

Ordained Servant

25th anniversary



Church Commitment

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From the Editor

A quarter of a century. In today's changing publication world that is a good run. I believe that the Lord has blessed our little journal with an extraordinary amount of human and divine resources. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). One of the subcommittee members overseeing the two periodicals published by the Committee on Christian Education told me that my greatest challenge as editor would be to find good writers willing to write for *Ordained Servant*. The variety of quality writers that the Lord has provided has been heartening. The editing from copy to proof to website, and then from copy to formatting for print to publication has been of a quality far beyond our size or budget.

Don't miss the third chapter of Danny Olinger's biography, "Geerhardus Vos: Professor at the Theological School in Grand Rapids." Vos was a star of the first magnitude, a diamond of first water, who harnessed the biblical theological scholarship of his day in the bridle of Reformed theology.

Shane Lems identifies "Six Anti-Church Evangelical Trends." If the church and its worship founded on a biblical ecclesiology is, as Calvin maintained in his treatise on the necessity of reforming the church, the means God has provided to implement the whole counsel of God, then Western Christendom is in a good deal of trouble. Lems identifies the disease for which a mighty cure is needed.

Arthur Fox's review of *The Reader's Bible* was an eye-opener for me. When he first asked me if I would publish a review of the six-volume set I was reluctant because it sounded like just another sales gimmick. It also sounded ridiculous—isn't every Bible meant to be read? Now that I have looked carefully at my copy, I realize the uniqueness of this endeavor. This beautifully published set is hardbound, sewn signature, and on high quality paper. This enhances the value of the books. There are no chapter or verse markers. So even more ancient distractions have been removed to invite modern readers to pay attention to the text of God's Word.

Jeffrey Waddington reviews a much anticipated, if somewhat disappointing, commentary on Romans by Richard Longenecker.

I review Larry Taunton's encounter with a famous atheist in *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens*. The antagonism that the new atheists, like Hitchens, often evoke is predictable, but actually it ought to humble us Christians to befriend those who share their desperate negation. Taunton can help show us the way.

Finally, our Christmas poem, "I Syng of a Maiden," is an ancient, anonymous, and lovely reflection on the wonder of the incarnation.

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

Reflections on Twenty-Five Years of *Ordained Servant*

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Ordained Servant was born in January 1992, twenty-five years ago next month. It was “Vol. 1, No. 1,” with an engraving of John Calvin on the cover. This set the tone for the next quarter of a century. It was published by Pleroma Press in Carson, North Dakota, a little over an hour away from Bismarck, where J. Gresham Machen went to be with his Lord. The publication was directed by three members of the Committee on Christian Education, Dr. James Gidley, Mr. David Winslow, and Rev. Larry Wilson. An annual subscription was \$12 per year.

The editor, G. I. Williamson, announced that “*Ordained Servant* will be published from two to four times a year in the present format.” In fact, after publishing three issues in its first year, the journal was published quarterly for the next twelve years. The only year that saw only two issues was the final year of Mr. Williamson’s editorship, 2005. Here is the first table of contents:

Contents:

Introducing *Ordained Servant*, by the Editor
Taking Action in Time, by Rev. Thomas E. Tyson
How to Get Started, by the Editor
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Here is editor Williamson’s sagacious introduction:

Introducing *Ordained Servant*

by G. I. Williamson

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift . . . And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (NKJV Ephesians 4:7 and 11–12).

In September of 1989, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s Committee on Christian Education appointed a special subcommittee with the title and task of “Equipping

Ordained Officers.” This issue of *Ordained Servant*, mandated by the entire committee in September of 1991, is the first tangible result of that appointment. The immediate aim is to provide materials to help in the training and effective functioning of the elders (both teaching and ruling) and the deacons of our church. But in a sense *Ordained Servant* is a means to a more important end. For, as the above quoted text clearly shows, God’s purpose in giving his church ordained servants does not end with their being well equipped. Quite the contrary, in fact, because their calling is to equip the saints for the work of ministry as believers. It is only when both of these become a reality in the church—only when there is “the effective working by which every part does its share”—that we can expect to see the kind of growth that brings glory and honor to God.

The American church is enamored with methods—yes, and even gimmicks—that seem to promise numerical growth in the church. But let us put the question quite bluntly: what is the use of numerical increase when the church is not functioning “according to the effective working by which every part does its share” which, in turn, “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”? The answer is that you have an even greater monstrosity. We believe the biblical view of church growth is quality first, and then increase in numbers. On the American scene it is too often quantity first, and then (much later on, if at all) quality. And, to be honest, our own churches are not all that they ought to be either. Can any honest person evade this? To answer that question ask yourself another: is there all that much difference between the way our people live and the way their people (the members of the liberal church on the next street) live? Can we honestly say, without hesitation, that the elders of Orthodox Presbyterian congregations are faithfully exercising oversight of the flock according to biblical standards? At the very least we should be willing to admit that we can—and must—do much better. It is this conviction that motivates the production of this journal.

We (the editor, and the editorial oversight committee) are aware of the difficulty of the task we are undertaking, but willing to do it because we sincerely believe the need is urgent. The exaggerated individualism of many, if not most, Americans today—even in the soundest Reformed churches—presents a difficult problem. How are we going to convey to the people of God a respect for authority, a respect that has so sadly diminished? How are we going to bring it about that, once again, membership vows will be awesome and sacred to our members? We will only see these deficiencies remedied if, first of all, the proficiency and diligence of the ordained servant is uplifted. So in this journal it will be our intention to point the way to more effective leadership by elders and deacons.

We do not intend to make this journal a forum for the invention of new ideas. We have too many of these already. But neither will we baptize the status quo as automatically holy. Further, we do not intend to use this journal to promote a partisan viewpoint, such as the two- or three-office view as exclusively legitimate. Our task, as we perceive it, is much more important. We want to find the best material written—old or new—to help all who are, and all who aspire to be, ordained servants.

This periodical is yours—the Lord’s (present and future) ordained servants in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—and your comments and contributions are welcome.

One of the features that we plan to include in future issues, therefore, is a Question and Answer page. Here is a little sample. We received a letter from a young pastor a few weeks ago, asking this question: “*Should a ‘hospital baptism’ by a Roman Catholic*

nurse—performed when she feared an infant was about to die—be accepted as valid?” Our answer was as follows. “No, we do not think it should be. There is at least one instance in the Scriptures, of what could be called a private baptism (Acts 8:26-40). But it is important to note that, even in this instance, the one who administered this baptism was an office-bearer in the church, and the church in which he was an office-bearer was in genuine submission to the Word of God. It may have been just such biblical teaching that led the Westminster Assembly to insist that neither baptism or the Lord’s supper ‘may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained’ (Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 27. sec.4). This reason, alone, would seem to us to disqualify the nurse’s act. Furthermore, for baptism of infants to be valid they must be children of parents that the church acknowledges, at the time, to be true believers. It is extremely doubtful, to say the least, that this essential qualification was accounted for in the nurse’s unilateral decision to act as she did.”

Some questions will undoubtedly stump us. But when this happens we intend to seek the wisdom of others. We also welcome your wisdom. If you have an insight that you believe to be truly biblical, and helpful in strengthening other office-bearers in the church, please send it to us. We cannot promise to use everything that is sent, but we will give everything that is sent to us our serious consideration.

You are invited to send any questions that you may have—and/or any other material that you may wish to have considered for inclusion in *Ordained Servant*—to the editor, whose address is listed above.

