

Systematic Theology

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From the Editor

Systematic theology forms the basis for our confessional standards. It provides a road map to the essential terrain of Scripture. Thus, it is essential for the faithful minister of the Word to be reading systematic and creedal theology regularly. Andy Wilson enumerates the benefits of this steady diet in his article, “The Truth Is on Your Side: Systematic Theology and Pastoral Ministry.”

In keeping with our lead article on the importance of systematic theology in pastoral ministry John Muether reviews a significant new systematic theology by a former minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Robert Letham. As Muether says, “This is an Orthodox Presbyterian systematic theology—though not in a sectarian sense.” It is unique because, while covering the usual territory of a systematic theology, it is organized under eight loci, instead of six. The order of arrangement is also distinct, beginning with the doctrine of God instead of the doctrine of Scripture. Scripture comes next as a distinct locus, instead of the usual arrangement of it under introductory prolegomena. This is only the beginning Letham’s useful new approach to wonderful old truth.

I am very pleased to announce “Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* Published in Polish.” Here is a modern classic relevant to the situation in the newly liberated Poland. Greater than the liberation from communism thirty years ago is the need of liberation from Roman Catholicism, which dominates the culture. Kudos to the Tolle Lege Institute in Warsaw, Poland for seeking to shake up the intellectual and spiritual lives of the Polish people.

Alan Strange continues with his “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 3–4.”

David VanDrunen reviews a new book by Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. This book challenges some assumptions about the differences between male and female, while upholding the biblical principle that only males may hold church office.

Darryl Hart explores the impact of twentieth century evangelical scholar Carl Henry in his review of *Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry*.

Finally, the metaphysical Christian poet Henry Vaughan, helps us meditate on the reality that transcends the troubles of this present evil age in his poem “Peace.”

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 Truth

The Truth Is on Your Side: Systematic Theology and Pastoral Ministry

by Andy Wilson

Near the end of the second part of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the pilgrims continue on the path towards the Celestial City, they come across a man with a bloodied face who is holding a drawn sword. When they ask the man his name, he replies, "I am one whose name is Valiant-for-truth." He then explains that he has just stood his ground against three wicked men who offered him three choices: become one of them; turn back; or lose his life. He chose "none of the above," and had to fight for his life. When one of the pilgrims notes that the odds were stacked against him in that encounter, Valiant-for-truth replies, "'Tis true; but little and more are nothing to him that has the Truth on his side."¹ What a stirring picture of how the truth that God has revealed in his Word emboldens the believer! When our feet remain firmly planted on God's truth, we are always on solid ground, even when faced with opposition, affliction, trial, temptation, change, or uncertainty.

The Open Statement of the Truth

The apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth that faithful ministry is marked by a refusal to practice cunning or tamper with God's Word and by a commitment to the open statement of the truth (2 Cor. 4:2). Christ works through the open statement of the truth to gather, feed, comfort, and protect his sheep. This makes systematic theology an essential tool for all who would be faithful in their calling as stewards of the mysteries of God and shepherds of Christ's flock. If a pastor fails to give careful consideration to the organization of the various doctrines contained in God's Word, how can he know that he is being faithful in his exposition and application of the biblical message? Ministry that neglects systematic theology is ministry that is in grave danger of being untethered from the truth.

Of course, systematic theology is not the only item in the pastor's theological toolbox. As Geerhardus Vos noted in his classic *Biblical Theology*, there are four main departments in the study of Christian theology: exegetical theology (of which biblical theology is one branch), historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology.² Some Christians may think that the inductive nature of exegetical theology makes it purer and less subject to human influence than systematic theology. It is certainly true that exegesis holds precedence in the study of Christian doctrine and in pastoral ministry. However, this does not mean that systematic theology is inherently less biblical than the exegetical branches of theology. The apostle Paul clearly had an organizational framework in mind when he spoke

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 348–349.

² Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 4.

of the importance of following “the pattern of the sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). How can that pattern be discerned without engaging in systematization? Moreover, a reluctance to systemize produces an atomistic hermeneutic that puts individual passages at variance with each other.

It is a good and necessary inference to say that the church is called to exercise its ministerial authority by formulating biblical doctrine in a system whose content is derived and regulated by Scripture as a whole. This is why, as Richard Muller points out, the Reformed have always thought that

exegesis functioned not as a disciplinary end in itself but as the ground and foundation for a path—a *methodus*—leading to theological formulation on all matters of doctrine and practice. That formulation, moreover, could take the form of preaching, of catechesis, or of didactic, scholastic, or polemical theology.³

When the church fails to handle Scripture in this way, the Bible is typically made subordinate to a churchly magisterium (the error of Roman Catholicism), the Christian consciousness (the error of liberalism and mysticism), or an individualistic biblicism that reduces Scripture to its explicit teachings and ignores the historical development of doctrine (the error of rationalism and fundamentalism). In short, the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* cannot really be upheld without systematic theology. As Louis Berkhof explains,

The Church does not find her dogmas in finished form on the pages of Holy Writ but obtains them by reflecting on the truths revealed in the Word of God. The Christian consciousness not only appropriates the truth but also feels an irrepressible urge to reproduce it and see it in its grand unity.⁴

Even though the pastor is often focused on expositing and applying particular texts of Scripture, he always needs to be immersing himself in the study of systematics to ensure that his handling of individual texts is consistent with the whole of Scripture and is not in isolation from the history of interpretation in the church.

Swerving from the Truth

It has become popular in our day to separate doctrine from practice and to look to methodology rather than theology to give shape to pastoral ministry. When this happens, the church begins to swerve from the truth. In the words of sociologist Peter Berger,

When churches abandon or de-emphasize theology, they give up the intellectual tools by which the Christian message can be articulated and defended. In the resulting chaos of religious ideas, the principle criterion left to the community as it seeks to find its way is, quite naturally, that of expediency.⁵

³ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 2: Holy Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 502.

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 23.

⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 124.

One does not need to look far to see evidence of this in the contemporary church. Recent decades have been marked by trendy ministry paradigms identified by various designations (seeker-sensitive, emergent, missional, etc.), all of which reflect a populist impulse that typically involves a significant degree of cultural accommodation.

Theology is sometimes downplayed for the sake of ecumenical efforts at gaining greater influence in society. One of the ways this has taken place in recent decades is in the stance taken by some evangelical and Reformed Christians toward Roman Catholicism. The 1990s saw the publication of the documents of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, which pursued unity by setting aside points of doctrinal precision that were regarded as vital by the Reformers. In 2005, prominent evangelical historian Mark Noll teamed with journalist Carolyn Nystrom to co-author *Is the Reformation Over?*, in which they argued that contemporary Protestants and Roman Catholics have attained significant doctrinal rapprochement. And in 2017, Covenant Theological Seminary marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by asserting that the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions can give a better and more credible testimony to Christ by finding common ground and cooperating with each other rather than by merely rehashing the reasons why the Reformation took place.⁶ The problem with these and similar efforts is their failure to reckon with the fact that the fundamental issues that led to the sixteenth-century division between Protestants and Rome remain unresolved. That is, Rome continues to reject the biblical doctrines that are summarized by the Latin slogans *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*. On top of that, the Second Vatican Council resulted in Rome's embrace of various aspects of liberal theology. In light of these things, while Reformed and evangelical Christians certainly can forge fruitful alliances with Roman Catholics on a number of political and social issues, we cannot say that we have a common cause in the gospel when we have major differences on doctrines that are at the heart of the gospel.

