

A Faithful Elder

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From the Editor

The importance of the eldership was a major theme of my predecessor, the first editor of *Ordained Servant*, G. I. Williamson. During the second year of my editorship (2007) I published a tribute to Elder Herb Muether written by William Shishko: “Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder.”¹ Elder Muether was a powerful influence on me in my first ministry as a mission pastor of the Westchester Orthodox Presbyterian Church in New Rochelle, New York (now in Mount Vernon). He was the clerk of session of the mother church in Franklin Square and one of main reasons Robin and I decided to go to New York rather than Maine. Ryan McGraw’s experience with Elder John Leding was similar.

Alan Strange continues his “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” with chapters 7–11. This will prove to be a great resource when it is completed.

Back a few months each minister in the OPC received a copy of Craig Troxel’s *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires and Will toward Christ*. Charles Wingard reviews this excellent new book which corrects many misnomers about the nature of the heart and recommends the keeping of the heart, which is central to Christian discipleship.

David Koenig reviews an anthology of the works of Dorothy Sayers. *The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays*. I can still remember how impressed I was with Sayers upon reading her influential essay, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” first presented at Oxford in 1947. Her titles alone witness the power of her writing— “The Dogma Is the Drama” (1947), an essay in the volume *Creeds or Chaos?* (1947).²

Ryan McGraw reviews the third volume of Johannes Polyander’s *Leiden Synopsis* (1625), making an important plea to read original, primary sources of theology. The cry of the Reformation was *ad fontes*, to the fountains of theological truth—the first of which is, of course, Scripture itself.

Do not miss Metaphysical poet John Donne’s “Nativity.” This sonnet celebrates our Savior’s identification with us in our mortal situation. Thanks be to God for that union.

The cover this month is a linoleum block print from my Christmas card in 1982.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

¹ “Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder.” (William Shishko) 16 (2007): 44–46.

² Dorothy Sayers, *Creeds or Chaos?* London: Methuen, 1947.

CONTENTS

ServantWork

- Ryan M. McGraw, “How a Faithful Elder Can Make a Difference: Reflections on the Life and Death of a Friend”

ServantStandards

- Alan Strange, “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 7–11”

ServantReading

- Charles M. Wingard, review of A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires and Will toward Christ*
- David J. Koenig, review of Carole Vanderhoof, ed., *The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays*
- Ryan McGraw, review of Johannes Polyander, *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, vol. 3 (1625)

ServantPoetry

- John Donne (1572-1631), “Nativity”

FROM THE ARCHIVES “ELDERS”

http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-28.pdf

- “Biblical Qualifications for Elders.” (Archibald Alexander Allison) 3:4 (Oct. 1994): 80–96.
- “The Duties of Elders.” (Daniel R. Hyde) 13:1 (Jan. 2004): 4–7.
- “Elder Self-Evaluation.” (Francis E. VanDelden) 22 (2013): 72–73.
- “Eldership in the Balance.” (Charlie Meyers) 10:2 (Apr. 2001): 31–32.
- “How Can a Session Shepherd Its Pastor?” (Lawrence Eyres) 8:2 (Mar. 1999): 29–31.
- “Lessons from the Life of an Extraordinary Ruling Elder.” (William Shishko) 16 (2007): 44–46.
- “Ordained Servants: The Ruling Elder.” (Gregory E. Reynolds) 16 (2007): 9–11.
- “Pointers for Elders and Deacons, Part 1.” 2:3 (Jul. 1993): 59–64.
- “Pointers for Elders and Deacons, Part 2.” 2:4 (Oct. 1993): 79–85.
- “Pointers for Elders and Deacons, Part 3.” 3:1 (Jan. 1994): 3–8.
- “A Response to ‘A Scandal in the Church’.” (Benjamin K. Wikner) 13:3 (Jul. 2004): 68–72.

- “A Scandal in the Church? The Question of Titus 1:6 and the Children of Elders.” (Stephen D. Doe) 12:1 (Jan. 2003): 17–22.
 - “Some Thoughts on Term Eldership.” (John R. Sittema) 10:2 (Apr. 2001): 35–37.
 - “Some Thoughts on Term Eldership.” (John R. Sittema) 13:1 (Jan. 2004): 14–16.
 - “A Training Program for Elders.” (Greg Reynolds & William Shishko) 10:3 (Jul. 2001): 55–58.
 - “Qualifications for Ruling Elders: An Historical Survey.” (Mark R. Brown) 10:3 (Jul. 2001): 65–66.
 - “Working with the Eldership.” (Jay E. Adams) 1:2 (Apr. 1992): 27–29.
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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 Work

How a Faithful Elder Can Make a Difference: Reflections on the Life and Death of a Friend

By Ryan M. McGraw

What difference can a ruling elder make? Many people do not know what elders are supposed to do and often even less of what they actually do. Yet ruling elders are vital to the life of the church as well as to our lives personally. On June 26, 2020, John Leding, who was a fellow elder and one my close personal friends, went to be with Christ when he died unexpectedly in a car wreck. His work as an elder behind the scenes illustrates why we need faithful ruling elders and the influence that they can have on our lives and ministries.

John and I served together on the session of Frist OPC Sunnyvale, CA. We usually kept in touch every other week on average long after I left the congregation to teach at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The following reflections illustrate how a busy and successful businessman can serve Christ and his church to further the gospel, often behind the scenes. Often our views of church offices are two-dimensional, resting on abstract principles and qualifications alone. Reflecting on the godly example and service of a faithful elder can help make them three-dimensional, realistic, and concrete.