As Christ is the only head of the Church, it follows that its allegiance is to him, and that whenever those outside the Church undertake to regulate its affairs or to curtail its liberties, its members are bound to obey him rather than men. They are bound to resist by all legitimate means such usurpations and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free. They are under equal obligation to resist all undue assumption of authority by those within the Church, whether it be by the brotherhood, or by individual officers, or by Church councils or courts. The allegiance of the people terminates on Christ. They are to obey others only so far as obedience to them is obedience to him.

— Charles Hodge

* * *

Among the themes the first editor promoted, was a concern for the “exaggerated individualism” in American culture and the ways it weakens the Reformed church. Along with the specific goal of providing “materials to help in the training and effective functioning of” church officers, *Ordained Servant* seeks to explore the aspects of American culture that present a direct challenge to the health of the church and its leadership. As its second editor I have sought to further examine the ways that American culture disciplines its citizens, especially as a technological society. I articulated this in my first editorial in 2006:

It is also my conviction that officers need to understand more deeply the battlefield on which we find ourselves engaged in a fierce conflict. So I hope to include thoughtful

analyses of different aspects of our culture, so as to better minister within it and to it.¹

In order to overcome the default nature of our fallen humanity, the renewal of our minds prescribed by Paul in Romans 12:2 requires a critical awareness of our environment. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Long before the Industrial Revolution, the idolatrous tendencies embedded in all fallen cultures have required Christians to test or discern our culture’s temptations and blessings in order to navigate our environment wisely.

But because God has also given many blessing on common culture by his common grace, I have sought to develop an awareness of poetry and fiction as means of cultivating the general intellectual and spiritual lives of officers.

As to the particulars of training and nourishing church officers, I continue to be committed to what I first promised:

I will continue building on G. I.’s pastoral and confessional themes, as these form the core of our focus. As a church planter, I have grown to appreciate the importance of sound doctrine, worship with reverence and awe, passionate expository preaching, and the training of gifted elders who fulfill their pastoral callings. The latter is the key to implementing everything else.²

A bedrock commitment of *Ordained Servant* is an Old School obligation to our confessional standards. In 2006 I set forth J. Gresham Machen as a model of ministry: “Machen is particularly useful because he lived in the same world we inhabit. He excelled in understanding the modern world and engaging it from a distinctly confessional perspective.”

I hope to continue with these basic planks in the platform of this journal. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome as they have formed a serious part of the development of *Ordained Servant* over the past quarter of a century. May the Lord bless us with continued faithfulness to his Word and his church.

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¹ Gregory Edward Reynolds, “Galvanized Iron: A Tribute to G.I. Williamson for His Pioneering Work on *Ordained Servant*,” *Ordained Servant* 15 (2006): 7; http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=4.

² Ibid.

ServantHistory

Geerhardus Vos: Professor at the Theological School in Grand Rapids

by Danny E. Olinger

After visiting Herman Bavinck in Kampen for one last time, Geerhardus Vos left Holland for America on May 19, 1888. Three weeks later, he was in Michigan meeting with the Curatorium (Board of Trustees) of the Theological School in Grand Rapids. Vos asked for the meeting with the Curatorium in order to request two modifications of the terms of his teaching position at the school. His first request was that he would not start teaching until September. The second was that the requirement that he preach weekly be waived. The Curatorium granted both pleas.¹

Two and a half months later, on the morning of Tuesday, September 4, 1888, Vos's installation as Professor of Didactic and Exegetical Theology took place at the Spring Street Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. His father, Jan, pastor of the Spring Street Church and a member of the Curatorium, delivered the charge from 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (KJV).²

The Prospects of American Theology

Later that evening Vos returned to the Spring Street Church to deliver his inaugural address, "The Prospects of American Theology." In the address Vos introduced many of the biblical themes that would mark his teaching ministry over the next forty-four years. These themes included a confidence in the Word of God, an understanding of the organic nature of the Word of God, and a belief that what is most practical in the life of the believer is the cultivation of communion with the triune God.

Speaking in Dutch to an audience that in the main had emigrated from the Netherlands, Vos declared that in the homeland, religious motives permeated culture. In America, there was an interest in Christian philanthropy and missions, but religious questions remained secondary. He said, "It is not interest in things theological that propels the mighty machine of American life. The life of the church in its theoretical aspect is not the soil from which the tree of the whole of this modern culture draws its sap."³

¹ James T. Dennison Jr. believes that both requests were related to poor health on Vos's part. See, James T. Dennison Jr., "The Life of Geerhardus Vos," in *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 25.

² Ibid.

³ Geerhardus Vos, "The Prospects of American Theology," trans. Ed. M. van der Maas in *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 20, no. 1 (May 2005): 15.

Rather than turn to God who has spoken in his Word regarding the issues of life, Americans employed a philosophy of “practical realism.” Vos questioned whether this philosophy, a worldview guided by the visible world experienced through the senses, was truly “practical.” For Vos, “practical realism” did not promote the most practical thing in life, the cultivation of communion with the unseen God. Further, “practical realism” did not have as its chief end the glory and enjoyment of God. Vos said:

This [realism] does not know God and does not want to take him into account. It finds its point of departure, not in the Creator but in the creature, and does not acknowledge a higher authority than experience, which is given preeminence. It does not seek to make the creature subservient to God, but beginning with the creature and finding no way up from (the creature), ends theoretically as well as practically in idolizing the creature.⁴

Vos countered that theology, when connected to the church, had a richer content than the sum of the external things of this world. “When theology is anything,” Vos stated,

it is a worldview taught by God that does not only involve the method of the expansion of Christendom, but that gives, although not exhaustive but nevertheless definite and absolutely certain, information about the meaning of heaven and earth, of life and death, and about all problems that torment the human heart and the human mind.⁵

In Vos’s judgment a lack of confidence in truthfulness of the Word of God had led to the dismissal of theology in America Christianity. He wrote:

We must confess with shame that the deepest cause of that lack of esteem for dogma and theology that we lament in American Christianity, is a lack of self-confidence, of trust in the veracity of our God and his infallible revelation. If we believed it, we would think more and with greater liking, and maintain the thoughts of God over against the thoughts of the world.⁶

Vos further stated that the unseen God who had revealed himself in his Word was also the sovereign God who directed history. God knows the beginning from the end, and the Scripture reflects this reality. His acts and thoughts are related like links in a chain. Picking up or letting go of one link is picking up or letting go of the entire chain. Any proper approach to the Word of God must recognize both his sovereign control and the Word’s historical coherence.

In conclusion Vos echoed Abraham Kuyper and declared that if the concept of freedom were to undergird American life, then the principles of Calvinism must be central.

Affinity [exists] between our Reformed doctrine and the concept of freedom that undergirds our national life. Calvinism must, by virtue of its principia, become the origin of civil liberty wherever its influence extends. Precisely because it places all creatures on a level field of dependence and smallness at the feet of the sovereign God,

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Ibid., 25.

it cannot tolerate despotic governments, whose power has not come down from God and is not exercised in conformity with the Word of God. The more deeply one understands the sovereignty of God and absorbs its delights, the more proudly one will hold high one's ransomed head, not only in the church of God, but also in the assembly of the country's citizens.⁷

Vos admonished his listeners to go forward in American society with confidence in the Word of God and the leading of the Spirit.

