalism of Shakespeare's depiction of the human, which Bloom so values, can only be accounted for through the biblical revelation of human nature as it impinged on the literary consciousness of the Bard. For the preacher, words incarnate biblical truth. Hence the value of the Sonnets.

A Brief Look at Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

I offer here a natural, rather than a technical, reading of the poem. The latter may enhance

³ Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Frost* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 111–12.

⁴ Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 721–22, 725. Bloom declares, "For us, now, the Bible is the most difficult of books. Shakespeare is not. . ." 729.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 731.

⁶ Bloom, *The Best Poems*, 113.

one's understanding, but this poem is one of the Bard's clearer offerings and an excellent way to enter the rarified world of his genius.

One of the dangers in interpreting poetry is to attempt to read the biography of the author into his poems. We confront this danger in the first line of Sonnet 29. "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." What disgrace, we may ask? It is difficult to identify it in Shakespeare's life. And we need not be concerned to since the poet's imagination ranges far beyond himself. He is an astute observer of humanity and reader of other observers who have gone before him. Here we see the poet as Job or David, whose fortunes and reputations fell to a great depth at once.

Shakespeare's world is both visible and invisible, "And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries." The poet has no ground upon which to stand before God and thus feels utterly abandoned, like the Psalmist, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" (Ps. 22:1).

Every pilgrim from Abraham to Paul can identify with being in an "outcast state." And with the emotion that often accompanies that state, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion" (Ps. 137:1); "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Ps. 6:6). This emotion that flirts with complete despair, "After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth" (Job 3:1), as we see in line 4 of Sonnet 29, which completes the first quatrain, stating the problem, "And look upon myself and curse my fate."

The second quatrain explores the poet's reason for discontent, rooted as it is in envy of those around him. He seems to have no future, "Wishing me like to one more rich in hope." Those who do have hope are surrounded with good friends "Featured like him, like him with friends possessed." They have wonderful skills and a great range of sensibilities like the polymath, "Desiring this man's art and that man's scope," which the poet wishes for himself. All of what he lacks and envies in others makes it impossible for him to be content with what he has and once appreciated, "With what I most enjoy contented least." What a litany of complaints. What insight into the temptations and sins of the outcast or pilgrim in this fallen world.

The final quatrain signals a turn of fortune reminding us of the Psalmist's turn, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (Ps. 42:11). Shakespeare looks up and beyond to a transcendent solution. He comes close to completely hating himself but remembers a wonderful resource beyond himself, that raises him above his outcast state and discontent, reminding of similar sentiments in the Psalms like "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5 KJV).

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

We do not know the "thee" toward whom the poet turns his thoughts, but whoever it is the memory of his or her love enables the despairing poet to turn a corner.

Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;

Again Shakespeare envisions a heavenly reality in the image of the lark's early morning singing. There is hope beyond this world where the earthly drags us down but heaven's gate becomes the object of the outcast's gaze. The lark must rise from his nest on the ground to

greet the dawn with song. The idea of Christian worship is prominent here as Shakespeare uses the image of Anglican church “hymns.” How far this is from the secularism of Bloom’s blind assertion about the place of religion in Shakespeare. The once brass heaven now offers an entrance.

The concluding couplet brings powerful and moving resolution to the sonnet.

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Here love reminds us of George Morrison’s final address in the book mentioned above, “On the Sovereignty of Love.” When James (2:8–13) speaks of the sum of the law as the love of neighbor, he assumes that the love of God is the original love of which all human love is the imitation. So in this couplet the origin of “sweet love” is ambiguous, perhaps purposely, so we can insert God’s love in Christ. And “sweet love” reminds us, as perhaps Shakespeare intended of Psalm 34:8, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” Sonnet 30 has a similar ending. After rehearsing the regrets of old age, the poet concludes,

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor’d and sorrows end.

What a friend we have in Jesus.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28–30)

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . (Matt. 6:20)

It is no accident that what is implicit in Shakespeare suggests revealed truth for the reader alert to the biblical atmosphere in which the Bard was nurtured as a writer of the spoken word. We speakers of the Word of God do well to drink from this rich fountain.

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Servant Literature

Why Shakespeare Matters

by Leland Ryken

When William Shakespeare died at the age of 52 on April 23, 1616, he was buried inside Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. He had been baptized in the same church as an infant. Shakespeare was buried inside the church in a day when most people were buried in the churchyard surrounding the church. Why?

When Shakespeare retired from a theatrical career in London five years before his death, he became a lay reader (also called lay rector) at the local Anglican church. At the very least this means that he supported the church financially and wanted to be affiliated with it in the eyes of townspeople. I believe that it meant a lot more than that. A lay reader in an Anglican church takes a leadership role in worship services, at least to the extent of public reading of Scripture.

Shakespeare's untimely death at age 52 was preceded by a period of illness of unknown duration. A month before his death, he signed his will. The preamble to that will reads,

In the name of God Amen. I William Shackspeare of Stratford upon Avon in the county of Warwickshire gent., in perfect health & memory God be praised, do make & ordain this my last will & testament in manner & form following. That is to say first, I commend my Soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping & assuredly believing through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made partaker of life everlasting. And my body to the earth whereof it is made.

I have begun my article with these details for two reasons. First, the English-speaking world is now celebrating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The article you are reading right now is occasioned by that anniversary. Second, I want to plant a seed that will lead to fruition at the end of this article. I have come to regard Shakespeare as a Christian writer. I make no claim to know the state of his soul during his life and at the time of his death. But no matter how much we qualify the data I have already cited as being rooted in the Protestant milieu of Shakespeare's day, the data is indisputably there. It is also present in Shakespeare's writings. The myth of the secular Shakespeare is a fallacy foisted on an intimidated public in an unbelieving age.

I will place one more enticing tidbit on the plate of readers of *Ordained Servant*. Shakespeare's biblical knowledge was extensive (of which I will say more below). The English Bible that he primarily used in his works was the Puritan Geneva Bible, translated in Calvin's Geneva by Protestant exiles from England.