It is sometimes thought that placing too much emphasis on theology in the Christian life reduces Christianity to the intellect when the seat of our personhood is in the heart. The heart is indeed the core of our being, but the heart should not be defined in a manner that separates it from our rational functions. After all, Scripture speaks of the heart as inclusive not only of the will and the affections, but of the mind as well. As Craig Troxel explains,

The heart is the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose).⁷

If desire is elevated over the mind, our religious practices and beliefs will be regulated by tradition, experience, or expediency rather than by sound doctrine. While it is wrong to reduce human nature to bare intellect, it is just as wrong to think that the will and the affections can be transformed apart from the renewing of the mind (see Rom. 12:2). Of

⁶ Melissa Morgan Kelley, "Protestant-Catholic Relations on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation," *By Faith: The Online Magazine of the PCA* (September 21, 2017): <http://byfaithonline.com/protestant-catholic-relations-on-the-500th-anniversary-of-the-reformation/>, accessed February 13, 2020.

⁷ A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 21.

course, we should not seek to acquire knowledge of God's truth merely to fill our heads with information. Rather, we should ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth and cause that truth to sink down into our innermost being so that it can shape our affections and our wills. In the words of John Calvin, "We have given the first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us."⁸ This means there is an interdependence between sound theology and faithful ministry. As John Murray once put it,

He would be a poor theologian indeed who would be unaware of, or indifferent to, the practical application of God's revealed counsel. But likewise, and perhaps more tragically, he would be a poor exponent of practical theology who did not know the theology of which practice is the application.⁹

To use an analogy, while it would be wasteful to go through medical school without ever intending to practice medicine, it would be irresponsible and fraudulent to practice medicine without the proper training and credentials. In the same way, while failing to apply theology to life misses the point of the study of theology, conducting ministry with little interest in theology is religious quackery.

Maintaining a theological focus in ministry is critical as we live in a culture in which people increasingly locate truth in their inward emotions and experiences and operate under the assumption that the supreme purpose of life is to be happy and feel good about themselves. This is not an atmosphere that is friendly to objective truth. One of the areas where this is especially evident is in our culture's handling of homosexuality and transgenderism. The fact that some people experience homosexual desire or gender dysphoria is taken to mean that these things define who they are and therefore need to be expressed, affirmed, and celebrated. When the church goes along with this line of reasoning, personal experience is elevated above Scripture. We need systematic theology because it combats the therapeutic mindset that makes the self sovereign, calling us instead to submit to the body of truth that God has revealed in his Word.

Contending for the Truth

When the church keeps theology primary, it understands that its ministry needs to be carried out in a manner that is always mindful of the church's spiritual antithesis with the world. While we certainly should strive, as far as it depends on us, to "live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18), we have to remember that "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4), and that we are called to expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). The church often loses sight of this by prioritizing mission over theology. When this is done, the focus is upon having a positive engagement with the unbelieving world, and there is a corresponding reluctance to engage in cultural confrontation. The assumption is that if we are direct and uncompromising in setting forth the Bible's teaching, we are failing

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 3.6.4.

⁹ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 1: The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 108.

to show compassion and empathy towards those who are living in sin and error. But if this were really true, then Jesus and the inspired authors of Scripture would stand condemned as unloving.

Another unwarranted assumption is that the church will be more effective in ministry if it expresses support for culturally popular ideas and causes while downplaying the culturally offensive aspects of Christian teaching that speak to those matters. If this were true, then the way to advance the gospel would be to follow the lead of the culture, a notion that is in conflict with the biblical admonition not to be conformed to the pattern of the world (see Rom. 12:2).

While we should not be inhospitable to those who are outside the church, we do need to be careful how we define what it means to be hospitable. A biblically hospitable church is one that faithfully sets forth God's terms for how sinners are welcomed into his kingdom, as well as how he expects those who belong to his kingdom to live. The church does not exist to adapt itself to the desires of man. On the contrary, the church is the place where redeemed man is brought into conformity with what God has expressed in his Word.

While engaging in theological controversy is an important aspect of pastoral ministry, there is such a thing as an unhealthy craving for controversy. The apostle Paul addresses this problem when he writes,

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words. (1 Tim. 6:3–4)

In saying this, Paul does not mean that we should never engage in controversies over words. After all, he criticizes those who deviate from the sound words of Christ. Paul obviously thought that there are times when it is necessary to enter into controversy in order to contend for the truth. Having “an unhealthy craving for controversy” means seeking out controversy for personal benefit. This is what the false teachers in Ephesus were doing. They were engaging in arguments that were profitless and unedifying. They were using controversy as a way of gathering people around themselves. In short, they weren't interested in the truth.

Theological controversy is sometimes avoided in our day by calling for dialogue in so-called “safe spaces.” While this may sound enlightened, it is often a tactical move that is used to disseminate and give credibility to unorthodox views. Dialogues of this nature reflect a dialectical perspective that assumes that opposing views can be reconciled by showing how each side gives expression to a portion of the truth. James Buchanan shows the futility of this kind of dialogue in his discussion of the failed attempt to reconcile the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines of justification at the Colloquy of Ratisbon (1541):

At Ratisbon, the difference between the Popish and Protestant doctrines of justification seemed to resolve itself into one point, and even on that point both parties held some views in common. It might seem, then, that there was no radical or irreconcilable difference between the two; and yet, when they came to explain their respective views, it was found that they were contending for two opposite methods of justification—the one by an inherent, the other by an imputed, righteousness; the one by the personal

obedience of the believer, the other by the vicarious obedience of Christ; the one by the inchoate and imperfect work of the Spirit *in* men, the other by the finished work of Christ *for* them, when he “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” This fact shows the utter folly of every attempt to reconcile two systems, which are radically opposed, by means of compromise between them; and the great danger of engaging in private conferences with a view to that end. In the open field of controversy, truth, so far from being endangered, is ventilated, cleared, and defined; in the secret conclaves of divines and the cabinets of princes, it is often smothered or silenced. It has far less to fear from discussion than from diplomacy.¹⁰

If the focus of a dialogue is upon managing and reconciling different viewpoints rather than understanding and measuring them against God’s Word, then truth is not the goal. The church needs to maintain that the clear teaching of Scripture is non-negotiable. If we enter into dialogue with views that are patently false, we are failing to contend for the truth. Moreover, as Rod Dreher warns, there have been far too many instances where

the liberals within various church circles have called for dialogue, but after they gained power within the church, declared that dialogue with the orthodox must end, because it would be wrong to have a dialogue with people who believe such immoral things.¹¹

Conclusion

Pastoral ministry that is committed to the truth will provoke opposition. Valiant-for-truths are at times the object of people’s vexation, disdain, and false accusations. They are often marginalized and disparaged for eschewing what is culturally fashionable for the sake of theological faithfulness and consistency. And when they have to confront the abandoning or downplaying of sound theology in their own circles, they may find that some try to silence them by portraying their criticisms as inaccurate, intemperate, unloving, and divisive. While none of this is pleasant, we will only grow discouraged by it if we forget that the truth of God will stand forever. When the truth is on our side, we can be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before Nebuchadnezzar (see Dan. 3:16–18). On the one hand, we know that our God is able to deliver us from any threat breathed out by man. On the other hand, we know that faithfulness is always worth it, even if the Lord chooses not to deliver us in this life. As Luther put it in his great hymn,

The body they may kill:
God’s truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.