The witness of the Holy Spirit to the Scriptures, through which God validates to our souls as certain and authentic that which he says in his Word concerning his Word—that is the starting point of our theology, her unprovable, self-evident principium, the rock on which she builds.⁸

Theological School in Grand Rapids

Vos's appointment at the age of twenty-six to the faculty of the Theological School in Grand Rapids marked a new day for the institution. He was the first professor with an advanced academic degree. He was also the first professor to teach selected courses in English. The original terms of the call also required him to preach once a month in English at the Christian Reformed Church of Le Grave Avenue in Grand Rapids. However, Vos was relieved of this duty with the arrival and installation of the Rev. J. Y. De Baun at the Le Grave Avenue Church.⁹

Vos's salary for teaching was \$1,300 per year. The school year ran from September to June and classes met Monday through Saturday with Sunday being the only day off. By 1888 the student body had grown to over forty men, and Vos's work load was extreme. Depending on the semester, he spent twenty-three hours to twenty-five hours a week in classroom instruction.

Still, a greater problem than the workload might have been how to teach students who were so limited academically. That the school required students to enter the Literary Department, also named the Preparatory Department, before their promotion to the Theological Department was a tacit acknowledgement that remedial education was needed. *The Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the State of Michigan* described the situation at the Theological School.

The institution is virtually a theological seminary. But recognizing the fact that many of the young men who attend here had little or no literary advantage, there is a literary course of four years, including such studies taught in our high schools and colleges as seem most essential to theological work.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹ Jacob G. Vanden Bosch, "Geerhardus Vos," *Reformed Journal* 4, no. 10 (November 1954): 11.

¹⁰ *Fifty-Seventh Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Michigan with Accompanying Documents for the Year 1893* (Lansing, MI: Robert Smith, 1894), 355.

Vos's responsibilities as a professor were in the three-year Theology Department. Among the courses and topics that he taught were antiquities, biblical geography, biblical history, Hebrew, history of dogmatics, history of religions, symbolics, hermeneutics, homiletics, natural theology, history of dogmatics, and introduction to dogmatics.

For his lectures in dogmatics, Vos did not translate Francis Turretin's *Elenctic Theology* or John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* from the Latin or Charles Hodge's *Systematic Theology* from English. Instead, Vos developed original lectures that totaled 1,892 handwritten pages. The lectures were published in handwritten Dutch in 1896, then typeset in Dutch in 1910 into a five-volume set. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., with the help of others, translated and edited the 1896 version into a five-volume English set.¹¹

In his *Dogmatics*, Vos quoted Calvin more than any other theologian, but, as Gaffin noted, Vos demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the Reformed dogmatic tradition throughout, particularly from the seventeenth century. Gaffin also took interest in any changes in Vos's positions from his *Dogmatics* to his later redemptive-historical writings. As an example, Gaffin noted that in the *Dogmatics*, Vos cited Romans 1:4 as a proof text for the deity of Christ. In his 1912 article, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," Vos argued that Romans 1:4 referred to the transformation of the incarnate Christ by the Holy Spirit in his resurrection.¹²

Still, Gaffin concluded that, when one explores the relationship between the teaching of the early Vos in the *Dogmatics* and the biblical-theological teaching of later Vos, "the end result will confirm a deep, pervasive and cordial continuity between his work in systematic theology and in biblical theology."¹³ The volume that captured Gaffin's interest in this regard was Vos's final one in the *Dogmatics* on ecclesiology, the means of grace, and eschatology. Gaffin wrote that there was in Vos's treatment of eschatology

a clear recognition of the two-age construct, including the present interadvental overlapping of this age and the age to come, and the structural importance of this construct for biblical eschatology as a whole—an insight that he subsequently develops so magisterially in works like *The Pauline Eschatology*.¹⁴

Two examples of Vos's treatment of eschatology that would mark his later work were his definition of "eschatology" and his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 with respect to the resurrection body. In answer to the question, "What is contained in the term 'eschatology'?" Vos wrote,

That history, in the course of which we are situated, will have a conclusion. It is not an endless process but a genuine history that ends in a definite goal and so has a boundary and limits. As it has a beginning, it will have an ending. That ending will come as a

¹¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., et al., 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014–2016).

¹² Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Preface," in Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3: *Christology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Jonathan Pater, Allan Janssen, Harry Boonstra, and Roelof van Ijken (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), vi–vii.

¹³ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Preface," in Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5: *Ecclesiology, the Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Kim Batteau and Allan Janssen (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), viii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vii.

crisis, and everything that has to do with this crisis belongs to the “doctrine of the last things.”¹⁵

Although Vos would expand this definition over time, the philosophy of history that it embodied would mark his mature teaching.

In answer to the question regarding the resurrection body, Vos maintained that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 taught that the pre-fall body of Adam was not the same as the resurrection body of believers. He said that for the body of believers two elements must be distinguished, that by which the body is distinguished from the body of sin and that by which the body is distinguished from the body that Adam had before the fall. “Paul teaches clearly that the image according to which the resurrection body is formed is not the image of the first but that of the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:49; Rom. 8:29). Believers receive a body that is not designed for the earth but for heaven, at least for the new earth in which righteousness dwells.”¹⁶ The bodies of believers will be spiritual, glorious, powerful— heavenly bodies.

While Vos taught the students at the Theological School out of his handwritten *Dogmatics*, the Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck were at work on producing new systematic theologies. Rather than seeking out a publisher to promote his own work before a larger audience, Vos sought the advancement and promotion of Kuyper’s *Encyclopedia of Theology* and Bavinck’s *Dogmatics* in English to an American audience. To do so, he entered into extended correspondence with Kuyper and Bavinck, and also with Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary.

Reformed Dutch-American Connections: Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Benjamin Warfield

After declining Kuyper’s invitation to become Professor of Old Testament at the Free University in 1886, Vos wrote Kuyper that it was his quiet prayer that the Lord would use him in America as Kuyper’s warm friend and firm advocate.¹⁷ Vos proved true to his word. This was evident in the fall of 1889 when the publisher of Kuyper’s *Encyclopedia of Theology* wrote Vos to see if he would be willing to translate the Dutch original of the book into English.

Vos then asked Warfield whether he thought an English translation of Kuyper’s *Encyclopedia* would find an audience in America. For Vos’s part, he indicated the volume could be of help in combating prevailing critical theories.

I should think myself that it might prove helpful in dispelling many half-German ideas, which are afloat and of which those, who adopt and defend them do not realise the dangerous tendency simply because they have no clear and firm conviction on the fundamental questions of Christian truth and theology. I only need refer to the looser views on Inspiration, Biblical Theology and Criticism.¹⁸

¹⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 5: *Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. with Kim Batteau and Allan Janssen (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 251.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁷ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Abraham Kuyper, October 7, 1886, in Dennison, *Letters*, 121.

¹⁸ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, October 22, 1889, in Dennison, *Letters*, 129.