A Word of Encouragement to the Faint Hearted

I am about to make lofty claims for the greatness of Shakespeare (without doubt the greatest English author), but I do so in an awareness that not everyone begins at the same starting point in relation to the bard. To readers with little acquaintance with Shakespeare, let me offer the advice to begin where you are. In every area of life, acquiring a taste for the excellent requires contact with it. There are printed guides to the plays of Shakespeare that can

take you by the hand and say “look.” Of course the best initiation or reentry into the plays of Shakespeare is to watch a performance of a play.

I also need to state the following disclaimer. With all literary authors, the quality falls off drastically once we move beyond their best works. In fact, we usually drop into a black hole. This does not mean that the lesser works do not have their moments, nor that they lack champions who might even claim them as favorite works. Nonetheless, the claims that I make for the importance of Shakespeare are based on what nearly everyone would acknowledge to be *crème-de-la-crème* works in the Shakespeare canon: two romantic comedies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*), three relatively early plays that have problematical aspects to them but nonetheless belong to the inner circle (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*), the four great tragedies (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*), and the greatest of the late romances (*The Winter's Tale*). Other Shakespeare lovers include additional plays and are often passionate about them. I have no problem with that, but I do not want to be held accountable for plays beyond the ones I have listed, in case my readers dip into them and find them wanting (as I do).

In addition to the plays, the sonnets of Shakespeare are as great as his best plays. The following at least are among the choicest treasures of English literature: sonnets 12, 18, 29, 73, 98, 106, 116, and 146.

A final note of encouragement that I want to offer is that Shakespeare's highly poetic and often archaic language makes him a very difficult writer. There is no need to apologize for finding Shakespeare's language difficult. I offer the following perspectives: (1) we do not need to understand all the words in order to enjoy Shakespeare's works; (2) repeated contact with the text makes it more and more familiar; (3) the greatest literature does not carry all its meaning on the surface but embodies much of it below the surface.

To give shape to what I will say in praise of Shakespeare, I will provide five answers to the question, Why does Shakespeare matter for Christians?

1. Shakespeare Matters because Beautiful Language Matters

Multiple sources tell us that when American pioneers headed west in their covered wagons, the two books that they were most likely to have in their possession were the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare. What did these two books represent amid circumstances that threatened the continuity of civilization? One answer is that these two books are the very touchstone of English language at its most beautiful and powerful. I do not have space to prove that, so I will just appeal to people's experiences over the centuries to confirm my claim. One signal is the space allotted to the King James Bible and Shakespeare in compilations of famous quotations.

Why does beautiful language matter? It matters because God is the source of both language and beauty. Christianity is a religion of the word. Beautiful and exalted language has a power that prosaic language lacks. We need a space in our lives where the best language is liberated to be itself and elevate our spirits beyond the idiom of everyday discourse. We cannot always reside at such lofty heights, but we are diminished if we never do.

The greatness of Shakespeare begins with the words that he wrote. The worlds of imagination that he created use words as their building blocks. I was struck by the statement of an actress who said about playing Shakespeare, “You need more than the character; you need the words.”

2. Shakespeare Matters because the Understanding of Human Experience Matters

It is a truism that literature is the voice of authentic human experience. Literature as a whole is the human race's testimony to its own experience, and Shakespeare wrote so much

and covered so many aspects of human experience that he himself constitutes a major chapter in the history of the literary portrayal of human experience. A book title from several years ago was so preposterous as to cheapen the idea that I am advocating—*Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human*. Shakespeare did not invent the human. But the more modest claim that he is an unsurpassed portrayer of the human is true.

Wherein lies the secret of Shakespeare’s ability to do this? It starts with skill in character creation. Every one of the plays I listed earlier provides us with a gallery of memorable characters. These characters have such a life force pulsing through them that they are almost impossible to forget. I remember once reading along in Northrop Frye’s book *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* and encountering the following sentence: “Characters in Shakespeare or Dickens take on a life of their own apart from their function in the play or novel they appear in.”¹ Yes they do.

In addition to the vividness of Shakespeare’s imagined characters, we should note their range. The range of Shakespeare’s characters comes close to embracing humanity as a whole. We encounter the proverbial good, bad, and ugly. We meet young people in love, people in their prime, and old people. When I teach Shakespeare’s “seven ages of man” speech, I tell my students that Shakespeare got it right. I do not have space to quote the whole speech, but here are the sixth and seven ages of a person, which I quote as a parallel passage when I teach the portrait of old age in Ecclesiastes 12:1–8:

. . . his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.
Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.²

In addition to the vividness and range of Shakespeare’s characters, we may note their universality. We have met Shakespeare’s characters in real life. In fact, we see some of them when we look in the mirror. The best comment on Shakespeare’s universality comes from his contemporary poet and playwright Ben Jonson. In a memorial poem on Shakespeare, Jonson called Shakespeare “soul of the age,” but then he went on to say that Shakespeare “was not of an age but for all time.”³

Wherein lies the value of Shakespeare’s portrayal of human experience? It yields a kind of truth—truthfulness in human experience. When we contemplate the experiences that Shakespeare places before us, we come to see human experience accurately. I call this knowledge in the form of right seeing. It is representational truth as compared with ideational truth. Shakespeare gives us both, but it is the living through of experiences like young people in love and destructive ambition and the mysteries of providence that we chiefly carry away from an immersion in Shakespeare plays.

3. Shakespeare Matters because Good Entertainment Matters

We live in a day of cheap and tawdry entertainment. The sonnets and plays of Shakespeare offer an alternative. In addition to the crisis of entertainment at a societal level, the subject of

¹ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 238.

² *As You Like It*, Act 2, scene 7, lines 160–66.