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¹⁰ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 127–128 (italics original).

¹¹ Rod Dreher, “The Dangers of ‘Dialogue,’” *The American Conservative* (September 13, 2017): <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/the-dangers-of-dialogue/>, accessed February 18, 2020.

ServantClassics

Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* Published in Polish

by Gregory E. Reynolds

I first read J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* in August of 1976, just before matriculating at Westminster Theological Seminary. Beginning in 1975, after graduation from Covenant College, I began getting to know Machen by reading Ned Stonehouse's biography, which I had purchased at an unlikely place—the Bible Institute of New England—in 1973 (2nd edition, 1955). At the time Machen looked like an interesting man. The dust cover made it plain that he was a man of theological and personal substance, but I knew nothing more about him. Little did I know what the future held. The biography introduced me to everything of Machen's then in print. I devoured them all, *Christianity and Liberalism* being the last of Machen's writings that I read before entering seminary the following month, September 1976. It was Machen and his work more than anything else that motivated me to go to Westminster and during my first year to join the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

I married into Polish heritage; my wife, Robin, is half Polish from her mother's side. So, when Dr. Dariusz Bryćko approached me about an article proposal for *Ordained Servant* on Machen's view of Christian scholarship in 2012¹ his Polish heritage caught my eye. We have been in touch ever since. Bryćko's love of Machen and his work is evident in his choice of *Christianity and Liberalism* to be the first in Tolle Lege's new primary-source series called "Intelektualne Wstrząsy," which means something like "intellectual shakeup" or "jolt." The goal of the series is to introduce Polish readers to paradigm-shifting works by key thinkers of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. Here is the announcement:

In June, 2020, J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* was published in Polish by Tolle Lege Institute in Warsaw, Poland, run by Dr. Dariusz Bryćko (former OPC member and current ARP minister). Machen wrote his classic defense of Christian orthodoxy in 1923 to counter rising theological liberalism. But given the intensity and durability of the unorthodox zeitgeist, *Christianity and Liberalism* is even more relevant for readers today than it was for its original audience 100 years ago. Machen insists that liberal Christianity is not Christianity at all, but another religion altogether. His brave words give orthodox Christians tools to identify and resist the most dangerous kind of false teaching—that from within the church.

¹ Dariusz Bryćko, "Steering a Course between Fundamentalism and Transformationalism: J. Gresham Machen's View of Christian Scholarship" *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 91–101.

Tolle Lege Institute's mission is to translate classics of the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition to Polish, operate a study center with over 8,000 print and digital books, host conferences on Reformation topics, and reintroduce forgotten Polish Reformers like Johannes a Lasco to Poland's staunchly Roman Catholic society. Upcoming projects include *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and Louis Berkhof's *Summary of Christian Doctrine*. Learn more at TolleLegeInstitute.org.



The cover of the Polish edition of J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*.

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Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter III The Nature and Exercise of Church Power

1. The power which Christ has committed to his church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the whole body. All believers are endued with the Spirit and called of Christ to join in the worship, edification, and witness of the church which grows as the body of Christ fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in due measure of each part. The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been called to such work by vote of the people.

Comment: The Roman Catholic Church sees all church power as vested in the bishop, particularly the Bishop of Rome (the Pope), and identifies the two, being willing to go so far as to say, “The bishop is the church.” Protestantism, among all the things that it entails, involves a reaffirmation of the significance and importance of the laity, so that church power is not seen to devolve only to the ministers, elders, and deacons but has a proper residency among all the church, including the whole of the laity. Luther spoke of this reality as the priesthood of all believers. Our FG addresses it in terms of the general office of the believer. This means that all believers have the Spirit and have a part in all the aspects of church life, growing together with every member, as Paul argues by using the metaphor of a body (1 Cor. 12), with no parts dispensable or insignificant.

It is out of the discharge of the general office of believer that special office arises. In other words, it is out of a faithful Christian life that some men emerge in their walk as having gifts that would suit them for special office (1 Tim. 3:1–11). It is to this special office to which oversight in the church is particularly given and set forth in the next section. Men are brought into special office only by the vote of the congregation, whether through the election of local ruling elders or through the calling of a minister. Ministers and elders are never imposed upon a congregation apart from their approval. More about this at the appropriate place below.

2. Those who join in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction are the ministers of the Word or teaching elders, and other church governors, commonly called ruling elders. They alone must exercise this authority by delegation from Christ, since according to the New Testament these are the only permanent officers of the church with gifts for such rule. Ruling elders and teaching elders join in congregational, presbyterial, and synodical

assemblies, for those who share gifts for rule from Christ must exercise these gifts jointly not only in the fellowship of the saints in one place but also for the edification of all the saints in larger areas so far as they are appointed thereto in an orderly manner, and are acknowledged by the saints as those set over them in the Lord.

Government by presbyters or elders is a New Testament ordinance; their joint exercise of jurisdiction in presbyterial assemblies is set forth in the New Testament; and the organization of subordinate and superior courts is founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, expressing the unity of the church and the derivation of ministerial authority from Christ the Head of the church.

Comment: Ministers of the Word and sacraments exercise both teaching and ruling functions in the church. As teachers, they are preachers who authoritatively proclaim God’s Word, particularly the unsearchable riches of Christ and all the promises of God that are “yes” and “amen” in him. They are also instructors in doctrine and life as part of the church’s catechesis of the youth and discipleship of all members. As rulers, ministers govern in the congregation, and on the session, together with ruling elders, who are “other church governors.” Ruling elders hold the ruling office, then, together with ministers, though they do not hold the teaching office. Ruling elders, together with ministers, exercise this office for rule (they are the ones now who have the gifts for such rule) in guiding and guarding the church.¹ More on the particular of these offices at the appropriate place in the FG.