He Was a Spiritual Man

John was more concerned with godliness than he was even with orthodoxy. This may sound jarring at first. Our denomination has “orthodox” in its name, showing how highly we value right thinking about the Lord and his Word. Yet, the truth we confess is the truth that accords with godliness (1 Tim. 6:3). We should never study Scripture or sound doctrine as ends in themselves. The Triune God’s purpose in revealing doctrine is so that we would know the right God in the right way (John 17:3). John’s concern was that many Reformed Christians were more concerned with being right than they were with right living. While we would argue the finer points of predestination, he would ask young men and candidates for the ministry whether they were viewing pornography. While we would argue over justification and union with Christ, he was concerned with whether the Spirit was conforming God’s people to the image of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29). While many wanted to form the best arguments for infant baptism, John wanted to press us to improve our baptisms and to live for God’s glory. While many are concerned with the right interpretation of the law of God, he wanted the law to be an instrument of the Spirit to love the God of the law.

John was as zealous for sound doctrine as any faithful OPC elder, but he never lost sight of why we should care in the first place. In short, everything he pursued and promoted in the church revolved around union with Christ and the glory of the Triune God. He was consumed with knowing Christ and with rooting the benefits of the gospel in him, rather than merely debating theology and getting the system of doctrine right for its own sake. He

always reminded me that the end of good theology is the reason for good theology. This, above all else, is what made him a good elder and a godly man, and a good elder because a godly man. This is precisely what our churches need from our officers.

He Was a Businessman

John was a successful businessman, running one of the largest tour bus companies on the West Coast. Sometimes people elect elders because they are leaders in the community and not because they are spiritual men. This only harms the church. We want men who are full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3). Yet, we should not go to opposite extremes. Sometimes sessions and presbyteries need men with good business sense simply because they know how to do business and how to get things done. Frankly, we often take too long to make decisions in governing the church and shepherding the flock. We take too long to approve men to serve churches as ministers and to keep church discipline on a timely track. Often exasperating our churches, we linger when we need to take action. John kept things moving.

He had a good sense for how we use church and presbytery funds and make decisions. While others saw no problem, for example, with people serving on committees that also paid their salaries, arguing that we were the church and not the world and we should expect the best, John had a healthier and more realistic view of human nature. He had a way of showing a session or presbytery that adding new information would not change our final decisions, and he would press us to act. He was always concerned with getting pastors in pulpits, and he was instrumental behind the scenes in bringing at least four pastors into three different pulpits in our presbytery. A good businessman, who is a godly and wise Christian as well, can be precisely what a session needs to be responsible and timely in making important decisions that affect the church.

He Was a Churchman

John attended every presbytery meeting, served on various committees, augmented sessions in other churches, and persevered through many day-long session meetings on Saturdays. He participated in prayer meetings faithfully, even via conference calls when work and travel would not permit him to attend in person. Loving the church, he showed commitment to its worship and work at every level he could. He was a model of someone with a busy schedule who never neglected his family and made time to serve the church. Maybe it takes a successful businessman to teach us how to manage our time well enough to do all that the Lord calls us to do.

He also humbled, and sometimes shamed, me through his public prayers. He had the gift of brevity and could say what most of us tried to communicate in half the words and with greater meaning and profit to the congregation. We have a lot to learn from men who know how to get to the bottom line, especially in public prayer.

Ruling elders are not in full-time ministry. They have full time jobs and busy schedules. Participating in session and presbytery meetings, serving on committees, attending visitation, leading new members classes, and being part of similar activities take time. These cannot be all consuming and no one can do everything. Elders should pace themselves and not overcommit. Doing a little bit every month in service to the church is better than setting unrealistic goals and burning out or holding a place on a session without

doing much of anything. John gives us an example of how far devoting a few hours at a time, a few times a month, can stretch into fruitful and necessary labor in spreading Christ's kingdom. The old saying rings true that where there is a will there is a way, with Christ opening the way and the Spirit making us willing and able to serve the Father.

He Was a Faithful Friend

John and I frustrated each other at times. Maybe we even irritated each other once in a while. Yet, we also trusted and loved each other. All of these things go along with friendship. He was not afraid to tell me when I was preaching too long, even though he loved preaching. He would tell me when my sermons lacked warmth for the congregation, even when I thought I had poured my heart out to them. He was willing to press me to be more concrete and give more examples in my application, even when I labored to do so. He was willing to confront hard pastoral issues with church members, even while the rest of us on the session wrestled with how to broach difficult subjects. Yet, none of us ever doubted his love when he did these things. He was patient, kind, generous, prayerful, open-hearted, straightforward, and sensitive. He was constructive and supportive without being critical. Pastors rarely need more critics, but they do need elders who love them enough to help them do better when they know that they can with the Spirit's help. I am a much better preacher, and a better man, for John's faithful service as an elder.

Pastors need elders who are their friends. Many ministers complain about being lonely in the ministry with no one really understanding the challenges that they face. I never felt lonely laboring with my elders in Sunnyvale. John was my friend (as are the other men on the session there), and we truly bore the burdens of ministry together, including the ministry of the Word. Those who do not understand the trials of the ministry are probably not investing adequate time into people's lives through regular (even if once a month) visiting, hospitality, counselling, and having fellowship with people. A minister should never be lonely if he has ruling elders who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, who love their pastors, and who share life and genuine friendship with him and with the people they serve. Men like this make our ministries more fruitful and more joyful.