³ Ben Jonson, “To The Memory of My Beloved Master William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us,” lines 17 and 43.

leisure has always been a topic of neglect in the church. Because we do not dignify the concept of leisure and surround it with a Christian defense, we usually sink to a low level by default. The leisure life of most Christians does not rise much above the general level of our culture. Reading and viewing Shakespeare (along with other great literature) provides a better way.

What things constitute what T. S. Eliot called “superior amusement”⁴ (which I prefer to call superior entertainment)? For starters, many of the pleasures of Shakespeare’s plays are the pleasures of narrative or story. One ingredient is the characters that Shakespeare invented, of which I have already spoken. A second is the plots that captivate us. Shakespeare’s plays are a primer on storytelling, with such elements as conflict moving to resolution, suspense, moments of revelation, surprise, and dramatic irony. Novelist E. M. Forster famously said that a story has only one essential requirement, namely, making us want to know what happens next.⁵ Once we allow ourselves to be immersed in the opening scene of a Shakespearean play, our curiosity about what happens next and how it all ends can usually be trusted to work its magic.

The third narrative ingredient is setting. Shakespeare’s plays do not employ realistic stage props, so the concept of entering an imagined world takes the place of setting in the usual sense. When we read or view a Shakespearean play, we enter a whole world of the imagination. That world is so compelling that it is easy to enter it and stay there. But literature is bifocal: it asks us first to look *at* the work and then look *through* it to real life. Shakespeare’s poems and plays give us windows to the world.

Two additional avenues toward understanding what makes Shakespeare’s poems and plays pleasurable have already been mentioned. To see human experience observed and recorded accurately and with insight into the human condition is pleasurable. Shakespeare’s works deliver the goods. Additionally, Shakespeare’s way with words is pleasurable. He exploited the resources of poetry, metaphor, and symbol in a way that makes his poetry (in which most of his plays are written) meet Robert Frost’s definition of a poem as “a performance in words.”⁶ Shakespeare’s exploitation of the resources of language is a performance by a master.

Through the years I have frequently gone on the Wheaton College summer literature program in England. Our students watch many plays as the summer unfolds. When I fly back to the U.S. at the end of the program and reflect on the summer, it is obvious to me that after 400 years, in the field of drama Shakespeare is still the best show in town.

4. Shakespeare Matters because the Bible Matters

Whole books have been written on the Bible as a presence in Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays. It is a subject that is dear to my heart. We need to begin with Shakespeare’s cultural milieu. The Bible was the best selling and most talked about book. Children learned to read from the English Bible. The Catholic Thomas More offered as proof that the Bible should not be translated into English the fact that the Bible was being disputed in taverns by “every lewd [ignorant] lad.”⁷

A “fact sheet” on Shakespeare’s knowledge of the Bible yields the following data. The total number of biblical references in the plays and sonnets is approximately 2,000. Experts on the subject regularly theorize that there are so many references to the first four chapters of Genesis that Shakespeare must have known them virtually by heart. To the end of Shakespeare’s writing career, he made so many references to the Bible, often based on detailed biblical knowledge, that he must have been a lifelong reader of the Bible. As one scholar

⁴ T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920, 1960), viii.

⁵ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 35.

⁶ Robert Frost, quoted by Elizabeth Drew, *Poetry: A Modern Guide to Its Understanding* (New York: Dell, 1959), 84.

⁷ Quoted in R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 254.

notes, Shakespeare's plays suggest that he owned an extensive personal library, and it would be unthinkable that his library would not have included the best selling book of his day.

Before 1598, Shakespeare's biblical references were based on the Bishop's Bible, and after that on the Geneva Bible. What caused the shift? Shakespeare's family resided in Stratford while he pursued an acting and writing career in London (with Shakespeare returning home during the off-season). When residing in London, Shakespeare eventually became a lodger in the home of a Huguenot family, where he would have heard the Geneva Bible read at meals and in family worship, and where a Bible was always available on the table. But Shakespeare's first acquaintance with the Geneva Bible came during his grammar school education, when students at the Stratford Grammar School translated passages from the Geneva Bible into Latin and then back into English. Occasionally Shakespeare even alludes to the marginalia of the Geneva Bible and not just the main text.

For a Christian reader or viewer, one of the sources of edification in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays is the biblical presence in them. We do not *need* those references when we have the Bible itself, but if we grant that we want wholesome literature in our lives beyond the Bible, then the rootedness of a work in the Bible becomes an avenue toward increased pleasure and edification. In some Christian circles there is an unwarranted disparagement of Christian literature because it represents "second level" discourse, whereas the Bible is the primary level. But sermons based on the Bible are in the same category as literature. Authors like Shakespeare and Milton do the same thing that preachers do—they create human discourse on the foundation of the Bible itself. In principle, a sermon and Christian work of literature have the same potential for truth and error.

The Bible enjoins us to sing a new song—a new poem, a fresh metaphor, an original story. Placed into an unexpected setting, the Bible can come alive or be confirmed in new ways. It can perform the same function as a good sermon, with the added element of entertainment and artistic enrichment. I will speak personally in saying that my life has been continuously enriched by seeing the Bible and its truths enshrined in the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare.

5. Christian Shakespeare?

Great literature that embodies Christian truth has been a major source of spiritual input in my life. Over the course of my career as a literary scholar, Shakespeare's works came to seem more and more Christian until I reached the point of not hesitating to claim him as a Christian writer. The rewards of reading his best works are the same as those of reading Donne, Herbert, and Milton: we view human experience from a Christian perspective. This is not to say that Shakespeare's works are as overtly Christian as those of Milton, but sometimes a work in which Christian patterns are latent can be all the more powerful for that understated quality. There is a place for implicitly Christian literature as well as explicitly Christian literature.

The myth of the secular Shakespeare casts a long shadow, even among Christians, so when I meet resistance, my first strategy is to ask, What is there in Shakespeare's works that contradicts Christianity? My own answer is that I am disappointed by bawdy and indecent scenes and language. But these passages are relatively few and far between. Certainly we cannot ascribe to Shakespeare the indecencies and assaults on Christian morality that are visited on us by modern directors of his plays.