Having heard back from Warfield, who presumably encouraged Vos to take on the translation project, Vos wrote Kuyper on February 1, 1890. He told Kuyper that he would be willing to translate his *Encyclopedia* into English, but that it would take him at least two years given the amount of translation to be done. Vos relayed that Warfield was interested in having Kuyper write for the newly formed *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* on recent theological thought or trends in Holland. Vos encouraged Kuyper to accept Warfield's offer. He believed that it would make Kuyper's name better known in America and help the sales of the *Encyclopedia*. Vos finished by expressing his desire one day to labor side-by-side with Kuyper, but for the time being his place was in Grand Rapids.¹⁹

The same day that Vos wrote Kuyper, he also wrote Bavinck. He repeated the main topics that he had discussed with Kuyper, but explained more fully why the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* had been created by conservatives in the Presbyterian Church. The background was a difference of opinion among the editors of the former *Presbyterian Review* (whom Vos did not name as Warfield and Charles Briggs) over the proposed confessional revision of the Westminster Standards in the Presbyterian Church. Vos told Bavinck that he believed that behind the proposal was the attempt to change the teaching of Westminster in an Arminian direction, and his fear was that the right wing of the Presbyterian Church would put up with it.²⁰

A little over a month later, Vos thanked Bavinck for his willingness to send Vos those recent books on Dutch theology that he deemed most significant. Vos wrote, "From afar it will be very difficult for me to keep track of the theological alliances and shifting."²¹ In revealing his personal closeness to Bavinck, Vos closed the letter, "Thanking you for the time being for your friendly trouble and with kindest regards also from my parents, to you and yours. Yours truly, your friend and brother in Christ, G. Vos."²²

Vos wrote Warfield in June to inform him that Kuyper was willing to write for the *Review* as long as he had more freedom in regard to the topics suggested. According to Vos, Kuyper thought the topics were unsuitable "in as much as he would either have to pass by in silence two orthodox movements or speak largely about himself."²³ Proving ever to be the facilitator of the Reformed Dutch-American connection, Vos suggested that, if Warfield were looking for someone to take Kuyper's place, he should consider Bavinck.²⁴

A month later, Vos wrote Kuyper that Warfield was agreeable to a change of topic for his potential article for the *Review*. He updated Kuyper on the situation in the Presbyterian Church, in regard to the proposed confessional revision, but also informed Kuyper that the evil was spreading to more than the Presbyterian Church. In Vos's judgment, the Reformed Church in America was also showing signs of theological liberalism. Knowing that he was entering into a delicate subject with Kuyper because of the church situation in the Netherlands, Vos acknowledged it was preferable for the Dutch-Americans to be joined in one Reformed church. Still, he believed the separated stance of the Christian Reformed

¹⁹ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Abraham Kuyper, February 1, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 135. This is not to say, however, that Vos agreed with Kuyper on every subject. In writing to Warfield in early 1891, Vos expressed his reservations that Kuyper's "presumptive regeneration" view was the proper Calvinistic position. See, Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, February 12, 1891, in Dennison, *Letters*, 147.

²⁰ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, February 1, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 132.

²¹ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, March 4, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 136.

²² *Ibid.*, 137.

²³ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, June 13, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Church was the only thing that could protect Dutch-Calvinists from washing away with the liberal current in America. The Dutch periodical *De Roeper* was mistaken in the notion that Freemasonry was the only point of difference between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. The issue was much deeper. Freemasonry was only the by-product of a larger theological decline. Vos then changed course and added the surprising statement, “The Reformed brethren in the Presbyterian Church have good courage and face the future with confidence.”²⁵

At the beginning of August, Vos wrote Warfield that Bavinck was agreeable to writing for the *Review*.²⁶ After he received Kuyper’s article for the *Review*, Vos wrote Warfield again to let him know the subject matter and length of the article. Warfield believed Kuyper’s article was too long to publish in its entirety. Vos then wrote Kuyper with the news that Warfield thought that the article was too long.²⁷ Kuyper wrote back to Vos that it was impossible to condense the paper without doing great harm to the argumentation as a whole.

Vos then wrote Warfield and explained the bind that he was in regarding the translation of Kuyper’s article into English. The greatest reach for the article would be in the *Review*, but it could only appear there in amended form. Vos then offered to Warfield a way out of the difficulty and asked if the article could appear in two successive issues. Kuyper agreed with the suggestion.

The next week Vos updated Kuyper about the condition of his article. Warfield had responded that he was greatly pleased with the contents of the article and was doing all he could to have it appear in the July issue. Vos wrote, “Now I trust that Professor Warfield will do his best to get you an audience with the American Reformed people, and I hope that the Lord exerts an influence with your good words.”²⁸

Vos then turned the discussion to theology and noted that he had read in *De Herault* where Kuyper’s views on infant baptism and supralapsarianism were receiving opposition in Dutch Reformed circles in America. Vos then indicated that he had the audacity to favor these positions in his own teaching. What Vos did not reveal to Kuyper was that Vos had become caught up in a theological controversy in Grand Rapids on both topics.

Doctrinal Controversy: Supralapsarianism

Lambert J. Hulst, editor of the theological journal *De Wachter* and a member of the Curatorium at the Theological School, objected to what he perceived was Vos’s endorsement of Kuyper’s supralapsarian viewpoint. At issue was the teaching of the doctrine of predestination. In arguing that the divine decree was for humanity prior to creation and the fall into sin, the supralapsarian exegesis that Kuyper advocated maintained that the sin of Adam was predestined and that God’s ultimate goal in election and reprobation was his own glory. The infralapsarian exegesis, which was thought to be the position of the 1618 Canons of Dordt, maintained that the object of predestination was humanity contemplated or considered as created and fallen; God decreed to create, decreed to permit the fall, and decreed to elect.

²⁵ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Abraham Kuyper, July 12, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 142.

²⁶ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, August 5, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 143.

²⁷ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Abraham Kuyper, October 27, 1890, in Dennison, *Letters*, 144.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

Hulst's concern had arisen from Vos's comments regarding Romans 9:23, "and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory" (NKJV). In exegeting that verse, Vos said:

Calvin is certainly right when he thinks that here preparing and making ready do not refer to the actual leading and governing of men in the execution of God's decree, but to the forming and preparing of the destiny of men in God's decree itself. That is clearly reflected in "prepared *beforehand* for glory." In His long-suffering God spares the reprobate, not only for those elect who have already been prepared in reality but also for those who do not yet exist in reality but nevertheless are prepared in God's counsel.²⁹

According to Vos, the infralapsarian explanation would not do justice to the words of Paul in this passage. The question Paul asked in Romans 9:20 was "Why have you made me thus?" (KJV). An infralapsarian understanding would have changed Paul's question to, "Why, when I already was as I was, did you ordain me to this end?" Vos concluded that predestination in this text included God's foreordination of everything by which man becomes what he becomes.³⁰

Vos told Warfield that he was supralapsarian in the matter of predestination because of the exegesis of Romans 9 and Ephesians 1:3, but only in a moderate sense.³¹ Vos also pointed out that the supralapsarian position was not condemned at Dordt. In order to condemn the supralapsarian position, infralapsarians would have to do something that they steadfastly refused to do, state positively what the purpose of God was in permitting sin.

Another reason for Vos's moderation was that he believed the issue was not whether there was a temporal sequence in God's decrees. Vos wrote, "If it was a matter of a temporal order it should have been called ante and postlapsarianism. The question would then have to be, 'Do you believe in predestination before or after the decree of the fall?'"³²

In the end, Vos sided with Calvin. In supralapsarian fashion, Calvin declared that God created man in order to redeem man, but at the same time, Calvin used language that did not openly alienate infralapsarians. Vos wrote,

The truth is that sometimes [Calvin] expressed himself in one way and at other times in another. But while his infralapsarian-sounding expressions can be explained as partial a posteriori representations, it is impossible to give a minimizing sense to his decidedly supralapsarian statements.³³

²⁹ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1: *Theology Proper*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 128.

³⁰ In his February 21, 1891, letter to Kuyper, Vos had asked rhetorically, "Is not Romans 9:19–23 supralapsarian? From the explanation that the parables contain things hidden from the foundation of the world, does it draw a conclusion for supralapsarianism?" Dennison, *Letters*, 150.