On one occasion two ruling elders, whom I knew well, asked me what was the best thing they could do to help the new minister the church was calling. I responded without hesitation, be friends with him and don't merely work with him. We only need read Paul's epistles, especially 2 Corinthians, to see the strong bonds of friendship and love that existed between Paul, the churches, and his fellow church officers. We need less of the mentality that ministers and elders should never be close to people in the church because they will likely be betrayed. Jesus was betrayed by Judas and forsaken by the other eleven apostles (Matt. 26:31), yet he laid down his life for his friends (John 15:14).

He Was a Persistent and Kind Evangelist

John brought the gospel to people everywhere he went. Every time someone complained that our churches needed more evangelism, while I agreed with them generally, I would point to John as a faithful example. He knew people in his town. He really got to know them, and he genuinely cared about what mattered to them. This was why so many were ready to receive the gospel from him. He taught me that we need more empathy with non-believers. We must confront people with their sin and with their need for Christ. Yet,

we must not forget how strange we are to them and that they are real people with real values, even if those values are wrong or misguided. If we want people to take Christ seriously, then we must learn to take them seriously. John was unafraid to talk to a lesbian couple and find out what made them tick and what they were passionate about before sharing his passion for Christ. This is why they often gave him the time to tell them about the Savior. Christ was always in his heart and never far from his lips. This is the best way to evangelize the lost. Jesus treated people as real people with real concerns and problems. He ministered to them body and soul. He was a friend of tax collectors and sinners. We need ruling elders to lead in evangelism by example, but this takes ruling elders who are willing to care for people who hardly share any of their beliefs or values. John helped show me how this should be done.

Conclusion

I have preached at funerals and, like all of us, I have experienced the death of loved ones. When some people die, my memories of them are clouded by selfish lives that ran like a thread even through their acts of service to others. People can buy gifts for others, do kind things for them, spend time with them, and entertain them with an eye primarily on what they want, on their self-esteem, their possessions, and how people will remember them. Sin teaches us to love ourselves, then others, and then God, if there is any room left for him. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love God first, then our neighbor for his sake, then ourselves, if we have any room left to do so. When I think of John's life, I am moved to praise and thanksgiving because I see such clear evidence of a life reoriented by grace. I don't need to call the comforts of the gospel to mind under the weight of losing him because they cannot stay out of my mind. They come flooding in without bidding.

Reflecting on my friend's life impresses me with the power of the Spirit of Christ. Elders must first be Spirit-filled men if they hope to have Spirit-filled ministries. We need elders who have good Christian sense, and maybe a dose of good business sense, and who are committed to the church without neglecting their families. We need elders who are friends to their ministers and to the members of their congregations. We need men who live in Christ and whose lives spill into those of the lost in everyday living. Faithful ruling elders may not receive much recognition in this world, but they can make a world of a difference, storing up treasures for the life to come. This is a three-dimensional picture of the difference that a faithful ruling elder can make, rather than a two-dimensional definition of office and list of qualifications. Elders need to be men we can serve with and under, and whom we can imitate as they imitate Christ, rather than men we can simply define theologically and fill open slots when elections come around.

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Servant Standards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapters 7–11

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter VII Evangelists

1. Jesus Christ, to whom is given all power in heaven and in earth, has commanded his church to make disciples of all the nations. From the throne of his glory he sent forth the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, to empower the witness of the church to the gospel. While it is the calling of every believer to confess Christ before men, and while God gives particular gifts and calling to some to minister the Word, and while every minister of the Word must evangelize in the fulfillment of his calling, there are some who are particularly called by Christ and his church as evangelists. Ordinarily such men shall preach the Word free of pastoral charge in a particular flock in order that they may labor to bring in other sheep. And to those sheep whom Christ has brought in, evangelists shall administer the sacraments until a congregation shall have been regularly organized. Since the gifts and functions of evangelists are necessary until the end of the age, this ministry is permanent and not confined to the apostolic period.

Comment: The last sentence in this paragraph is particularly important because in the history of church polity, even within the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, not a few have believed that the office denominated “evangelist” was particular to the apostolic period and that there are no longer “evangelists” (as an office) as such. It is the conviction of this church order, however, that evangelist is not limited to the apostolic period and thus is a permanent ministry of the church, necessary until the end of the age. The gifting in the ministerial office of some men seems warranted to draw such a conclusion: some men possess gifts that are particularly suited, if in a settled congregation, to focus on outreach, on the ingathering of the saints; or to act as missionaries, either home or foreign, if not in a settled congregation. These men have a particular focus on gospel outreach, whether seeking to bring more into a settled congregation or to gather a mission work with a view to it particularizing at the appropriate time.

As the first sentence so wonderfully notes, Christ, to whom all is given, has commanded the church to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He has sent forth the Holy Spirit to enable the church to do just that. While it is the task of the church as a whole to evangelize, and thus everyone in the general office of believer may share the gospel with his fellow, some are not only particularly appointed to preach the gospel, as is a pastor in a local church, but gifted to act as evangelists in a variety of settings and circumstances. Evangelists may be especially peripatetic, traveling about, sharing the gospel in chaplain settings (in health care facilities, institutions of higher education,

prisons, the military, etc.) and in other ways, being free of a pastoral calling and responsibility for a settled flock, preaching the gospel in a more widespread way to gather in Christ's sheep. In a church planting or mission-field situation, the minister, serving as an evangelist, both preaches the Word and administers the sacraments, often referred to as the organizing pastor with a view to congregational particularization and the new congregation calling a pastor.