What, then, constitutes the Christian element in Shakespeare's plays and poems? I have already noted the biblical presence. *Macbeth* is the Shakespearean play that I teach most often, and one authority on the subject of the Bible in Shakespeare identifies over 200 biblical references and echoes in this play. That averages out to a biblical presence once every minute.

Additionally, the perspective from which human experience is viewed (the themes or embodied ideas) is consonant with Christianity. Here is a brief list that covers all of the genres in which Shakespeare wrote: affirmation of romantic love and marriage; the potential of the

human heart for both good and evil; the destructive effects of unchecked ambition and other passions; the workings of divine providence; the necessity of forgiveness; the certainty of justice and retribution for evil; the importance of order within the individual and society; the need to choose good rather than evil. That is a beginning list.

Also Christian is the world that Shakespeare creates in his plays. That world is based on Christian premises. The best summary statement on this comes from a guide to Christian historical sites in London. Shakespeare's plays are Christian, claims the author, because they assume the same kind reality that the Bible does. That is exactly right.

Shakespeare's works assume the reality of God and the Christian supernatural, including heaven and hell, angels and demons. His plays accept the premise that every human soul is destined for either heaven or hell, based on the choices that people make. Shakespeare's moral vision lines up with the Christian scheme of virtues and vices. *The Winter's Tale* even affirms belief in the resurrection from the dead with a story in which the statue of a dead woman comes to life. I return to a question that I put on the table earlier: what ideas in Shakespeare's plays can be said to be incongruous with Christian doctrine? If we cannot name them, they must not exist.

It is true that often the embodied themes are implicitly or inclusively Christian, by which I mean that they are ideas that are shared by other religious and philosophical systems. But that does not make them any less Christian. Furthermore, when Shakespeare fills his plays with biblical allusions and echoes, he signals that the framework within which he expects his themes to be understood is the Christian one. He expects us to connect the dots and see an overall Christian world picture.

Summary

What is the takeaway value of this article for readers of *Ordained Servant*? I have two answers. First, to the degree to which you take time for literature, I want you to consider spending some of that time with the greatest English author. The rewards are abundant, and some of them are spiritual. Second, secular forces are trying to excise all Christian elements from Western culture. I hope that I have said enough that you will take a stand for the Christian element in Shakespeare as occasions arise. You do not have the time or expertise to fight the battle, but you can plant a flag of initial resistance. Resources are available to provide a supporting army.

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ServantReading

Faith, Politics, and the Fall in Thatcher's Britain

A Review Article

by Diane L. Olinger

God and Mrs. Thatcher: The Battle for Britain's Soul, by Eliza Filby. London: Biteback, 2015, xxiii + 432 pages, \$39.95 cover price, available on Amazon.com for \$24.90.

For the sake of full disclosure, you should know that my nineteen-year-old cat's name is Thatcher. We used to have another cat. We lost her twelve years ago. Her name was Maggie. I'm not sure that Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, would've considered this an homage, but it was meant to be so. As a fan of the Iron Lady's, I was pleased to find a book that promised to delve into her faith and its effect on her politics. However, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* does much more than that, presenting an analysis that goes beyond Mrs. Thatcher to the British nation as a whole. Margaret Thatcher was the “hinge” in the conflict between the Conservative Party and the Church of England. During the 1980s Thatcher and her followers “sought inspiration (and legitimization) from the Gospel for their political ideas and policies”; at the same time, the Established Church began to view “engagement in [increasingly liberal and socialist] politics as part of its spiritual mission” (xvii).

The author, Eliza Filby, is currently a lecturer in modern British history at King's College London. Although *God and Mrs. Thatcher* is the outworking of her doctoral thesis, it avoids academic jargon and is a good read. It is well researched, with a bibliography that will be enticing to anyone with an interest in church-state issues. Even more importantly, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* is about as close to an objective analysis as one can find these days, with Filby acknowledging Thatcher's achievements (or at least her good intentions) as well as her failures. Filby writes to counter what she sees as a weakness in most analyses of Thatcher, “the secular mindset of most historians of contemporary Britain” (xii). This mindset leads historians to focus on Britain's withdrawal from empire and decline as a global economic superpower, but miss the collapse of Christianity as another major change with a dramatic effect on Britain's political culture (xiii).

Filby begins her story in Margaret Thatcher's birthplace, Grantham, a small town in the East Midlands section of England. Inter-war Grantham had a population of about twenty thousand. It was run by a local borough council in the hands of small businessmen and shopkeepers, like Alfred Roberts, Margaret's father, who served as an alderman. Alfred Roberts rose from a mere grocer's apprentice to be the owner of two shops and the mayor of the town. In addition to his service on the borough council, Roberts served his community as a lay-preacher at Finkin Street Methodist Church, a trustee of the Grantham bank, a governor at the local school, and president of the Chamber of Trade

and Rotary Club. Margaret was born above the grocery shop in 1925. During her childhood, Margaret had “little privilege,” mainly due to her parents’ thriftiness rather than a lack of money. Her father, like most Methodists of his time, was very wary of debt, viewing credit as being just as corrupting as alcohol and gambling. A collection of Margaret’s sermon notes show that her father emphasized individual salvation (“The Kingdom of God is within you!”) and the Protestant work ethic (“It is the responsibility of man ordained by the creator that he shall labor for the means of his existence”) (21).

In the Roberts’s home, board games, sewing, and newspapers were forbidden on the Sabbath. The family attended chapel for both Sunday morning and evening services, while Margaret and her sister, Muriel, also attended Sunday school. Margaret played the piano for the younger children’s classes. During the week, the Roberts sisters attended Methodist Youth Guild, while their parents attended other mid-week social functions and prayer meetings. Margaret’s childhood catechism book has been preserved and her notes and underlining show the young scholar’s interest in sin and service (14–15).