³¹ Letter, Vos to Warfield, July 7, 1891, in Dennison, *Letters*, 162. It is interesting to note that Vos in his correspondence interacted primarily with Kuyper and Warfield about supralapsarianism, and not Bavinck. Although Bavinck saw strengths and weaknesses with both views, he said (in playing off of 1 Corinthians 15:46), "The entire creation, including that of man, was infralapsarian; the natural is first, then the spiritual." Herman Bavinck, "The Covenant of Works," trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. in *Creator Redeemer Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, Howard Griffiths and John R. Muether, eds. (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic, 2000), 170.

³² Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 143.

³³ *Ibid.*

In his February 21, 1891, letter to Kuyper, in which Vos first brought up the issue for Kuyper's counsel and help, Vos suggested the polemic against Kuyper's view on supralapsarianism did not get to the heart of the issue. It was simply that Kuyper's opponents thought that supralapsarianism was his weakest point confessionally. Vos wrote, "The stumbling blocks are the covenant view and baptismal view, which reckon with election, and are dominated by the Calvinistic principle. They will likely adhere to election, but only as something separate that may not influence and have a lasting effect on any other field."³⁴ Vos concluded that this mindset was decidedly un-Reformed as the covenant was employed to render the doctrine of election harmless.

He then added,

In our little church there is very little theological development. If the people are persuaded once for all that supralapsarianism is condemned by Dordt and that the disputed covenant and baptismal view is committed to supralapsarianism, then anything can be expected. But God still rules.³⁵

Election, Covenant, and Baptism

In his February 12, 1891, letter to Warfield, Vos had hinted at what he thought was the real issue, the relationship among election, covenant, and baptism. Vos asked Warfield if Kuyper was correct in his belief that his (Kuyper's) theory on infant baptism was the proper Calvinistic view.

Did the older theologians really mean that baptism in each case presupposes regeneration as an accomplished fact? I have never been able to make up my mind on this point, and still feel the necessity of having a more or less decided opinion in my teaching.³⁶

Vos told Warfield there were those theologians who made baptism little more than a symbolic offer of the covenant on God's side, that is, a presentation of the gospel instead of a seal of the gospel promise. Vos then added, "It seems to me that Dr. Kuyper approaches more or less to the Lutheran view of baptism, though of course with the necessary restrictions. I shall be very much obliged, if in a few words, you can let me know your opinion."³⁷

A month later, Vos thanked Warfield for sharing his views on infant baptism and sharing his notes on regeneration and conversion. He then wrote, "It seems to me that the subject is beset with great difficulties on every side. The Rev. Hulst, to whose remarks against Dr. Kuyper you made reference in your letter, and many others among us, work to cut the doctrine of election love from the covenant."³⁸ The problem for Vos was that the position that Hulst represented wished to give baptism a significance independent of the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, February 12, 1891, in Dennison, *Letters*, 147.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Benjamin Warfield, March 12, 1891, in Dennison, *Letters*, 152.

presumption of election. Vos finished, “I have never been able to agree with this view. A statement, it seems to me, is more than a symbolic offer of the gospel, combined with the duty to accept.”³⁹

Vos then reached out to Bavinck for help and advice in regard to the doctrine of the covenant of grace. He explained that the dualistic belief that placed covenant and election next to each other without any inner connection was prevalent among many Reformed believers in America. The covenant becomes a strengthened gospel offer. Election comes last, and functions like a second Amyraldian conclusion.⁴⁰ It also appears as if people are embarrassed to speak about covenant and election in the same sentence, and yet, it is in the covenant that the sovereign grace of God shines so clear. Vos said:

I always thought that the issue was as follows: the connection between covenant and election rests on this, that God in the offer of sanctifying grace generally follows the line of descent. That therefore being in the covenant still means more than living under an extraordinary solemn gospel offer or to carrying within one’s self a covenant offer. That this greater value exists is the presumption that one finds oneself within the circle or on the line of election, a presumption which rests on God’s promise, the God of you and your seed. That therefore adults, not born within the covenant, are admitted only on a reliable confession of saving faith. In the meantime, I do not want anyone to Labadistically⁴¹ set himself up as a judge over someone’s (spiritual) state. I object to falsely leading someone to believe that historical faith only can make him right in the presence of God in the covenant.⁴²

Vos then described to Bavinck his view of the relationship between the covenant and the sacraments. The sacraments seal the offer of the covenant from God’s side and make it a closed covenant. The content of the sealing is “in the presupposition that you are a true covenant child, the right of all the covenant blessings is sealed to you.”⁴³ He made clear, however, that he would distinguish between sealing that is “on the condition that” and “in the supposition that.” He explained, “The first sounds totally general and applicable anywhere. In this way, anywhere on the mission field the sacraments could accompany the external calling. The other, however, requires a well-founded presumption that one is talking about covenant children.”⁴⁴

If, however, baptized children grew up and turned their back on the faith, it did not follow that they have nothing to do with the covenant. They will be treated and punished by the Lord as covenant-breakers insofar as they have been in the covenant.

Vos then immediately added that he had objections to the following situations. First, when the comfort of the covenant is lost because children who have been baptized stray from the faith; second, when emphasis of the covenant is sought solely in the duties and

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Named after Moise Amyraut (1596–1664), a French theologian at the Academy of Saumur, Amyraldianism taught a hypothetical redemption. It placed divine election after the decree to atone. Thus, Christ died universally for all, but salvation extends only to those who have faith.

⁴¹ Vos referred here to Jean de Labadie (1610–1674), a Jesuit convert to the Reformed Faith who led a Pietist movement in the Netherlands.

⁴² Letter, Geerhardus Vos to Herman Bavinck, May 13, 1891, in Dennison, *Letters*, 154.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 154–55.

demands of the children; and, third, when the grace of regeneration is left outside the horizon of the covenant.⁴⁵

Baptism, Vos continued, has to be viewed more penitently and include the positive promise of God that the seed of the faithful will beget a seed. If this were not the case, then there would be no logical ground to believe that the children of believers dying in infancy will be saved. Vos believed this was the consensus of Reformed theology up to the Synod of Dordt.

Vos then turned to a consideration of Kuyper's thesis that baptized children must be presumed to be already regenerated. Rhetorically, Vos asked Bavinck, "That is found by many old writers, is it not? It seems to me that Dr. Kuyper goes too far when he recommends this as the accepted doctrine of the fathers."⁴⁶

Vos then objected to Kuyper's view of specific baptismal grace. Scripture and the sacrament bring the same grace, but, Vos wrote, "I thought that with the Reformed, the working in baptism as a means of grace was always in close connection with its working as a seal for the religious life. Dr. Kuyper separates seal and means of grace very strongly."⁴⁷

Interested in Bavinck's judgment, Vos asked if Bavinck believed that a connection existed between Kuyper's two views: that baptized children must be presumed already to be regenerated, and that there is a specific baptismal grace that brings about mystical union with Christ. Did Bavinck believe that for Kuyper the latter position was the reason for the former?⁴⁸

Vos then shifted to the relationship between the covenant of grace and the church. He wrote:

Does not the visible church, however pure or impure, have to be present everywhere the covenant of grace is? Is not this distinction one of the aids through which they seek to reconcile the catholic covenant of grace with a sectarian view of the church?⁴⁹

Vos finished with a confession that he had doubts about the manner in which the Reformed movement was returning to the absolute inerrancy of Scripture. But, he said, every time he had those doubts he returned to the conviction that there is no other point of view possible, not even in general, for a Reformed person.