These teaching and ruling elders are said now to hold the only permanent church offices with gifts for rule. In the Old Testament Levites and elders of the people held such offices as did Apostles and elders in the New Testament era before the close of the canon (as at the Jerusalem Council—Acts 15). The Levitical priesthood has expired due to the fulfillment of all to which that system pointed and the Apostolate also ceased when the canon of Scripture closed. The Apostolate admits no successor with respect to the extraordinary aspect of its office; however, with respect to the ordinary aspect of its office, it finds its successor, or perhaps, better, its analog, in the New Testament Minister of Word and Sacrament. Even as elders joined Apostles in the joint rule of the church at the Jerusalem Council, so, now, ministers join elders in the joint rule of the church.

This joint rule of minister and elders occurs not only at the level of the local church in the session but also at the broader levels of the presbytery (governing the regional church) and the General Assembly (governing the whole church). This is because the church is also connectional (universal or catholic). Ministers and elders thus govern not only in their own local congregations but also at the level of the regional and national church. The New Testament makes clear that neither everyone in the church governs (congregationalism) nor is there a hierarchical clerical government (episcopacy). Rather, ministers and elders, the latter serving as rulers from the among the people, join together in the local and broader church for a rule of the people that properly reflects the Presbyterian principles contained in God’s Word.

¹ Mark R. Brown, editor, *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Duncansville, PA: Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, 1993) is one of the more important volumes of recent years to treat the offices of the church and their mutual relationships. See especially Thomas Smyth, “An Ecclesiastical Catechism: Officers of the Church,” first published in 1843 and reprinted here, 119–133.

3. All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God. "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship" (Confession of Faith, Chapter XX, Section 2).

Comment: Church power is exclusively ministerial and declarative, which means that it is to be carried out in a servant (ministering) mode and involves proclamation (declaration) of the Word.² This stands over against the Roman Catholic Church, for which church power is magisterial and legislative, meaning that the church can proclaim dogma on its own authority, based on the Word and tradition, and that it can legislate—make canon law—and not simply declare what the Word says. Protestantism does not believe that the church is self-authenticating, only the Word is; Rome believes that the power of the church to declare doctrine is not limited to what the Word proclaims but is based on the teaching authority that the church possesses to proclaim dogma and canon law.

No church judicatory can properly do anything other than proclaim “thus says the Lord:” it must cite in all its decisions a proper application of the Word of God. This means that the church may not in matters of faith or worship speak “beside” or in addition to God’s Word. No doctrines may be promulgated that are not biblical and no elements may be added to worship that do not come from God’s Word. For example, the church cannot shape worship as it pleases nor can it tell people what to eat, drink, and the like. It can say “don’t be a glutton or a drunkard” but it can prescribe no specific diet. This is not the proper province of the church; when the church exceeds its proper biblical authority, it denies true Christian liberty, either in adducing unbiblical rules for its members to follow or in introducing novel elements in worship or doctrine. Church judicatories, in other words, must neither add to nor take from the Word of God. To do so is both treason with respect to Christ’s rule and tyranny with respect to the flock that office-bearers are called to shepherd, not to domineer over (1 Pet. 5:2–3).

4. All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officers or judicatories possess any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security.

Comment: This is one of the most important lessons for us to learn in terms of the doctrine of the church and the polity of the church.³ Church power is not like the power

² James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (1869; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), Part II (“The Power of the Church”). This tome merits consultation across the range of topics it treats but is particularly helpful on the nature, limit, and other aspects of church power.

³ The historical roots of this doctrine of the spirituality of the church are contained especially in the Scottish *Second Book of Discipline* (1578; widely available online). *The First Book of Discipline* (1560), modeled after Calvin’s Geneva Discipline, did not reflect this anti-Erastian sensibility so strongly. It was only after the short-lived overthrow of Presbyterianism in Scotland in 1572 that the commitment to the spiritual independency of the church emerged as it did in the *Second Book*, all of which provided historical precedent for the sensibilities of the Westminster *Form of Presbyterial Government* and this FG.

given to other institutions ordained of God. The family has a power proper to it, for example, which includes the exercise of discretion. Parents, for instance, may forbid their children from wearing certain clothes or eating certain foods. The church does not command with respect to what one eats or wears (as long as one is not gluttonous or immodest) but permits a wide range of Christian liberty, particularly with respect to adiaphora (matters indifferent).

Similarly, the church exercises no coercive authority as does the state, which enjoys the power of arrest and imposition of civil and criminal penalties for those adjudged guilty at law. The symbol of authority for parents is the rod and for the state is the sword, indicating that parents may employ corporal punishment and the state may inflict penalties up to and including death. The power of the church is the power of the keys—to admit to or bar from Holy Communion.

This power is said to be wholly moral or spiritual. It is not a lesser authority; in fact, it is the greatest authority. To remain barred from the Table of the Lord is more injurious for the soul (and body) than the death penalty is. The church receives its power from Christ through the vicarage of his Spirit. Church power is spiritual because it is distinctly an administration that occurs in and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church administers the means of grace, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer, and its work is a spiritual work, ministering first of all to the inner man (to the outer as needed, of course, but the focus being to the inner, spiritual man).⁴

Chapter IV The Unity of the Church

1. Since the church of Christ is one body, united under and in one God and Father, one Lord, and one Spirit, it must give diligence to keep this unity in the bond of peace. To this end the church must receive those endued with gifts of Christ as Christ himself, must submit to those whose call to govern in the church has been properly acknowledged, and in particular must learn of those with gifts of teaching the Word of God. Further, since every Christian is endued with some gift for the edification of the body, he must minister this gift to the church as a faithful steward. Church government must maintain this fellowship in Christ and in the gifts of the Spirit and seek its restoration when it has been disrupted through schism.

Comment: Sometimes we witness the division of the church (one may think of it in terms of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant, for instance) and despair over its unity. We often hear ecumenical exhortations to unity, from both the left and the right, that suggest that the church is not unified. While true calls to unity are quite appropriate, especially given our divisions, they must always be recognized as calls not to become something that we are not, but rather calls to be who we are.⁵ We are, as FG 4.1 asserts (in keeping with John 17), one body, united together and brought into the fellowship and communion of the blessed, holy, undivided Trinity. We have unity as

⁴ Alan D. Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Theology of Charles Hodge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 132–174 seeks to develop the links between the Holy Spirit, the church as a spiritual entity, and the doctrine of the spirituality of the church.

⁵ Alan D. Strange, “Barriers to Ecumenicity,” in *Ordained Servant* 27 (2018): 31–37.

God's great gift: we who were not a people have been made one and we have far more in common in Christ than we do differing with one another.

The basis for unity then is not that all in the church speak the same language, share the same culture, or even like the same music, but that we all partake, by the Holy Spirit, of the same spiritual life, hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). Wherever on earth we have national citizenship, we all have heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20), being seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). And notice this feature, then, of our unity. That unity that we have in Christ binds and commits us to strive for it always and everywhere, manifesting itself in our willingness as the church to receive those whom Christ has gifted as we receive Christ himself.