Politically the Roberts were “old-fashioned Liberals” who switched their allegiance to the Conservatives in the 1930s (24). Ten-year-old Margaret’s first taste of politics came in 1935 as a polling day runner for the local Conservatives. In the Roberts’s political journey “we find one of the important shifts in twentieth-century British politics: the movement of lower middle class Nonconformists [non-Anglicans] from the Liberals to the Conservatives” (24). Shopkeepers and managers, like Alfred Roberts, “now defined themselves not against the landed Tory squires, but the unionized working class” (28). They brought with them to the Conservative Party a libertarian streak that would later clash with the traditional paternalism of the Tories.

A diligent student, Margaret arrived at Oxford University in 1943 while Britain was still engaged in World War II. She became a committed member of the Wesleyan Society, attending its study groups and preaching in nearby chapels (the Wesleyan Methodists opened their pulpits to women in 1918 the same year the nation extended the franchise to them). By her third year at Oxford, the constraints of war had been loosened, the campus was buzzing again, and Margaret became increasingly involved in the Oxford University Conservative Association, and less active in the Wesleyan Society. “The boundless energy she had channeled into preaching the Word was now redirected into rallying the Tory troops” (47).

Leaving Oxford in 1946, Margaret found a position using her Chemistry degree, but her heart was set on pursuing a political career. In 1952, after two hard-fought, but unsuccessful attempts to unseat a Labor MP in a solid union constituency, she married Denis Thatcher, a millionaire who was a “default Anglican,” but not an active believer. “He was worldly, she was provincial; he was establishment, she was Nonconformist; he was rich, she was not” (61). The marriage was definitely a break from her Grantham roots. Margaret moved away from Methodism and became an Anglican. Justifying the move, she said that she longed for more formality in religion and “given that John Wesley had always regarded himself as a member of the Church of England, she did not feel that a great theological divide had been crossed” (67). The move was politically expedient as well: Conservative leaders were expected to be Anglicans. When Margaret and Denis had children, they did not insist on the children’s attendance at church, to the consternation of Margaret’s mother (67). In 1959 Margaret finally became a Conservative MP for Finchley.

It seemed that Margaret Thatcher had completely severed her ties with Grantham, and all it stood for. But the rise of the New Right political movement in the 1970s matched up well with her Nonconformist roots.

The economic arguments against excessive state spending suited her inclination towards thrift; theoretical notions of state interference went hand in hand with her understanding on the foundations of individual liberty, while the desire for moral and economic restraint fed into her innate Puritanism. This was self-conscious but it was not entirely self-constructed. Her upbringing had instilled a class and religious identity that was to be reawakened in the mid-1970s. (109)

From the time Thatcher sought and won the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1975, she presented herself as the candidate who was in harmony with disaffected middle class voters because of her Grantham roots (108). In a radio interview before the first ballot she stated: “All my ideas about life, about individual responsibility, about looking after your neighbor, about patriotism, about self-discipline, about law and order, were all formed right in a small town in the Midlands” (2). All this could be dismissed as political spin, rebranding the millionaire’s wife as a small town girl with small town values. But Filby maintains that Thatcher’s portrayal of Grantham was “not too distant from the reality” and that “understanding Grantham . . . is key to understanding Thatcher; not only the religious and political values to which she subscribed but also crucial to explaining some of the naivety and short-sightedness in her political thinking” (3). Margaret Thatcher wanted to revive Grantham values on a national level. She sought to decrease taxes and de-regulate businesses in order to free up individuals and businesses; she valued local autonomy over centralized decision-making and private charity over government redistribution; she wanted to rein in powerful trade unions; she promoted free markets; she believed, unapologetically, in a strong national defense.

As Thatcher’s critics see it, the problem with Thatcherism was that Grantham values did not work on a national level. Thatcherites did not properly appreciate the differences between the Grantham of Thatcher’s childhood and modern Britain.

Thatcher’s portrait of capitalism was often one where companies were small, privately owned and operated along much the same lines as the grocer’s shop in which she had served as a child. Alfred Roberts behind the counter rather than the yuppie on the trading floor was always the predominant image of market transactions in her mind. There was little reference to, let alone justification for, the system that her government created and would later become the norm. A situation where the nation’s homes and household budgets were intertwined with a global financial services sector that made up an ever-growing percentage of Britain’s GDP, but which was increasingly internationally owned and in the hands of speculators, who were chiefly concerned with short-term gain and distant from the deals and lives they were gambling on. (335)

Putting her Conservative agenda into action, Thatcher encountered stiff opposition from the Established Church, though both claimed to be moved by biblical principles. Their contrasting conceptions of Christianity (and of the individual and the state) can be

seen in their interpretations of the Good Samaritan parable. For Margaret Thatcher, the story “demonstrated the supremacy of individual charitable virtue over enforced state taxation . . . In her uncompromising words, ‘No one would remember the Good Samaritan if he’d only had good intentions; he had money as well’ ” (xviii). For the Anglican leadership, the story meant something quite different, namely the “scriptural justification of the indiscriminate redistribution of wealth” (xviii). As one Anglican Bishop pointed out, “The point of the story is not that [the Good Samaritan] had some money but that the others passed by on the other side” (xviii).

In 1988 Thatcher addressed Scottish church leaders, giving her theological defense of Thatcherism. She emphasized the biblical foundations and temporal applications of the sanctity of the individual, God-given liberty, and the Protestant work ethic. She quoted St. Paul: “If a man will not work he shall not eat,” and distinguished between wealth creation (good) and the worship of money (bad) (239). She praised individual acts of charity and condemned state enforced redistribution. In a clear rebuke, Thatcher stated that “Christianity is about spiritual redemption, not social reform” (239).