2. The evangelist, in common with other ministers, is ordained to perform all the functions that belong to the sacred office of the minister. Yet distinctive to the function of the evangelist in his ministry of the gospel are the labors of (a) a missionary in a home or foreign mission field; (b) a stated supply or special preacher in churches to which he does not sustain a pastoral relation; (c) a chaplain in institutions or in military forces; (d) an administrator of an agency for preaching the gospel; and (e) an editor or similar ministry through the press and other means of communication.

Comment: The evangelist, as conceived by this church order (unlike that same office in some Reformed church orders), is fully a minister, competent to do all that any other minister can do. In fact, in the context of the foreign mission field, without other settled churches nearby, the evangelist, or missionary, has had to act as a judicatory, both in examining candidates for baptism and profession of faith as well as in ordaining and installing elders and deacons. This should not be thought odd: a missionary may have a dozen people that he has baptized and admitted to the Lord's Table. He can proceed with the Lord's Supper even without elders and deacons and place those men in office when the time comes. If he can enlist other ministers or elders to assist in these tasks that is preferable though it is not infrequently unavoidable that the missionary must proceed on his own to gather that initial flock.

This section of the FG enumerates the particular fields of service envisioned for the evangelist: a missionary serving domestically as a church planter or on the foreign mission field; serving a local particularized church in which he is not the pastor, thus serving as stated supply (in churches without a pastor) or as a minister who has a particular remit for outreach; a chaplain in various venues; an administrator of an agency for preaching the gospel (whether ecclesiastical or extra-ecclesiastical); and an editor (in an agency like Great Commission Publications). It should be noted here that though we retain the distinction between home and foreign missions, and there are some important reasons for doing so, the nature of some church plants even in this country, due to our highly heterogeneous culture, can take on some of the cross-cultural dimensions of the foreign mission. Many urban centers in the United States are so variegated that one can minister to Russians, for example, almost as if one has gone to that land.

Chapter VIII

Pastors

Christ's undershepherd in a local congregation of God's people, who joins with the ruling elders in governing the congregation, is called a pastor. It is his charge to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God;

to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the homes of the people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the gospel to the lost.

Comment: This is the most common and commonly encountered expression of the ministerial office: the pastor (the Latin word for “shepherd”) in a particular local organized congregation, who joins with the ruling elders on the session in the government and discipline of the church. We have here a rather full description of the duties incumbent upon the office of pastor: shepherd, preach, pray, administer, teach, administer sacraments, visit, disciple, counsel, etc. It does not seem that these qualities, as rather fully and clearly spelled out here, require further exposition.

It should be noted here that, unlike the PCA BOCO (for instance), the OPC FG makes provision only for the office of pastor and does not enumerate or elucidate “associate pastor” or “assistant pastor.” This does not mean that a church may not call someone that it chooses to designate as an associate pastor. It does mean that any one designated “pastor” by title in a particular local church—whether senior pastor, pastor, or associate pastor—must be called by the local congregation and is a member of and serves on the local session. Someone, such as a retired or bi-vocational minister, may serve in a ministerial role (say, minister of visitation or counseling) in a local congregation that is not designated as pastoral and for which he has no call from the congregation. He would be serving in that or like cases as a minister in the employ of the session without a call by the congregation. In all cases a minister retains his membership in the regional church.

Chapter IX Teachers

1. A teacher is a minister of the Word who has received particular gifts from Christ for expounding the Scripture, teaching sound doctrine, and convincing gainsayers, and is called to this ministry.

Comment: We come now to the third and last expression of the ministerial office found in our FG: that of teacher, or doctor (Latin for “teacher”). The teacher is especially gifted in scriptural and doctrinal exposition. He is by such biblical and theological skill to persuade those who oppose the Bible and its teaching: this would include anti-theists who deny God as well as professed religionists who do not openly deny God but who do so truly by false teaching and resisting the truth. The teacher needs special skills in the art of apologetics and elenctics, especially in his task of “convincing gainsayers” (those particularly in opposition to the doctrines of the Christian faith).

2. A minister may serve a local congregation as a teacher if there is at least one other minister serving as pastor. The teacher may also give instruction in a theological seminary; or teach the Word in a school, college, or university; or discharge this ministry in some other specific way, such as writing or editing in the field of Christian religious education. He shall take a pastoral oversight of those committed to his charge as

teacher, and be diligent in sowing the seed of the Word and gathering the harvest, as one who watches for souls.

Comment: The gifts of the teacher suit him for certain roles and this section addresses the roles that one called as teacher ordinarily fulfills. A congregation may call someone and designate him as teacher if there is at least one other minister serving as pastor in such a congregation. The teacher in a local congregation may head up the Christian Education program, be in charge of outreach, or any other number of roles most suitable to his gifts. Many OPC churches, frankly, call someone as teacher to serve functionally as a sort of “associate pastor,” though “associate” or other qualifiers to “pastor” receive no official recognition in this FG.