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

ServantChurch

Six Anti-Church Evangelical Trends

by Shane Lems

Church attendance in the United States has always waxed and waned. It is not accurate to say that church attendance in America was excellent around the turn of the nineteenth century and has declined ever since. Instead, there have been various tendencies in attendance: sometimes attendance trended upwards, sometimes it trended downwards.

R. Kent Hughes, pastor, author, and professor, wrote a helpful list of anti-church Evangelical trends back in 2003. These developments, he said, show that many who call themselves Christians have a very low view of the church and of church membership. Hughes's discussion of this topic is very insightful; below I'll summarize, explain, and expand on his insights since they are still relevant today.

1. The Hitchhiker Mentality

A hitchhiker is a person who wants a free ride for a limited amount of time. He doesn't take ownership of the car, maintain it, or help with its repairs; he simply wants a ride and will bail if anything goes wrong or if he's finished riding. This is how many people think of the church and church membership:

You go to the meetings and serve on the boards and committees, you grapple with the issues and do the work of the church and pay the bills—and I'll come along for the ride. But if things do not suit me, I'll criticize and complain and probably bail out. My thumb is always out for a better ride.¹

Many Christians today have the mindset of just coasting in a church for a time and then leaving when they feel like it. They don't get involved in the life of the church; they don't donate their time and energy; they never ask what they can do to help; and they don't invest their lives in the church. They are irresponsible and immature in this aspect of their lives, and have little concept of duty or service.

2. Consumer Christians

These are

ecclesiastical shoppers [that] attend one church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for its youth program, and go to a third church's small group. Their motto is to ask, "What's in it for me?"

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 128.

The consumer mentality “encouraged those who have been influenced by it to think naturally in terms of receiving rather than contributing.”²

These are the kind of people who want to take from the church but never give. Church for these types of people is a commodity that exists to offer them something they want or need.

This view—a consumer view of the church—is a characteristic of the entitlement mindset of our culture. Everyone—especially younger Americans—believes they are entitled to certain rights and benefits, as if they are royalty to be served. The customer is king! This view has crept into the church: “If the church doesn’t serve or suit me, I’m out. If my needs are not met, I’ll go somewhere else.” Church shopping, consumerism, and entitlement all go together to be part of this anti-church Evangelical trend. To be sure, there are churches that make this trend worse by using consumer-centered church growth methods.

3. Spectator Christians

Spectator Christianity feeds on the delusion that virtue can come through viewing, much like the football fan who imagines that he ingests strength and daring while watching his favorite pro team. Spectator sports and spectator Christianity produce the same things—fans who cheer the players on while they themselves are in desperate need of engagement and meaning.³

These are the people who like sitting lazily in the bleachers, but do not want to get in the game. The bleacher seat is good enough for them, thinking (implicitly or explicitly) that the Christian faith can be “caught” by watching from the stands and not committing oneself to stepping on the field. In other words, these are the people who are content with watching others follow Christ, but never really doing it themselves. They watch others to feel good about life or themselves, but not to learn how to die to self and live for Christ.

4. Drive-Through Christians

The fast-food drive-through means you can get (unhealthy) food in no time and with no effort. Since we’re in a hurry, we just want to quickly eat something that tastes good and then get on with our urgent business. The result of this kind of lifestyle is not good: it leaves unhealthy and typically overweight people who are stressed out because they have such busy lives.

Something similar happens when a person views the church like a fast-food restaurant: People with this view

get their “church fix” out of the way by attending a weeknight church service or the early service on Sunday morning so that the family can save the bulk of Sunday for the all-important soccer game or recreational trip. Of course there is an unhappy price extracted over time in the habits and the arteries of a flabby soul—a family that is unfit for the battles of life and has no conception of being Christian soldiers in the great spiritual battle.⁴

² Ibid., 129.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

5. Relationless Christians

Despite the Bible's emphasis on Christians regularly assembling to worship and fellowship, today some people say "the best church is the one that knows you least and demands the least."⁵ This goes hand in hand with the trends already mentioned. People want to hitchhike through church life—making small talk with the driver but never really getting to know him personally. To many people, the soccer game or vacation are more important than the people at church, so why bother to start relationships within the church?

This becomes evident when people balk at the idea of membership. Few people appreciate church membership today because it goes against their selfish desire to be on their own, it means they are accountable to others, and it means they need to share their lives and help others when needed. For most people, it's much more fulfilling to go to a movie Friday night than help the needy church family move into an apartment down town.

6. Churchless Worshipers

This trend is also common, since many people today think that they can worship God alone, on their own, when it is most convenient and beneficial to them. Why wake up early on Sunday and go to a place where there are strange people when I can just sleep in and worship God while I watch the football game alone? Although this line of thought is completely unbiblical, it is quite common today. Hughes put it this way:

The current myth is that a life of worship is possible, even better, apart from the church. As one person blithely expressed it, "For 'church' I go to the mall to my favorite coffee place and spend my morning with the Lord. That is how I worship." This is an updated suburban and yuppie version of how to spend Sunday, changed from its rustic forebearer [namely, Emily Dickinson, who said 100 years ago], "*Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—I keep it staying at Home.*"⁶

Hughes is right-on with these trends; I've seen them myself since I became a pastor some years ago. The ethos of American culture (consumerism, individualism, narcissism, dislike of authority, lust for entertainment and fun, busyness, and so forth) directly contradicts the ethos of the biblical view of the church. They are quite at odds.

It's helpful to think about the above trends for these reasons: 1) so we ourselves don't get caught up in them, 2) so we can understand the mindset of those who are caught up in them, 3) so we can patiently dialogue, discuss, teach, rebuke, and preach to those struggling with these trends, 4) so we can help keep the church from catering to these trends, and 5) so we can better preach the gospel that frees people from all these "isms" (narcissism, consumerism, individualism, etc.). Since this is the cultural air we all breathe, every one of us needs to be constantly reminded of the biblical view of the church, and of the loving, patient Savior who is her head, husband, and redeemer.

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 130.

ServantReading

ESV Reader's Bible, Six-Volume Set

Arthur J. Fox

ESV Reader's Bible, Six-Volume Set, English Standard Version (ESV 2001), Six-Volumes Permanent Text Edition. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016, \$199 cloth, \$499 cowhide.

This is not a review of the Bible but of a magnificent edition of the Bible. Crossway has taken us back centuries to enable us to read the Bible, albeit in English, as it was read long ago. According to scholars, the chapter divisions we are accustomed to were developed by Stephen Langton, an Archbishop of Canterbury who published around AD 1227. The Wycliffe English Bible of 1382 was the first Bible to use this chapter pattern. Since then, nearly all Bible translations have used Langton's chapter divisions. The Hebrew Old Testament was divided into verses by a Jewish rabbi by the name of Nathan in AD 1448. Robert Stephanus was the first to divide the New Testament into standard numbered verses in 1555. He also used Nathan's verse divisions for the Old Testament. When the Geneva Bible adopted Stephanus's divisions, it began a pattern followed to this day.

But there is a problem. Many Christians are unaware that the chapter divisions are not inspired. One unintended result is that inspired thoughts are divided mid-thought in many places. Read Romans chapters 10–11 and you will find that Paul had one fluid thought from 10:1–11:12, and perhaps beyond that. But many believers reading a chapter a day will miss the whole thought and think he is saying two unrelated things in the two chapters. Examples of this could be multiplied many times over in both testaments. The result is a poverty of theological and devotional thinking because readers will read only part of an argument or narrative in one sitting.