If the church refuses those gifted for office by Christ through the Spirit and instead ordains and installs those not gifted, then it invites disunity. So, those gifted and called of Christ to serve in church office need their calling discerned both by the congregation as a whole and by those who have also been received as officers in Christ's church. The church must especially receive the preachers/teachers that the Lord sends her, as such labors together with the ruling elders and deacons, in the mutual governance and service of the church.

Not only are officers gifted, but every Christian enjoys the gifts needed for the specific calling that God gives to him or her. Proper church government helps ensure the harmonious operations of all the gifts in a congregation (or broader church body), enabling all to serve as they have been called, and maintains these gifts so that fellowship in Christ and in the gifts given by the Spirit is achieved, making for the harmonious working of the body. Failure in this respect promotes schism or division, when some exalt their gifts and offices over others either failing to recognize such gifts and offices of others or ill-regarding the gifts as of no consequence (regarding their own gifts instead as paramount). This all makes for division, as does heresy, and good church government seeks to avoid such and foster unity.

2. It is the right and duty of those who rule in the church of God to maintain order and exercise discipline, for the preservation both of truth and duty. These officers and the whole church must censure or cast out the erroneous or scandalous, always observing the requirements of the Word of God, and seeking the honor of Christ's name, the good of his church, and the reclamation of the offender.

Comment: The ancient and medieval church spoke of the attributes of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic). These proved necessary but not sufficient, and the church in the Reformation found it necessary to affirm as well certain marks of the church, whereby the true church (over against the Roman and Eastern churches) might be identified.⁶ Among these marks (alongside the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments) was the faithful exercise of church discipline. This

⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church in the Contours of Christian Theology*, Gerald Bray, series editor (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), 99–115 is helpful not only on the relationship between the attributes and the marks of the church but also on the visible/invisible, local/universal, and institute/organism perspectives on the church.

section speaks of maintaining order, addressed here in the FG, and exercising discipline, addressed in the BD, as it will much more fully be explicated in the BD commentary.⁷

In the middle ages, church discipline tended either to be ignored or abused; abuse employed discipline politically, enforced against those who offended hierarchs, the pope especially. With the Reformation came a recovery not only of preaching and a right doctrine of the sacraments but also a restoration of the biblical doctrine of church discipline, without which the church remains deficient. This is because Christianity cannot be reduced simply to doctrine, on the one hand, or life, on the other. It is both—a life that emerges out of a proper understanding of our native spiritual inability, Christ being the sole remedy for our great need, calling us by his Word and Spirit to live as new men and women in vital spiritual union with him. When those who are baptized and profess faith in Christ go astray, whether seriously in doctrine (to the detriment of a credible profession), or markedly in life, it is a mark of the true church to call them to repentance and back to the fellowship of the church.

3. The manifestation of the unity of the church requires that it be separate from the world. Apostasy in faith and life is destructive of the fellowship in Christ; only by rejecting such error can Christian fellowship be maintained. There are many antichrists, many false apostles and teachers. From these the church must turn away, and those who steadfastly hear the voice of false shepherds and follow them cannot be regarded as the sheep of Christ. There are organizations which falsely call themselves churches of God, and others which once were churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. Communion with such is spiritual adultery and an offense against Christ and his saints.

Comment: The church is both one and called to be one, even as saints are holy and called to be holy. All of the attributes of the church (unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity) are inter-dependent; thus, the church can never express its proper oneness or unity without being, among other things, holy. And holiness presupposes a proper separation from the world. The church is a kingdom not of this world, and it must maintain its integrity as such in the face of the world and all its temptations. It has been said that when the church seeks to be most like the world she does the world the least good. The church must witness to the world a life shaped by God’s Word, a life that is holy and separate from worldliness, from the idols of our culture and times.

False doctrine and sinful living (apostasy in faith and life) destroys our unity with God and with each other as members of his mystical body. Unity cannot be purchased at the expense of purity and holiness, which, in fact, are necessary for unity; we have true unity only as we stand together on and in the truth. What unites the church is not that we all like the same music, or food, or sports teams: it is that we all worship the same God as set forth in his Word. All our differences give way to the unity that we have in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Thus, the enemy strikes at truth, seeking to foster disunity by promoting errors among us, through the agencies of false gospels and messiahs, promoted by false teachers and religious hucksters.

The church requires capable teachers and orthodox teaching so that she may know and remain firm in the truth. Only then can she resist error and turn away from false

⁷ Until the BD commentary: Alan D. Strange, “Conflict Resolution in the Church,” Parts 1–2, *Ordained Servant* (Nov.–Dec. 2019) at https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=778&issue_id=150 and https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=786&issue_id=151.

teachers and false churches. Here the FG reflects the Confession of Faith at 25.4–5 in teaching that churches may be more-or-less pure, in doctrine and life, and that some have so departed from biblical truth and godly living that they are synagogues of Satan, no longer worthy of the name church. Not only then is the church to separate from the world, but true saints ought to separate from false churches. To have communion with antichrist (another way of speaking of false teachers and churches in the aggregate) is spiritual adultery: the church is Christ's bride and to be in league with falsehood is for the bride to be untrue to her faithful husband and Lord.

4. The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether destroyed, is greatly obscured by the division of the Christian church into different groups or denominations. In such denominations Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship, in accordance with the principles set forth above.

Comment: The fact that we are one often seems lost in the call to be one, coming as it does in our highly divided denominational scene. We should take heart, though, that our denominational divisions, while lamentable, do not destroy, though they obscure, our unity in Christ. This is because, ultimately, our unity is “of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:1–7) and this transcends all our differences, making all true Christians, in whatever church they may be in, to have and enjoy a trans-denominational unity with all other true Christians. To be sure, the closest bonds of fellowship are with other true believers in one's own denomination, sharing confessions, liturgies, church orders, and the like that are not shared with other Christians, who are in different ecclesiastical bodies. As noted above some churches have so gravely departed from the Bible that we cannot have, nor do we seek, fellowship with them.

We do seek, however, fellowship with churches of like faith and practice (other Reformed and Presbyterian churches), as well as recognize on a different level other churches that may not be Reformed or Presbyterian but that maintain a gospel witness of some sort nonetheless. We seek the closest alliance with the sister churches with whom we have the most in common, naturally, and with all churches, in varying degrees, that are truly evangelical, which is to say, that faithfully preach the gospel.

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ServantReading

Systematic Theology *by Robert Letham*

A Review Article

by John R. Muether

Systematic Theology, by Robert Letham. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019, 1072 pages, \$50.00.

Another oversized systematic theology by a Reformed author? Aren't there too many already weighing down our bookshelves? Consider what has appeared in this millennium alone: Herman Bavinck (translated into English, 2003–2008), Joel Beeke (2019), John Frame (2013), Michael Horton (2011), and Douglas Kelly (2008). In joining this crowded field, Robert Letham, Professor at Union School of Theology in Wales (and a minister at Emmanuel OPC in Wilmington, Delaware from 1989 to 2006), anticipates this concern in his introduction. The rapid publication of systematic theologies today, he explains, is still not equal to the pace after the Reformation, when “they were coming off the press almost as quickly as one could say ‘Martin Luther’” (38).