Outside the local congregation the teacher may serve as a professor in a theological seminary or in a college or university, Christian or otherwise. If the teacher is in an institution of higher education that is not distinctly Christian, he must be free to teach from the perspective of the Reformed Christian faith to which his ministerial vows commit him. Institutions of primary or secondary learning (grade schools) that are not Christian do not ordinarily permit unhindered presentations of the Christian faith such as the teacher is called to give. Teachers may also serve as religious editors or writers. In any case, because he is a minister, teachers (in the sense that the FG gives to this function within the ministerial office) must act pastorally in evangelizing and discipling those under his care, keeping watch over the flock that is his charge.

Chapter X Ruling Elders

1. Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by the people from among their number, are to join with the ministers in the government of the church, and are properly called ruling elders.

Comment: Ministers, as we have noted, have not only gifts for teaching (as the gifts that particularly mark them fit for the ministerial office) but also have gifts for rule, or government. These gifts they share with ruling elders, for whom government is their primary gift. Ruling elders, then, are men gifted for government, emerging from among the people as leaders, and recognized by the people and the session as such.¹ This office finds its origin in the Old Testament: the elder in the gate was a layman (that is to say, not a Levite or priest), a recognized leader in Israel (among the tribes, clans, and families) who, together with the priestly class, formed a body especially fit for ecclesiastical

¹This FG takes a generally three-office approach. This author, and his guiding light on the subject, Charles Hodge, takes such an approach. There are other approaches reflected within historic Presbyterianism, which are reflected in many fine works on the eldership. A classic American Presbyterian work is Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (1832; repr., Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage, 1987). More recent works are John R. Sittima, *With a Shepherd's Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1996), Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010) and, by a Reformed polity teacher, Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

judgment.² In the interim era the Apostles replaced the Old Testament Levitical priesthood, though the eldership continued. In Acts 15 for instance, we find the Apostles joining the eldership in governance and judicial determination at the Jerusalem Council.

After the closing of the canon and the expiration of the apostolic era, the church entered the common era in which we now live (and will prevail until the coming of Christ) in which the ministerium is the ordinary successor to the apostolate. They continue to join together with the eldership in the governance of the church.³ The second sentence of this section is quite important: ruling elders are chosen by the people (the laity—simply the Greek word for “people”) and so serve as representatives of the people, not in the sense that they poll the people and vote in accordance with majority wishes, but in the sense that when they sit with the ministerium (“session” is from the Latin, meaning to sit in rule or judgment), the ruling elders do not become “clergymen” but remain lay leaders, providing that when the office-bearers rule they do so not only as the trained-for-ministry clerical class but also as the living-ordinary-Christian-lives-in-a-variety-of-occupations lay class.⁴ If all members of the session are of the same class or order, it is not presumed in Presbyterianism that they are all laymen but that they are all clergyman, and if all the governors of the church are clerical, this is not historic Presbyterianism but episcopacy.⁵

2. Those who fill this office should be sound in the faith and of exemplary Christian life, men of wisdom and discretion, worthy of the esteem of the congregation as spiritual fathers.

Comment: Note that the requirements for the office of ruling elder focus on solid life and doctrine, practical application of such to cases requiring good judgment, a good reputation in the congregation as one able to give leadership, and being worthy of the respect of God’s people. Ruling elders are not required to have gifts for teaching as they do not hold the teaching office. Rather, they need the kinds of virtues and gifts required for governance, which is what this section describes.

3. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils which they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

Comment: This section lays out beautifully the duties of the ruling elder(s). Some have averred that one of the differences between ruling elders and ministers is that ruling

² Lee Irons, *Theories of Eldership* (private paper formerly published but no longer available on the Internet). Citations omitted.

³ Alan D. Strange, “Do the Minister and the Elder Hold the Same Office?” in *Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers* 22 (2013): 25–32, see especially the diagram on page 28.

⁴ Charles Hodge, “Warrant and Theory of Ruling Eldership,” in *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 262–71.

⁵ Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity*, 270–71.

elders must always act only collegially (corporately, in session) while ministers may act individually in the exercise of their ministerial office. This is incorrect: both ruling elders and ministers in the execution of their respective offices ought to act both individually and jointly. Ruling elders are to be watchmen on behalf of the congregation of which they are a part, serving to prevent errors in teaching and ethics among the flock. They are personally and privately to admonish people regarding sin and to bring to the session, to the body of elders and minister(s), those evils not amenable to their private corrections.

Then follows the list of pastoral duties in which not only ministers but ruling elders should also engage: visiting (the sick, in particular), discipling personally those who do not know or misunderstand the faith, bringing solace to those grieving personal losses, and readily engaging the youth of the church, guiding and guarding them in the way of life. Finally, the ruling elders need to pay particular attention to the teaching(s) and the deportment of the minister, to ensure orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and to help him in his labors, particularly his governmental (administrative) work, like Aaron and Hur upholding Moses' arms (Exod. 17: 8ff).

Chapter XI Deacons

1. The Scriptures designate the office of deacon as distinct and perpetual in the church. Deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church. To this end they exercise, in the fellowship of the church, a recognized stewardship of care and of gifts for those in need or distress. This service is distinct from that of rule in the church.