Thatcher’s words incensed church leaders, who emphasized society over the individual. They viewed competition, profit, and interest as “dirty words . . . encouraging human sin, possessive individualism and debasing relationships and values in society” (244–45). In contrast to Thatcher, the Anglican Bishops went so far as to speak of individual acts of charity pejoratively, proclaiming the spiritual superiority of progressive taxation and government redistribution (244). As Bishop David Sheppard put it, “‘Charity’ . . . is discriminate and dictated by preferences or prejudices, whereas indiscriminate contribution through taxation is a greater example of collective giving and ‘belonging to one body’ ” (244). For the Church, social reform was the essence of Christianity.

Hearing this, Thatcher and the Conservatives concluded that the Church leaders were advocating a different gospel. As for the increasingly liberal Church leaders, they were skeptical of the Conservatives’ claims to be motivated by biblical imperatives at all—it seemed to them that the Conservatives were prompted by greed and animus toward the poor.

In the last chapter of *God and Mrs. Thatcher*, entitled “Reap What You Sow,” Filby evaluates Thatcherism. Since Thatcher once said that “Marxism should be judged by its fruits,” Filby feels justified in judging Thatcherism by its fruits as well, meaning that her analysis doesn’t stop at the prosperity of the 1980s but looks ahead to the later recession of the 1990s and financial crisis in 2008. Though living standards rose in the 1980s, the rise was funded in large part by the expansion of personal debt. Though more and more people became investors in the market with opportunities for great gain, their wealth, savings, and homes were now linked to the volatile global financial market. Bankers may have been partially to blame for the economic downturn, but Filby says it can also be seen as “a crisis in individual morality and the public’s own fiscal irresponsibility” (344). The prosperity generated by Thatcherism resulted in a British society that was consumerist, not conservative; secular, not Christian (349).

Filby argues that Margaret Thatcher’s “conviction politics” were unsuccessful in the “battle for Britain’s soul.” In the early years of Thatcher’s premiership, the priority was getting a grip on the economy, but for Thatcher this was only one aspect of a much larger goal of restoring self-reliance as the basis of personal responsibility and national success.

“Economics is the method, the object is to change the soul,” she said (133). In Thatcher’s view, the excesses of the modern welfare state had broken down the fundamental relationship between effort and reward, weakening the economy as well as personal morality. Her reforms—privatizing industry, decreasing market regulation, reining in unions, and increasing market participation by individuals—were aimed at restoring this relationship and were built upon her view of the gospel. According to Filby, “by destroying paternalism, Thatcher succeeded in making Britain more egalitarian in an American sense, but she also created a nation more sharply divided into winners and losers” (310). In a perfect world, the pain of losing would be cushioned by the winners’ acts of charity. But this isn’t a perfect world. When asked what her greatest regret in office was, Thatcher reportedly replied, “I cut taxes and I thought we would get a giving society and we haven’t” (348). Filby concludes: “The flaw in Margaret Thatcher’s theology was not that she did not believe in society, as many criticized, but that she had too much faith in man. She had forgotten the essence of Conservative philosophy: the Fall” (348).

And this is the “takeaway” from *God and Mrs. Thatcher*, remembering the Fall. If we, like Thatcher, are champions of individual liberty and opportunity, we should remember that sinful man will never care for the poor as he should, and sinful decisions will cause corruption in our markets and institutions, just as it does in our hearts. If we, like Thatcher’s opponents, insist on the priority of society and promote state-enforced social reform, we should remember that the poor will always be with us—and so will sin. No program and no amount of money will fix problems endemic to this fallen world. This should not justify inaction, but it should prompt all Christian citizens to be humble in debate, realistic in expectations, and marked by a longing for the New Heavens and the New Earth.

If you are looking for a biography of Margaret Thatcher, with all the facts, figures, people, and places important to her life, *God and Mrs. Thatcher* isn’t the book you’re looking for. Try Charles Moore’s highly acclaimed authorized biography (Volume 1: *From Grantham to the Falklands* (2013), Volume 2: *At Her Zenith: In Washington, London and Moscow* (2016), with a third volume anticipated) or Thatcher’s own memoirs, *The Downing Street Years* (1993). Although it includes biographical detail, Filby’s book isn’t so much biography but an analysis focusing on the role of faith in Margaret Thatcher’s life and politics, and at this it is a success.

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ServantReading

The Triumph of Faith *by Rodney Stark*

by John R. Muether

The Triumph of Faith: Why the World is More Religious than Ever, by Rodney Stark. Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2015, 258 pages, \$24.95.

What if the sociologists of religion get it all wrong? What if their projections of the future of religion are based on false assumptions, unscientific polling, and bad data? That is the claim of Rodney Stark in this feisty book. Stark taught the sociology of religion at the University of Washington for three decades before accepting his present appointment at Baylor University. In some thirty books that he has authored or co-written, Stark commends the study of world religions in terms of competition that yields winners and losers. (Thus phrases like “rise of,” “victory of,” and “triumph of” appear in his book titles, including the one under review.) Raised in the Lutheran tradition, Stark’s own religious convictions have shifted from agnostic to “independent Christian.”

“Until now,” Stark asserts, “worldwide religious statistics have been based on substantial guesswork” (12). Many surveys severely limited religious questions to matters of institutional affiliation or attendance at religious services. (Stark singles out the Pew Research Center surveys as particularly unreliable.) The effect has been to inflate the appearance of secularism, from Europe to China. The introduction of more sophisticated surveying (such as the Gallup World Polls, begun in 2005) is yielding a more reliable picture, he explains. (A warning to the statistically challenged: charts of survey results take up a good 20 percent of this book.)