If you are still harboring skepticism about the value of this book, I understand, because I had similar reservations. But it would be misguided to dismiss this book as redundant. Letham approaches the topic in thirty-one chapters that fall under eight major sections: “the Triune God,” “The Word of God,” “The Works of God,” “The Image of God,” “The Covenant of God,” “Christ, the Son of God,” “The Spirit of God and the People of God,” and finally, “The Ultimate Purposes of God.” The very arrangement of the subjects suggests a distinguishing characteristic of this work. Unlike the recent authors he joins, Letham has a different starting point. Because “God precedes his revelation” (36), Letham puts the doctrine of God before the doctrine of Scripture. Moreover, he discusses the Trinity before he examines God’s attributes. Here he follows through on a concern he expressed in an earlier book on the Westminster Confession’s treatment of God in its second chapter: when the Westminster divines delay reference to the Trinity until article three, “the distinctly *Christian* doctrine of God is almost an afterthought.”¹ Leading the chapter with the Trinity would have made the Confession more effective in confronting Islam, he suggested.² It is also fitting for Letham to take that approach in light of contemporary evangelical confusion about trinitarian relationships.

Letham shapes his discussion by categories suggested by Oliver Crisp, who distinguished between the creeds and confessions of the church on the one hand (two sets

¹ Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Perspective* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 146.

² *Ibid.*, 147.

of *norma normata* or “ruled rules”) and “theologoumena” on the other hand, which are theological opinions that are not binding upon the church (34–35). Among the doctrines he categorizes as theologoumena are the *pactum salutis* (433) and common grace (650). In an appendix he commends the Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s 2004 “Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation” as a “comprehensive and even-handed discussion” (912n7) that observes the distinction between confession and opinion.

His fluency with the ecumenical creeds and Reformed Confessions is evident throughout, and he cites the Council of Trent and the Catechism of the Catholic Church as well. He is also familiar with Calvin, Augustine, Barth, Bavinck, and Aquinas (in that order, the names most cited), and scores of others, especially Reformed and post-Reformation voices. Letham’s expertise extends even further to the theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, also the subject of a previous study.³ In chapter 11 he introduces the Eastern doctrine of *theōsis* in his discussion on “Humanity in Creation.” The uniqueness of humanity in the image of God, beyond our commonality with other creatures, entails our compatibility with God. This compatibility prompted the incarnation and eventually leads to our glorification (which Letham sees as synonymous with deification or *theōsis*, 337). In “The Progress of the Christian Life” (chapter 26) he returns to *theōsis* as it relates to union with Christ. The chapter’s conclusion, “nine thesis on *theōsis*,” carefully frames the doctrine within the bounds of Reformed confessionalism (785–88).

Letham ventures into plenty of modern topics. He expresses skepticism about the current interest in Second Temple Judaism, that is, developments in the intertestamental period. He finds the term itself “about as useful as *twentieth century evangelicalism*,” explaining: “Get two or three Americans together from various times within the previous century and there will doubtless be at least four or five opinions” (705). His point is that the not-so-New Perspective on Paul’s assumption of the apostle’s reliance on a “normative Judaism” in this period forms a flimsy basis for its ambitious claims.

In a brief discussion on the prospect of extra-terrestrial intelligent beings in a universe of billions of galaxies, Letham assures readers that this is no challenge to our faith. He reminds us that Christianity has always believed in such a phenomena, calling them angels (289). He respects the restraint of Scripture on the matter, concluding “that eternity will be filled with praise and obedient faithfulness from throughout the animate and intelligent cosmos” (289).

Angels also appear in his discussion of miracles a few pages later. Letham takes the traditional approach on this subject: because redemption is accomplished, “God has spoken his final word. There is nothing more he can say. He has said it all.” Thus, “signs and wonders are *theologically* superfluous” (305). Yet he cautions that the Reformed cessationists must avoid a functional deism by accounting for the ministry of angels. Operating behind the scenes, “some extraordinary accounts of protection from danger or of deliverance in times of need defy normal explanation” (305).

A theme that predominates throughout the book is the connectivity of doctrine. In the context of a discussion on the incarnation Letham observes:

Christian theology is interrelated. New developments in one area inevitably impinge on others. If you enter a room, by opening the door, you set in motion new wind

³ Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2007).

currents. Objects on the other side of the room will be disturbed or displaced by the draft. If windows are open, curtains will billow, and your favorite lamp may come crashing to the floor and smash to smithereens without your laying so much as a finger on it. (532–33)

The point is to challenge the claim that Christ's incarnation assumed a fallen human nature, which in Letham's judgment threatens the gospel itself.

A particular concern for Letham is to integrate soteriology with ecclesiology. "The doctrine of salvation," he regrets,

has long been treated in isolation from the doctrine of the church. . . . In reality they stand together, since outside the church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (WCF 25.2). We are saved not merely as discrete individuals but as the one church of Jesus Christ. Consequently, I have long thought that the two should be treated together. (36–37)

This comes specially to bear in chapter 20:

In the New Testament, salvation in Christ is connected inextricably to the community of the church, in parallel with the solidarity of the race in sin in Adam. . . . The New Testament letters, for the most part, were addressed to churches rather than individuals, to be read to the assembled congregation. Individuals are addressed within these letters but in this churchly context. In Ephesians, Paul writes to the church and then talks to groups within it. In Romans, within the church, Paul focuses on both Jewish and Gentile elements. This corporate dimension is of immense significance. Without it we will not understand baptism or come to grips with the New Testament understanding of salvation. "In Christ" is a dominant theme throughout and it is located and expressed in the church. (620)

Enlightenment individualism, he explains, has severed salvation from the church, which notably finds expression in evangelicalism's relegation of the Lord's Supper as an "optional extra" (752) where the memorialist interpretation predominates (762).

The reader will encounter few surprises in the views Letham advances. He approaches with caution those topics where Scripture is not clear. One example is on the precise frequency of communion. While the church has liberty in this matter, he regrets the Presbyterian reputation for infrequency. "The degree to which the church desires communion is a reliable gauge of how eagerly it wants Christ. The key word is 'often.' The question to ask is, how far do we desire communion with Christ?" (767).

Similarly, Letham is careful in discussing the "sleep" that characterizes the soul of the believer in the intermediate state. While he questions how characterizing that state as unconsciousness can be harmonized with biblical teaching, he presses his case with gentle humor: "As for me, I am in no rush to find out whether this is so; besides, once I do find out, I will be unable to inform you. It is more than sufficient to know that we will be 'with Christ'" (830).

On the *ordo salutis* and union with Christ, Letham offers a clarifying perspective on recent discussions. The two are complementary and do not compete against each other,

and thus order and priority among the benefits of Christ must be maintained. One of his conclusions bears pondering: in describing the *ordo* “it is debatable whether we are to follow slavishly the same pattern as Paul did. He was not the only biblical author” (616).