Comment: Deacons are a distinct New Testament office (Acts 6; I Tim. 3:8–13). The office of the care of the poor and needy belonged to the people as a whole in the OT and to the Levites in the land, who collected the tax for the relief of the poor. Other provisions for those in the land included gleaning laws and Jubilee years. With the worldwide spread of the gospel message, what had belonged to a now-defunct office (the Levite) at a time in which the faith was largely restricted to a particular ethnicity in a defined land (the Jews in Canaan), now threatened, with the globalization of the gospel, to fall into desuetude. The church in Jerusalem, apparently chiefly Hebraic, responded to the complaint among Greek Christians that their widows were neglected in poor relief by appointing Greek brothers to serve as deacons to meet the needs of the whole church (Hebrew and Greek). This furnishes a pattern that should be, but has not always, sadly, been imitated, a pattern of fair and equitable distribution to the needy among us.⁶

2. Those chosen to this office should be of great faith, exemplary lives, honest repute, brotherly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

Comment: Here in this section we have the spiritual qualities that must mark the one who would be a deacon. He must be committedly orthodox, live a life worthy of imitation, have a reputation of honesty, given to love of the brethren, have a heart for

⁶ For a good recent general treatment of the diaconate (from a Reformed perspective, which tends to be on the office of deacon a bit richer than the Presbyterian), see Cornelius Van Dam, *The Deacon: Biblical Foundations for Today's Ministry of Mercy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2016).

those in need, and be wise and discerning in engaging those who would appear to be in need, whether in or outside of the church.

3. In order to facilitate the performance of the duties of their office the deacons of each particular church shall be constituted a board of deacons. The board shall choose its own officers from its membership.

Comment: Deacons, while able and responsible to act individually, also, like ministers and elders working together on the session, act corporately on the board of deacons. Even as the session meets with some regularity, so should the board of deacons for the purpose of coordinating and carrying out its work. Such deacon boards typically have a chairman, secretary, and treasurer, the latter often serving as congregational treasurer, though these matters are all left to the discretion of local churches.

4. The board shall oversee the ministry of mercy in the church and shall collect and disburse funds for the relief of the needy. Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons

Comment: The primary duty of the diaconate is the ministry of mercy, which includes chiefly, but is not limited to, gathering and distributing monies to those in need. Other appropriate diaconal work includes yard and house work for seniors (sometimes done in conjunction with and training of the youth), food for families mourning or with sick/recovering members (often done in conjunction with the women of the church), financial counseling and help with budgeting, etc. Women have an important diaconal role to play in the church; the diaconate does well to work with them in its ministry of mercy.⁷

5. In the discharge of their duties the deacons shall be under the supervision and authority of the session. Accordingly, the board shall keep a record of its proceedings and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its records to the session once every three months, and at other times upon request of the session. If it seems to be for the best interest of the church, the session may require the board of deacons to reconsider any action, or may, if necessary, overrule it.

Comment: The diaconate is not an office of rule but of service, though bearing authority proper to its calling in Christ's church. The diaconate serves under the guidance and authority of the elders. As a part of accountability to the elders, it is fitting and required that the board of deacons takes minutes, including a record of all monies gathered and disbursed, and that such be submitted to the session quarterly for sessional review (or anytime in addition that the session requests such). The session ordinarily permits the deacons to proceed according to their own lights insofar as it deems their actions wise and prudent. The session may ask the deacons to reconsider an action that it has taken and may, if the session believes that circumstances warrant it, overrule any

⁷ In the GA "Report of the Committee on Women in Church Office," @https://www.opc.org/GA/women_in_office.html, the members all recognize a proper role for women in diaconal service; Robert Strimple, taking a minority position, argues that women should actually be ordained to special office, while other members are content to conceive the diaconal service of women as part of that which pertains to their labors in the general office of believer.

decision made by the deacons, if the session considers such necessary for the maximal welfare of the church.

6. It is desirable that the session and the board of deacons meet together at regular intervals to confer on matters of common responsibility.

Comment: In addition to the quarterly review of the minutes, it is also preferable (though not required) for the session and the board of deacons to meet together at some regular interval to talk about matters of mutual concern and responsibility. Historically, Presbyterians have been weaker on this account than the Reformed, who have elders and deacons regularly meeting together (often monthly) in what they call “the council.” Among Presbyterians such meetings are not customarily deemed necessary more than from 2-4 times a year.

7. In a church in which there are no deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the session.

Comment: This section highlights that diaconal work must be carried on even if a particular local church lacks deacons. A church may not particularize without at least two elders or an elder and a pastor. It may do so without deacons, though diaconal work is always to be taken up by the session if there are no deacons to carry it out.

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ServantReading

With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will Toward Christ by *A. Craig Troxel*

By Charles M. Wingard

With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires and Will toward Christ, by A. Craig Troxel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020, 220 pages, \$13.39, paper.

Every redeemed saint aspires to love God with all his heart—nothing is more precious to him than cultivating a heart for God. But what is the heart? Like so many frequently used words, it can be spoken without much thought. For many, loving from the heart is to have strong feelings for someone else—like a romantic attachment or friendship. At best this is an incomplete understanding and will not satisfy the Christian.