Stark takes the reader on a quick world tour, beginning in Europe, where the claim of a “secularized Europe” is simply a “grand illusion” (37). Declining church attendance is not an indication of a rise in atheism, because the continent is replete with a “smorgasbord of spiritualities” (48), and even alleged secular strongholds such as Sweden and the Netherlands are awash in New Age and Eastern beliefs ranging from reincarnation to mental telepathy. These “believing non-belongers” (44) elude the measurement of pollsters who fixate on church membership. Stark even suggests that fears of growing Muslim populations in Europe are overstated. His research indicates that Muslim fertility rates in Europe, as with the rest of the European population, have dropped below replacement level. Indeed, the only demographic in Europe that has a fertility rate above replacement level are women who attend church weekly.

Subsequent chapters make stops in Latin America, the Muslim world, Africa, Asia (including Japan, China, and the “four tigers”—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea), and finally America. Sociologists continue to predict the withering of

religious conviction under modernity. But across the globe, the evidence consistently reveals otherwise: a remarkable revival of religion is unfolding. Stark gleefully notes the irony: “It is their unshakable faith in secularization that may be the most ‘irrational’ of all beliefs” (212).

The key to Stark’s optimism is competition. Modernity does not secularize; rather, it pluralizes. And Stark confidently asserts that religion flourishes under unconstrained free-market conditions. “Lazy churches” (such as state churches in Europe or Roman Catholicism in settings without Protestant competition) wither in numbers, because they lack the incentive for aggressive evangelization. He finds the evidence particularly striking in South America, where the rise in Pentecostal Protestantism has awakened the Roman Catholic Church. Thus church attendance in that continent exceeds that of the United States and even of most Muslim nations. “Contrary to the sociological orthodoxy, pluralism results in active and effective churches” (80). The winners are new religious movements, including innovative conservative churches. The losers are “theologies of doubt and disbelief” (199). Thus “Protestantism is as strong as ever in America—only the names have changed” (201). And atheists? They may be louder now than in the past, but they remain a tiny portion of the population—less than 5 percent.

But is the stubborn and worldwide endurance of religious conviction any comfort to orthodox Christianity? Stark’s better polling data becomes less hopeful here. He concedes, for example, that Christianity’s rapid expansion in sub-Saharan Africa is producing indigenous churches that are shocking in the extent of their theological heresy. Polygamy, Old Testament dietary laws, and the prosperity gospel are common in many African Initiated Churches. (Moreover, the persistence of tribalism in new Christian sects has enflamed much Christian-against-Christian violence.)

Towards the end of the book, Stark takes on Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher who has argued, in books such as *A Secular Age* (2007), that the Enlightenment has created a “disenchanted world.” Stark dismisses Taylor’s claims as superficial, and he associates it with the reductionistic polling data he has exposed. Yet it seems that the charge of superficiality may be turned against Stark. When Stark finds signs of faith in beliefs in lucky charms, fortune tellers, and the like (187), he is hardly describing a rise in the triumph of true faith. Moreover, Taylor and others have explained that such practices are often quite compatible with secularist convictions. To paraphrase Immanuel Kant, Stark seems willing to settle for “enchantment within the limits of modernity alone.” As sociologist Christian Smith has observed, conceiving of God as one’s personal “cosmic butler” is a domesticated form of enchantment.

Finally, Stark does not reckon fully with the effects of supernatural beliefs becoming *privatized*. Guardian angels, for example, may be effective coping devices in creating and maintaining personal identities. But they are unwelcome in the highly rationalized world of the public square. Simply put, religious values can be very popular and highly marginalized at the same time. So believe what you want about the sanctity of life in the womb or the importance of traditional marriage. Just keep those opinions to yourself.

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ServantReading

A Helpful Little Primer on Eschatology?

A Review Article

by Jeffrey C. Waddington

As You See the Day Approaching: Reformed Perspectives on the Last Things, edited by Theodore G. Van Raalte. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016, ix + 169 pages, \$21.00, paper.

As You See the Day Approaching is the fruit of the January 2015 conference held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton, Ontario. Theodore Van Raalte, professor of ecclesiology at CRTS, has ably edited a fine collection of essays focusing on eschatology. Each of the essays shares the admirable trait of being crystal clear so that the argumentation can be followed without the hindrance of poor writing.

Van Raalte contributes two chapters. In the first (1–19) he lays out the contours of the doctrine of eschatology or last things. The author notes three usages of the term “eschatology” which entered the English lexicon in 1841 following its introduction in German theological terminology. The doctrine refers to last things or those events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the ages. This is what Van Raalte refers to as the “traditional” usage. The second usage is associated with a more philosophically driven use tied to theologians such as Karl Barth. The third usage is also orthodox and is associated with Geerhardus Vos; and in this case eschatology is short form for redemptive historical (2). The author then develops discussion of the three uses (and connects them to Barth and Pannenberg on the one hand and Vos, Herman Ridderbos, and Richard Gaffin on the other) of the term eschatology and notes that the first and third will appear throughout this volume. The remainder of the chapter is then devoted to providing brief descriptions of the remaining chapters.

The second chapter is penned by the OPC’s own Lane G. Tipton (20–35) who looks at Paul’s comparison of the eschatological blessings of union with Christ with pre-fall Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 and post-fall Moses in 2 Corinthians 3:6–18. Tipton argues via in-depth exegesis that in both instances Paul makes a comparative argument using absolute categories. Compared to the blessings that have come with the person and work of Jesus Christ in functional identity with the Holy Spirit, the pre-fall Adam and the post-fall covenant of grace Mosaic administration were as dead. The beauty of this essay is that the author is able to do equal justice to the covenant of works and the continuity/discontinuity of the covenant of grace in two of its varied administrations.

Jannes Smith provides us with a fascinating exploration seeking to find eschatology within the Psalter (36–53). Smith intends to be sensitive to the expanding contexts of the Psalms: original setting of each Psalm, the context of a psalm within the psalter as a whole, and finally within the canon as a whole. Related to these three contexts the author seeks to set out the “explicit teaching” of the psalms, the “implications,” and the “direct application”

to our own lives (37). Smith recognizes that these distinctions are not hermetically sealed compartments. It is a way for the pastor-scholar or lay person to be self-conscious in his reading of the Psalms with a view to seeing the eschatology of the book. This is a thought-provoking chapter and is useful in raising the right issues.