Now comes the *ESV Reader's Bible*. Using the English Standard Version text, it is made up of six well constructed and beautifully bound volumes (Pentateuch, Historical Books, Poetry, Prophets, Gospels and Acts, Epistles and Revelation) that simply present the text of Scripture without chapter or verses marked out, and with minimal section headings to indicate the flow of a book of Scripture. The reader is thus reading the Bible as he or she would any other book, and, because there is just the text without division, may well get caught up in the story of redemption and the fullness of redemptive history along with the application of it. Imagine getting lost in the drama of Jeremiah's prophecy or the story of Esther and wanting to read just a bit more in order to know how it ends. One is then reading Scripture, if I may say so, the way it was designed to be read! Yes, you will need to use your normal Bible to follow a Bible study or a sermon, or for detailed study. But such studies will be enhanced if you know the full context of the portion being studied.

It is such a simple concept and yet how profound! The whole set is available in well constructed cloth covered volumes (the less expensive choice) and in a leather bound set

(more expensive), and are least expensive when purchased from someone other than the publisher. The paper is sturdy and much thicker than those of most Bibles, so the pages will not tear so easily. Crossway has done a craftsman-like job with this publication. Many Christian book sellers are already discounting them. Either way it is worth the investment to give more undistracted attention to God's Word.

Now here is its value for a minister or teacher of the Word: When working through a book of Scripture, either for a sermon or Bible study series, it is very important to get the "big picture" or flow of the book. This allows the preacher to see the author's plan and locate the individual stories and ideas in their proper context. That big picture is better seen if you read the book in one sitting and even better if you are not distracted by chapters and verses. The *ESV Reader's Bible* is ideal for this purpose.

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The Epistle to the Romans *by Richard N. Longenecker*

by Jeffrey C. Waddington

The Epistle to the Romans, The New International Greek Testament Commentary Series, by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, 1140 pages, \$80.00.

This is a commentary long in the making and many of us have waited long in eager anticipation. Ever since the New International Greek Testament series was launched in the late 1970s, it has increasingly established itself as a standard commentary set among broadly conservative evangelical scholars and pastors. Not only has the prestige of the series increased over the years, so, too, has the average size of each volume. One thinks of Greg Beale's volume on Revelation or Anthony Thiselton's on 1 Corinthians. The new volume on Romans is no lightweight volume in either page length or substance.

Richard Longenecker, professor emeritus of New Testament at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, comes as no stranger to Pauline studies with *The Epistle to the Romans*. This commentary was preceded by his *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Eerdmans, 2011) in which he laid out the various critical questions that Romans scholars have wrestled with over the last century and more and in which he offers his own take on such issues as the new perspective(s) on Paul, the proper understanding and role of justification in Paul's theology, the ethnic constitution of the Roman church(es), the nature of Romans (a letter or a theological treatise?), and the rationale for the letter. Longenecker tackles these issues and more in the earlier introduction, which he summarizes in *Romans* (1–39).

Longenecker divides Romans into three sections that he describes as the body opening (1:13–15), the body middle (with four subsections: 1:16–4:25, 5:1–8:39, 9:1–11:36, and 12:1–15:13), and the body closing (15:14–16:27). The author argues that in the first section of the body middle (1:16–4:25), Paul offers an account of the gospel that he preached in terms he and the Romans would agree on. In other words, regardless of how the interpretation of this portion of Romans has played out in subsequent church history (i.e., the Reformation), for Paul, and presumably for the saints at Rome, there is *nothing* controversial about justification as Paul lays it out here (186–88). Longenecker sees the *fulcrum* of Paul's letter in the second subsection of the body middle (5:1–8:39). Here Paul contextualizes the gospel for a Gentile audience unfamiliar with the history of God's dealings with Israel and equally unfamiliar with the Scriptures of the Old Testament (547).

It is not possible to deal with all of the author's treatment of the contentious issues in Romans in a brief review. For instance, the author's treatment of Romans 1:3–4 (63–77) in the body opening shows no familiarity with the difference between the traditional reading in which Paul is understood to be discussing the *two natures* of the one person of Jesus Christ (supported by Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield) and the redemptive

historical reading which sees Paul referencing the *two estates* of Christ in terms of humiliation and exaltation (supported by Geerhardus Vos and John Murray).

While there is much of tremendous value in this substantial commentary, on the whole it is disappointing. Longenecker's assumption that the first subsection of the body middle (1:16–4:25) deals with uncontroversial material is based on, among other things, his belief that the Roman saints, while predominantly Gentile, were Jerusalem oriented, and Paul is offering there an account of the gospel that he knew he and they would share. The saints at Rome were exposed to and familiar with the OT Scriptures.

Conversely, the second subsection of the body middle (5:1–8:39) deals with a contextualization of the same gospel for Gentiles who would not recognize Scripture or grant it any authority. This fails to adequately deal with chapter 5 as a hinge connecting Paul's discussion of justification and sanctification. Longenecker treats the first two subsections of the body middle as *two versions of the same thing*, or seemingly so. But this fails to guard the distinction between justification and sanctification. While Calvin is surely correct that justification and sanctification are a twofold blessing which we receive when we are united to Christ by faith, this does *not* obliterate the distinction. Calvin's Chalcedonian dictum ("distinct, yet inseparable") is relevant here. Justification is not sanctification, nor is sanctification justification. Longenecker erroneously appears to equate union with Christ with sanctification (a view shared with such critical scholars as Albert Schweitzer). This failure to guard the deposit of the faith and the gains of the Reformation is regrettable.

Related to the above is Longenecker's description of Paul's contextualization of the gospel as accounting for the great difference in OT citation between the first and second subsections of the body middle. The author states that Paul could not have demonstrated the truthfulness of his exposition from the OT (547), nor was it necessary that he do so since his Gentile audience would not have appreciated the authority of the Scriptures had they been cited to the extent done in the first subsection. Besides, Paul based his gospel on his encounter with the exalted Christ on the road to Damascus and on his ongoing spiritual relationship with the living Christ. This pitting of Scripture against experience is unfortunate. The truth be told, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ was revelation itself. It wasn't just the apostle's private spiritual experience. It was such a pivotal revelation that account of it is given three times in Acts. It was a further unfolding of God's redemptive plan. That Paul could not justify or provide warrant for his gospel in its contextualized form from the OT is problematic to say the least. We cannot consider all the facets of this problem. But one appears to be the relativizing of biblical authority.

This volume, with all its shortcomings, will be a must-read for those who want to keep abreast of Romans scholarship. I should note that it is available in the Logos electronic library which makes it easily searchable. Richard Longenecker is an accomplished NT scholar. While this is not a Reformed commentary in any meaningful sense, it has the merit of being nearly encyclopedic. As ministers we should read widely, wisely, and well. All three adverbs should apply to our studies and to our digestion of this commentary in particular.

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An Unlikely Witness

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The Faith of Christopher Hitchens: The Restless Soul of the World's Most Notorious Atheist, by Larry Alex Taunton. Nashville: Nelson, 2016, xvi + 201 pages, \$24.99.

It is unthinkable that one of the most outspoken public intellectual atheists should praise a conservative Evangelical Christian, but that is just what Christopher Hitchens did. The subject of that praise has given us a remarkable account of his unusual friendship with the late Christopher Hitchens. Larry Taunton begins his book with a quote from Blaise Pascal which nicely sums up Taunton's interaction with Hitchens, "Men despise religion; they hate it, and fear it is true."

Taunton skillfully applies the Proverbs we often think of as mutually exclusive: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 26:4–5). There are times when these two different ways of interacting with unbelief apply singly to a particular person, but Taunton uses both in his conversations with Hitchens.