For readers who long for a deeper understanding of the heart, Craig Troxel's *With All Your Heart* will prove valuable. With the skill of a mature physician of the soul, he explores what God's Word reveals about the human heart. This is no small task. Formulating a definition of *heart* taxes the intellect. After all, the various Old and New Testament words for it appear nearly 1,000 times (17). So, the author surveys biblical vocabulary and usage, and concludes that the heart is

the governing center of the 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). (21)

The hero of this book, if I may use that term, is the Lord Jesus Christ as he executes his offices of prophet, priest, and king. The author demonstrates that as a prophet, Jesus teaches and assures sinful minds; as a priest, he redeems and renews iniquitous hearts; and as a king, he subdues and strengthens rebellious wills (22).

Although mind, desires, and will can be distinguished, they can never be separated. They are interrelated aspects of the human heart and together provide the inner direction of a man (47). This threefold “unity of the inner self” furnishes the structure of the book: the heart *knowing*, the heart *loving*, and the heart *choosing* become the headings of the book's first three sections.

The Heart Knowing

In his treatment of the mind (the heart knowing), the author offers a much-needed corrective to the prevalent misconception that the mind is wholly distinct from the heart, the former distinguished by thinking and the latter by emotion. Frequently, the two are pitted against each other, as when a person says, “I know in my mind that what you’re saying is true, but my heart just doesn’t feel it” (35). With ample biblical support, the author demonstrates that “if [the] heart principally does one thing, it thinks” (25). Jesus’s interaction with the scribes provides an example: “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (Matt. 9:4).

As prophet, the Lord Jesus confronts foolish thinking. He transforms us by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The eyes of our hearts are enlightened (Eph. 1:17–18). The Lord sets right twisted views of God, his Word, and world. He punctures inflated opinions of self. Reasons to disbelieve or disobey are overcome. To be certain,

We do not know anything perfectly, nor can we see as God sees, perceiving everything fully and clearly. . . . But we are getting to know Christ and his truth, better and better. And that is more than those in this world can ever claim, offer, or know—unless the Lord of the heart opens their eyes. (63)

The Heart Loving

Next comes the critical matter of desires (the heart loving). Mature believers know that the heart, with its desires and affections, is the great battlefield upon which the struggle for holiness is fiercely fought. Whether born again or not, “what the heart enjoys is what the heart will explore” (47). What sinners need and find in Jesus is the priest who redeems “from sin’s condemning power and corrupting power” and who “now continues to purify [the heart] from sin’s residual power” (96). By his Word and Spirit, Christ enables believers “more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness” (WSC, 35).

Many Christians struggle mightily—as they should—to put to death sinful desires. But mortification is only half the struggle. Ungodly desires must be replaced with godly ones. Love of the world must give way to love of God and his kingdom. Holy virtues must be cultivated with diligence.

The Heart Choosing

Section three, with its study of the will (the heart choosing), completes the author’s exposition. As Sovereign King, the Lord Jesus delivers the proud and defiant heart from its bondage to sin and renews the will. Sinners are enabled to receive Jesus Christ, offered to them in the gospel, and are strengthened in the inner man to follow him in obedience. Terms that many modern Christians buried long ago—submission, self-denial, self-control, and self-discipline—are unearthed and given both their appropriate prominence and urgency. Christ’s renewal of the believer’s will is a foretaste of heaven,

for the day will come when Christ will return and bring us into our Father's heavenly presence. It is there, in that state of glory, that the will of every Christian will be "made perfectly and immutably free to good alone." It will be a life of glorious and sinless fellowship with God and one another. (149–50, citing WCF 9.5)

Keeping the Heart

With All Your Heart concludes with an eminently practical section on keeping the heart. Three organs—the eyes, the ears, and the mouth—demand our utmost attention. The author identifies the eyes and ears as the heart's gatekeepers. Through them pass the impressions of the world around us. With the eyes we can observe what is beautiful, noble, and godly. We can also fix them on what defiles both body and soul. With the ears we can hear the word of God and speech that edifies. They can also be open and welcoming to degrading language.

The author's comments on media are timely:

Ongoing vigilance is absolutely required. There is no escape from all the media by which the temptations of the world find their way into our hearts. There is also no escape from the ready alliance between the world's attractions and the sin in our hearts. . . . What we take to heart will, in large measure, come down to how well our gatekeepers do their job. (178)

The eyes and ears are sentinels. Train them to do their duty!

If the eyes and ears guard the heart, the mouth is "the ambassador of the heart" (179). It broadcasts the heart's condition, and a believer will monitor it carefully. When words reveal the sinfulness of the heart, an opportunity presents itself to the believer: first, to repent, and then to walk in renewed obedience to the Lord.

I enthusiastically recommend this book. Life presses upon us its urgent concerns, fierce temptations, and harsh setbacks. The succession of trials is never-ending. In the midst of all the tumult, we dare not neglect the heart—which is why the author will not let us forget that "as goes the heart, so goes the man" (20). Failure to tend to the heart leads to ruin. But joys forever belong to those who trust in their Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our prophet, priest, and king.

To a previous generation, J. C. Ryle wrote, "There is nothing in your heart that the Lord Jesus cannot make right" (103). The author shares Ryle's commendable and biblical confidence. To be sure, there are no quick fixes: no instantaneous paths to triumph that put us beyond the reach of sin and temptation. But the Lord Jesus, who desires our holiness more than we do, will never abandon us or cease his work in us. The good work begun in us now will be brought to completion in the age to come (Phil. 1:6).

If you long to love your Lord with all your heart, then you will treasure this book.

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The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays, *Edited by Carole Vanderhoof*

By David J. Koenig

The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers: Selections from Her Novels, Plays, Letters, and Essays, Edited by Carole Vanderhoof. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2018, xx + 241 pages, \$18.00, paper.