Letham devotes attention to the primacy of the Word. Lying at the heart of covenant theology, this should yield among Reformed Christians a confidence in the Word (626) with especially high expectations from the preached Word (634). Here again, Letham does not strike new ground, but his argument is particularly forceful. At the same time, he reminds the reader that matter can communicate God’s grace, through the visible signs of his appointment (639), which leads into his discussion of the sacraments.

Every systematic theology has its idiosyncrasies, and Letham’s is no exception. But it is refreshingly devoid of American obsessions. In his illustrations we learn a few things about cricket (297, 869) and the Elizabethan rose (302). Among the many pastoral asides in the text, there is a touching anecdote about the death of his ninety-year-old father, who found assurance in Christ amid weakness of faith (677).

This is an Orthodox Presbyterian systematic theology—though not in a sectarian sense. Letham interacts extensively with many colleagues in his former denomination. On one page I counted engagement with three OPC voices, and his survey of the literature of the Reformed landscape extends to the pages of *New Horizons* and *Ordained Servant*. Letham’s *Systematic Theology* is Reformed, catholic, and confessional, and not beset by the burden to be creative. OPC officers may wish to spare themselves the expense and the shelf space for yet another thick systematic theology. But they would be depriving themselves of an edifying read and a helpful resource.

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Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood *by Aimee Byrd*

by David VanDrunen

Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Its Purpose, by Aimee Byrd. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020, 235 pages, \$18.99, paper.

Aimee Byrd, an OPC member who supports the headship of husbands and the ordination of males-only to gospel ministry, writes this work in critique of the “biblical manhood and womanhood” movement (hence, BMW). While acknowledging that the movement arose to resist genuine threats, she states that it has harmed “the health of God’s church” and is “stifling the force of the biblical message and strangling the church’s witness and growth” (18–19). She proposes an “alternative” focusing on “the reciprocity of the male and female voices in Scripture, the covenantal aspect to Bible reading and interpretation, and bearing the fruit of that in our church life” (25). Byrd identifies many specific problems with BMW. It views manhood and womanhood “through a filter of authority and submission, strength and neediness” (70) and appears “to say that all men lead all women” (22). It utilizes “cultural stereotypes” (18) and “Victorian-age gender tropes” (70), and has not “retracted any of the hyperauthoritarian, hypermachismo teaching about manhood and . . . hypersubmissive and stereotypical teaching about womanhood” (109). It has diverted the church from its chief aim of preparing Christians for everlasting communion with God (26). It also thrives “under popular Biblicist interpretive methods” (27) and teaches that men and women should pursue different virtues (109). Byrd repeatedly highlights BMW’s association with the *eternal subordination of the Son*, “an unorthodox teaching of the Trinity” (100–104, 120–21, 170–72).

Part 1 addresses how we read Scripture. Concerned especially about the proliferation of men’s and women’s study Bibles, Byrd argues that we all read the same Bible, albeit one that includes many “snapshots from a woman’s perspective and experience” (43). She discusses accounts of Huldah, Ruth, and many others, in which “we see women treasuring God’s Word, meditating on it, and acting on it, not within isolated women’s ministries, but connected to the body of faith” (92). These stories break down many common stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Part 2 focuses on the church’s mission. She calls for the church to focus on its “ultimate goal,” everlasting communion with Christ (109). In doing so, it should encourage theological study among women and value women as co-laborers. Byrd also warns against the prominence of parachurch organizations and says that chief responsibility for Christian discipleship lies with the church, the covenant community that provides proper context for reading Scripture. Finally, Part 3 continues several of these themes, reflecting especially on how women can contribute to the church’s life and worship. They are “necessary allies” of men, “not optional, subordinate assistants” (189).

Since Byrd’s book is explicitly a critique of BMW, the inevitable initial question is whether she has described it fairly. I’m not the right person to make a final judgment on

that; people affiliated with or heavily invested in BMW can offer their assessment. But Byrd has documented a lot of evidence for her claims and many of them appear accurate to me, at least regarding some prominent proponents of BMW. In this short review, perhaps it is best if I discuss some substantive moral/ecclesiological issues the book raises, with little further comment on BMW itself.

To begin, I mention several things to appreciate about Byrd's case that confessional Reformed churches would do well to take to heart. First, Byrd's discussions of women in Scripture present, in general, compelling correctives to many non-biblical gender stereotypes that I fear are all-too-present in confessional Reformed churches. She sometimes wanders into speculations beyond what the texts themselves say, but these don't nullify the many legitimate conclusions she draws. Second, Byrd is correct to emphasize that Scripture calls men and women to the same Christ-like virtues and that the New Testament's many "one another" exhortations describe our mutual responsibilities in a non-gendered way. Men and women have some distinct obligations in Scripture, but these are dwarfed by their myriad of joint obligations. Finally, Byrd's emphasis upon the church—as the God-ordained forum for confessing the faith, making disciples, and studying Scripture—is most welcome.

I conclude by raising two issues worth further reflection in our churches. I believe Byrd's book stimulates reflection on these issues without providing final answers.

First is the *metaphysics* issue. In two relevant texts, Paul grounds the authority of husbands and male church officers in the creation order, but its "order" is in terms of *sequence*, not *ontology*. That is, husbands and male church officers have authority because God formed Adam first and then made Eve from him (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13), *not* because he created the world in such a way that males are ontologically better equipped to exercise authority than women are. This presents a caution to those appealing to *biblical* manhood/womanhood to claim that there are clearly distinct masculine and feminine traits and that men have a general obligation to lead women and women to be led. Nevertheless, we still face the question of how to understand male and female differences (beyond the obvious physical differences) through natural revelation, or through metaphysical inquiry, as Byrd puts it. She deserves credit for recognizing that this issue needs to be addressed, although her discussion of it (123–30) is neither entirely clear nor obviously consistent with everything she writes elsewhere in the book. I believe confessional Reformed people should keep reflecting on this, in a charitable and mutually edifying way. They should also remember that our metaphysical reflections on natural revelation are not the sort of thing that the church rightly imposes upon the consciences of its members, though they should enrich the wisdom by which we encourage and disciple each other. I suspect that these reflections, if sound, will lead in a direction similar to where Byrd points: that there are real distinctions between males and females, and yet they're not rigid, certainly not in a way that justifies raising our sons and daughters with nice, clean lists of masculine and feminine character traits which point them toward distinct lists of acceptable vocations.