The antagonism that the new atheists, like Hitchens, often evoke is predictable, but actually it ought to humble us Christians to befriend those who share their desperate negation. Taunton can help show us the way.

Taunton describes the surprise ending of Hitchens's life.

Between 1964—the year that he, as a fifteen-year-old-boy, declared himself an atheist—and September 11, 2001—a date that changed America and, if his biography is to be believed, Christopher Hitchens—his mind was *fixed*. One need only name the social or political issue of this period and he was there to take up the liberal cause with other standard bearers of the Left. Could there be any real suspense regarding what his position would be on, say, Vietnam or the presidency of Ronald Reagan? Not in the least. Hence, a Christopher Hitchens biography would be largely predictable.

Except for the ending. (5)

Chapter 1, "The Making of an Atheist" is an illuminating portrait fulfilling part of the author's intended purpose, "My objective is not to recount his life, but to give some account for his soul" (7). Reminding the reader of Paul's assessment of fallen humanity, "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). "Hitchens was seeking liberation in all of its manifestations—chiefly sexual and political—and atheism became a means of achieving it" (15).

Chapter 2 describes the intellectual weapons Hitchens marshaled as a would-be champion of his cause. "Voracious reading was undertaken for the sake of gaining new weapons to defend opinions he already held, rather than challenge and mature them" (19–20). He read wisely but not deeply because his chief aim was to excel in debate, a talent he honed in the Oxford Union Society while attending Balliol College (21–23).

The danger here—and Christopher fell wholeheartedly into its snares—was developing a love of words insofar as they were weapons for attack and defense of *his* position, rather than loving words insofar as they lead to truth. (23)

All of his thinking and debating presupposed the antithesis of Christianity: there is no God (25).

Taunton soon learned the difference between the public and the private Hitchens. In Chapter 3, “Two Books,” he describes the “public Christopher” as “the confident, bombastic, circuit-riding atheist-pugilist” (29). But underneath the surface was an appreciation for the aesthetic aspects of Christianity. He loved the King James Version of the Bible (32–33).

It was no small thorn in Hitchens’s side that his younger brother Peter became a Christian (48). A journalist and author, Peter “openly denounced his atheism” and wrote a book about it, *The Rage against God* (52).¹ The subtitle in US editions is: *How Atheism Led Me to Faith*. While they strongly disagreed, they maintained a cordial relationship.

September 11, 2001, proved to be a milestone in Christopher’s life. The title of his reflection on the event in *Slate* ten years later tells it all, “Simply Evil” (68). This turned his sympathies to “the forces of law and order” (68). He was appalled at the response of “the intellectual class” of which he considered himself so vital a part:

[They] seemed determined at least to minimize the gravity of what had occurred, or to translate it into innocuous terms (poverty is the cause of political violence) that would leave their worldview undisturbed. (68)

His worldview would do a 180, at least politically. In 2007 Hitchens became an American citizen (74). “Christopher wanted a real fight with a real enemy: 9/11 gave him both, and made him an American patriot” (75).

Hitchens’s political shift put him in contact with Christians. His

friendships with “Christian conservatives” formed after his publication of *god Is Not Great*² would in fact bring about a deeper change, a change made possible by the shock of 9/11, one that moved him beyond any comfortable stopping point. (80)

This led to Hitchens’s challenge to debate Christians “anytime and anywhere” (82).

Chapter 8 enters Hitchens’s encounter with true Christianity, which held out many surprises for him. “What started as a vain attempt to bring God’s kingdom crashing down became a means for his surreptitious investigation of hidden spiritual questions” (84). The third major shock of his life, after 9/11 and Peter’s conversion, was his discovery of intelligent and compassionate Christians. They just did not fit the atheist stereotype (86–87). Hitchens would later declare,

I much prefer this sincerity [Evangelical] to the vague and Python-esque witterings of the interfaith and ecumenical groups who barely respect their own traditions and who look upon *faith* as just another word for *community organizing*. (88).

¹ Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God: How Atheism Led Me to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

² Christopher Hitchens, *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2007).

After debating Al Sharpton, Hitchens concluded, “*Total huckster*. I’m convinced he is an atheist” (88). So he hated not Evangelicals but intellectual frauds.

Now enter Taunton, who first met Hitchens at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2008. Although Taunton doesn’t say this bluntly, there was a strong element of intellectual fraud in Hitchens. His performance in debate was more important than the substance of arguments. But there was more.

Christopher was not the atheist ideologue I had supposed him to be from reading *god Is Not Great* and listening to his lectures and debates. An ideologue will adhere to his given dogma, no matter what. . . . I had just discovered, however, that this man, one of atheism’s high priests was, in fact, a heretic. (104)

Taunton waited for about a year before he had developed a friendship with Hitchens that enabled him to challenge some of his atheistic assumptions. Importantly it was some of Taunton’s practices, like adopting a Ukrainian girl, Sasha, with “fetal alcohol syndrome, HIV, rickets, and significant emotional and neurological disorders” that moved Hitchens to discuss the reasons for Taunton’s faith (107–8). Hitchens often issued a challenge to Christians: name a Christian ethical statement or practice that could not be affirmed or performed by a non-believer (107). Hitchens had no answer for Sasha. “Hitchens found this kind of Christianity, the sort that took the Bible’s mandate to care for others, deeply seductive” (108).

The genuineness and intelligence of Taunton’s faith eventually lead to Hitchens accepting a challenge to take a trip and study the gospel of John (120). “Atheist Christopher Hitchens, spectacles perched on his nose, was reading the Bible aloud on the front seat of my car” (122). Taunton recognizes that in his long discussions with Hitchens he is battling an agenda—the agenda of unbelief. Milton memorably sums up this Van Tilian point, “Who overcomes by force, hath overcome but half his foe” (125). Two strengths in Taunton’s approach to witness are his desire to let the Bible speak and his constant prayer for Hitchens. His conversations summarized in the chapter titled “The Shenandoah” are instructive and moving.

Taunton’s last debate with Hitchens demonstrates what a difference was made by Taunton’s patient witness in Hitchens’s life. When the moderator asked Hitchens what he thought of Taunton, an Evangelical Christian, Taunton braced himself for the public answer, which was often quite different from the private sentiment. Hitchens said, “If everyone in the United States had the same qualities of loyalty and care and concern for others that Larry Taunton had, we’d be living in a much better society than we do” (150). Of course, over the years Hitchens had become a pariah among the new atheists. But he never backed down on his appreciation for the genuine article he had discovered in Taunton.

I will not tell my readers the conclusion. That would spoil the suspense. Read it for yourself. It is well worth the time.

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ServantPoetry

Anonymous (1400)

I Syng of a Maiden

Middle English original

I syng of a mayden
That is makeles,
king of alle kinges
to here sone che chees.

He cam also stille
Ther his moder was
As dew in Aprylle,
That fallyt on the gras.

He cam also stille
To his modres bowr
As dew in Aprylle,
That falleth on the flowr.

He cam also stille
Ther his moder lay
As dew in Aprylle,
That falleth on the spray.

Moder & mayden
Was nevere noon but she:
Well may swich a lady
Godes moder be.

Modern English version

I sing of a maiden
That is matchless,
King of all kings
For her son she chose.

He came as still
Where his mother was
As dew in April
That falls on the grass.

He came as still
To his mother's bower
As dew in April
That falls on the flower.

He came as still
Where his mother lay
As dew in April
That falls on the spray.

Mother and maiden
There was never, ever one but she;
Well may such a lady
God's mother be.