In “Working Politically and Socially in Anticipation of Christ’s Coming,” Cornelis Van Dam presents his case for a chastened transformation of culture by Christian disciples (54–69). He is seeking to recognize both the cultural imperative (Gen. 1:26–28) and the eschatological reality of the “already/not yet.” Van Dam draws upon Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles (Jer. 29:5–7) about seeking the welfare of the city to which they have been exiled despite knowing that after seventy years or so God will bring his people back to their homeland, renewed and ready to serve him. The example of Daniel is also considered as well as NT examples like John the Baptist. Undoubtedly this will be one of two provocative chapters, challenging the hegemony of the popular Two-Kingdoms theology.

Theodore Van Raalte’s second essay addresses the intermediate state and the existence of the human soul (70–111). By far the longest essay in the book, it repays repeated readings. What is the intermediate state? It is the state of the saints in heaven with the Lord between their deaths and the resurrection at the end of the age. It is a vast improvement on living in this beautiful but fallen world, but it is not yet the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth. Saints live in a disembodied state and so the discussion about the nature and existence of the human soul. Van Raalte properly takes aim at the problem of physicalism (that every process of thinking or feeling, choosing, or willing is a chemical reaction or is an epiphenomenon). Physicalism, if true, would require a major (indeed impossible) reworking of the system of Christian doctrine. Van Raalte notes that some Christian theologians have bought into physicalism, namely Joel Green and N. T. Wright (75).

The author then delves into some close exegesis of various OT and NT passages, including those where Paul notes that he longs to depart to be with Jesus and yet knows that it would be better for the church if he stays in his body on earth. The author concludes his study with a consideration of which understanding of the body-soul distinction best comports with Scripture. Van Raalte eventually concludes that the Aristotelian-Thomist model is most amenable to the biblical data on the body-soul relation (99–102). The Aristotelian-Thomist model is one model not two, at least from this side of philosophical-theological development. I think that Van Raalte has made his case.

In his chapter (112–133) Jason Van Vliet asks, “Is hell obsolete?” The author’s concern is with the falling off of the proper preaching of the doctrine of hell enunciated in Scripture. Van Vliet notes that in the last several decades a few notable evangelicals have come out against the traditional doctrine of hell as eternal punishment of the wicked. He notes especially the examples of British scholars John Wenham and John Stott. With the mention of Stott’s name we are presented with the problem of conditional immortality or annihilationism. Before we get there, the author recognizes that there are three basic views about the fate of the unsaved: exclusivism, universalism, and inclusivism. Van Vliet seeks to address a properly balanced handling of the doctrine of hell through asking and answering four questions: (1) How do we handle the passages that seem to suggest that God wants everyone to be saved? (2) If God is perfectly compassionate, how could he condemn anyone to eternal torment? (3) If God is perfectly just, why would he give an infinite punishment to humans who have committed a finite number of sins? (4) When the Word of God speaks about the destruction of the wicked, does that mean that they will cease to

exist? In answering these questions, Van Vliet affirms a proper biblically balanced preaching of the doctrine of hell following the example of our Lord Jesus himself.

In the seventh chapter of this book (134–142) Gerhard Visscher deals with the nature of the new earth. Visscher seeks to defend and unfold the earthiness of the new earth, i.e., that it will indeed be a physical new heavens as well as new earth. The author's concern is that for many Christians, their view of the new earth is an eternalizing of the intermediate state. Visscher is correct to emphasize the importance of the resurrection of the body for Christian doctrine and experience. He wants to make sure we understand that there will be a physical new earth on which we can plant the feet of our resurrected bodies! But the author wants to argue for more than the reality of the resurrected bodies of saints and a physical new earth. He wants to include within his discussion the idea that the old earth will not so much be destroyed as purified and that we will bring (unspecified) human artifacts with us into the new heavens and new earth. Visscher will need to deal with 2 Peter 3, which is the strongest passage apparently countering his position. However, he raises a good point: Did the Noachian flood waters obliterate the pre-diluvian earth or did it purify it? God did not obliterate and recreate. He renewed the pre-diluvian earth. Peter notes that God will do with fire in the future what he did with water in the days of Noah.

To bolster a biblical case of human artifacts being brought with us into the new earth, Visscher turns to Revelation 21 and the reference (drawing upon the insights of Isaiah 60:6) to kings bringing into the New Jerusalem the glory and honor of their nations. The author does not think this means that the kings will be personally saved but that the various cultures of the world will be brought into the New Jerusalem. At the end of the day the author has presented a plausible analysis of Scripture. However, what the human artifacts might be that we bring with us into the new heavens and new earth remains vague. Given the contentious nature of this chapter's subject matter (it argues against views advocated by some two kingdoms theologians), there should be further shoring up of its biblical foundations.

Arjan de Visser offers the final chapter, in which he examines the eschatological thrust of Reformed liturgy (144–158). Each aspect of Reformed worship is considered in terms of what kind of eschatological thrust it has. The author discusses the necessity of the minister being eschatologically concerned so that the people of God will have set before them week in and week out the return of Christ and our consequent holy living. Visser looks at the preaching in a Reformed service as well as the celebration of the sacraments as eschatologically colored when fully understood. For instance, the Lord's Supper is a displaying of our Lord's death until he returns, and it is a present feeding on Christ by faith which anticipates the marriage supper of the Lamb in the new heavens and new earth. These and other elements of Reformed worship are shown to have a proper and irreducible eschatological thrust when consistently and creatively set before the people of God.

As You See the Day Approaching provides us with a delightful consideration of the Dutch Reformed contribution to the worldwide Reformed communion. I recommend it highly. It can be read and digested in just a few sittings.

Jeffrey C. Waddington is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as stated supply of Knox Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania.

ServantPoetry

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed, whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.