The second issue concerns office and ecclesiology. When reading some BMW proponents on texts such as 1 Timothy 2:11–14, I have found their discussions lacking a robust view of office and ecclesiology (as perhaps is expected among non-confessional evangelicals). That is, they apply Paul's prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority to relationships and activities among church members generally and to

institutions other than the church. In contrast, I believe Paul, in context, is focused on the church (not on other institutions) and on the exercise of ministerial office (not on other kinds of relationships among Christians). Keeping these different perspectives in view might be helpful for understanding Byrd's important contention that laymen and laywomen have the same responsibilities in the church. I believe she is correct about this. Issues she raises such as reading Scripture in worship and passing the offering basket (or, I might add, teaching adult Sunday school) are issues of *office*, not general male/female leadership relations. The proper way to put the question is not whether *women* can do these things but whether *only officers* (or *which officers*) should be doing them. Byrd's broader discussion points us in this office-focused direction, which seems to me is a more confessionally-Reformed (and biblical) way of approaching these matters. We probably will not all agree about what the proper ministries of the church ought to be or what things are properly performed only by officers (and I note that Byrd's opinion on laypeople reading Scripture in worship [232] differs from Westminster Larger Catechism 156). But if we could discuss these things in terms of office and not in terms of men and women generally, that would be a helpful development in churches where it's not already happening.

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Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry

by Darryl G. Hart

Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019, ix + 419 pages, \$23.00.

Billy Graham may have been the media sensation that gave post-World War II evangelicalism coherence at a popular level, but Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) was the figure who supplied much of the movement’s intellectual substance. The son of German immigrants, Henry grew up on Long Island and after high school worked as a journalist in nearby Suffolk County. His conversion to Christianity as a young adult sent him to Wheaton College, then presided over by J. Oliver Buswell. There, Henry sat under Gordon H. Clark’s teaching and received a B.A. (1938) and a M.A. (1940). From Wheaton he attended Northern Baptist Seminary and was ordained in the Northern Baptist Convention (1941). Henry hoped to be a theologian and pursued doctoral studies at Boston University where he received a Ph.D. in theology (1949). Contacts with Harold John Ockenga, pastor of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston, proved to be important. Although Henry’s first academic position was at Northern Baptist Seminary where he taught between 1947 and 1949, Ockenga asked him to teach theology at the newly founded Fuller Theological Seminary.

In 1949 Henry joined the faculty in Pasadena and held the seminary’s first post in theology and officially entered the neo-evangelical movement. From there Henry had a front row seat at the expansion of institutional evangelicalism. He assumed leadership positions in the National Association of Evangelicals and the Evangelical Theological Society, attended the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin and the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, became a lecturer-at-large for World Vision International (in addition to guest lectureships at, among others, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), and served on the board of Chuck Colson’s Prison Fellowship. As Timothy George writes in his tribute (included in this volume), “Henry was enormously successful as an evangelical networker” (376).

Arguably, the most significant of Henry’s connections was his tenure as founding editor of *Christianity Today* (1956–1968). That appointment is the reason for this collection of essays, many of which were first published while Henry edited the magazine. Again, according to George, “no one was more pivotal to the emerging movement than Carl F. H. Henry.” His intellectual prowess is one reason for that estimate, though it turns out that Henry’s ideas sometimes ran afoul of *Christianity Today*’s management. The book is in some sense an ironic tribute to a theologian and pundit whose arguments and manner did not suit the movement he sought to serve. According to Molly Worthen in *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (2014), J. Howard Pew, a chief patron of the magazine, thought Henry was taking *Christianity Today* too far in the direction of social activism. Pew even referred to Henry as a “socialist” (66).

Henry’s independence of mind and comprehensive outlook may have been responsible for his critics’ objections, and they are certainly plain to see in this book. One conviction that guided his theological judgments was a ringing condemnation of Protestant liberalism. Henry kept abreast of theological developments, from Schleiermacher to John C. Bennett, and

understood that J. Gresham Machen and Karl Barth had exposed liberal novelties as little more than theological gestures, often on the defensive and timid in its affirmations.

He also monitored developments in theological education, thanks to his own training and experience at Fuller, and defended the propriety of seminaries maintaining doctrinal standards as the basis for faculty appointments and institutional mission. The issue, Henry held, was not between theological commitment and academic freedom, but whether in the absence of “commitment to the intelligible revealed truth of God,” theological educators “can long preserve sense for either freedom or academia” (262).

His reflections also ran to politics. Here Henry carved out a political conservatism that drew on evangelical convictions. For instance, he was cautious about the language of human rights that drove international treaty organizations (such as the United Nations) without also reconsidering the importance of “human duties” (281). When it came to questions of character for evaluating politicians, Henry contended that some matters of private conduct had “no bearing on qualifications for the presidency” (359). At the same time, American politics needed both “better persons” and better policies. Political realities, he argued, “often force us to choose the lesser of two evils” (363). This was not something he saw in *Sojourners* magazine, an evangelical publication on the political Left. Henry complained that *Sojourners* “never speaks on abortion, promotes military disarmament, and tends to blame America for the ills of the world” (353).

What may be most intriguing to contemporary readers are Henry’s reflections on evangelical identity. At a time when the 2016 evangelical vote for Donald Trump sent scholars and journalists in search of definition that could explain the outcome, Henry’s own doubts about evangelical identity from four decades ago sound remarkably prophetic. In 1972 he wrote that defining an evangelical “is becoming no less difficult in America than defining a Jew in Israel” (59). That did not mean that Henry was at all hesitant to identify evangelicalism with “the doctrinal positions recovered by the Protestant Reformers and their devotion to an authentic biblical faith” (60). By 1980 he took stock of the popularity of evangelicalism and worried that the movement was “going nowhere.” “Evangelical Christianity in our generation has come out of the closet,” he wrote. “It has yet to discover what it means to come confrontationally and creatively into the culture” (88). That sort of assessment showed Henry’s unwillingness to be simply a cheerleader for the movement in which he labored. He was a strategist and a thinker. That meant that he wrote, as this collection indicates, about tactics to enhance evangelical influence as well as with a critical eye for deviations from doctrinal affirmations.

In his 1994 book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark A. Noll remarked that Carl Henry was more of a journalist than a theologian. That verdict may look more negative today compared to twenty-five years ago when evangelical historians, philosophers, sociologists, and biblical scholars were coming into their own. Henry was part of an older generation of evangelical thinkers that did not enter the ranks of the secular academy the way that Noll and others did. And yet, if evangelicalism had had more gatekeepers like Henry, people who had serious theological convictions and an eye to broader social and intellectual trends, the movement may have turned out better than it has. Debatable is the title of this book, as if Henry were truly the “architect” of evangelicalism. The constellation of organizations and parachurch ministries that tried to fit under the tent of post-World War II evangelicalism, to mix metaphors, had too many cooks for its own good. But as these essays show, somewhere on the menu was a dish as hearty as it was nutritional—its chef was Carl F. H. Henry.

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ServantPoetry

Peace

By Henry Vaughan (1621–1695)

My Soul, there is a country
Afar beyond the stars,
Where stands a winged sentry
All skillful in the wars;
There, above noise and danger
Sweet Peace sits, crown'd with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.
He is thy gracious friend
And (O my Soul awake!)
Did in pure love descend,
To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flow'r of peace,
The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress, and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One, who never changes,
Thy God, thy life, thy cure.