“The variety of Dorothy Sayers’s work makes it almost impossible to find anyone who can deal properly with it all” (226). So says C.S. Lewis in his *Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers* (226–31).¹ These days the danger seems to be that we neglect the great variety of Sayers’s work. Sayers is most well-known for the creation of the memorable gentleman-detective Lord Peter Wimsey, but it would be a mistake to suppose that that is all she wrote worth reading.

From the very beginning of her life it seemed that the word-loving Sayers was meant to be a writer, an idea that she doggedly held onto and that helps to explain the diversity of her work. Words and writing were always at the center of Sayers’s life. Even one of her earliest jobs as an advertising copywriter produced the well-known Guinness tagline “My goodness, My Guinness!” The time between the world wars was a golden age of detective fiction in Great Britain, and her detective novels met with quick success, which would allow her the financial security to pursue writing for the rest of her life. Detective novels, however, were only the beginning of Sayers’s career, and not surprisingly she left off writing them early in her career and never returned, moving onto what many would consider more rigorous literary endeavors. It is here that Sayers began to delve into more theological themes in her work. The daughter of an Anglican rector, Sayers was, as were so many well-known writers of the day, a high church Anglican. Her popular essays on Christianity also met with success and opened even more doors for her to pursue writing.

Early in her life she had born a child out of wedlock, which fact she kept secret for most of her life, and possibly the fear of this being exposed caused her to shy away from the public eye to a surprising degree. Sayers died of a heart attack in 1957 as she was beginning work on the second volume of her well-regarded translation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Sayers’s lifelong fascination with Dante pervades her work and sparked a love of all things medieval, taking shape in a lecture that became one of the major beginnings of the Classical Education movement, another accomplishment for which she is noted today.

The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers is the first in Plough Publishing’s Gospel in Great Writers series that brings together selections from the detective stories, plays, cultural criticism, and other genres Sayers worked in. The structure is simple: the editor Carole Vanderhoof opens the book with a brief introduction and biographical sketch; the book

¹ C. S. Lewis, “A Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers,” in *“On Stories” and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 91–95.

then moves into topical chapters, which deal with specific themes, usually opened by a section from one of her mysteries then moving deeper into her other works; the book concludes with Lewis's panegyric.

The book offers a wealth of memorable quotations. For instance, in speaking of covetousness:

It was left to the present age to endow covetousness with glamor on a big scale, and to give it a title which it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, covetousness has gone forward and never looked back. It has become a swaggering, swashbuckling, piratical sin, going about with pistols tucked into the tops of its jackboots. (27)

Or concerning work the book includes "Work is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one does to do" (146).

There is also a particularly vicious attack on advertising that is as accurate as it is incisive (84),² not to mention an excellent essay on feminism, "Are Women Human?"³ which is worth the price of the book. Considering these topics, you might get the feeling that titling the book *The Gospel in Dorothy L. Sayers* is a bit of a misnomer, and you would be correct. While there are chapters in the book on Gospel themes such as "Sin and Grace" and "The Cross," the topics wander far and wide, taking on ethics as well as social issues. While the selections from articles and nonfiction works are very much worth reading, the novels are still the stars, a fact reflected by the editor in the pride of place they are given in each chapter.

The mystery story is a genre that we all too quickly dismiss today as mere "commercial fiction." There is often a truth to that, but at the same time the mystery story gives a latitude to explore themes that might not otherwise present themselves in other genres, a point that Sayers's work seems to prove. One of the strong points of this book is that these are highlighted. An example would be the very first selection in the book taken from Sayers's first Lord Peter Wimsey novel, "Whose Body?"⁴ In this brief section, amateur detective Peter Wimsey, in a conversation with his professional detective friend Inspector Parker, discusses whether or not it is right to enjoy the work of the detective as it is so intrinsically bound up with the world's evil (1). This is an excellent example of Sayers's integration of theological themes into a very entertaining story.

There are strengths and weaknesses connected with any anthology, and they are all present here. As a rule, I find literary anthologies leave much to be desired. The strength of good writing lies as much in context and a well-constructed story or essay as it does in a good turn of phrase or clear thought. Anthologies naturally, by cutting up an author's work, focus on the latter at the expense of the former. That being said, this particular book offers an excellent introduction to the breadth and scope of Sayers's work and very much whets the appetite for more.

However, it is especially in the area of Sayers's novels where this book is at its weakest. As one who has read these novels in their entirety, I can readily say that the sections chosen by the editor are not the only parts of these novels that take on major

² "Murder Must Advertise," 83–93.

³ 153–64.

⁴ 1–14.

literary and theological themes, nor are they always the best. For instance, in her novel *Clouds of Witness*, there is a major undercurrent on the self-isolation of people even within their own families that would be entirely missed if only an individual chapter is used.⁵ Furthermore, as most detective novelists do, Sayers is constantly taking on themes of justice and how it is administered, which are both searching and poignant, such as in the conclusion of her *Busman's Honeymoon*.⁶ This most famous passage of her detective stories is rightly included in this anthology, but disconnected from the story it seemed almost robbed of its power.

The key is to realize that this book is meant to be an introduction to Sayers and her work, and keeping that in mind, a reader can say it does that job admirably. It is to be hoped that the book serves to introduce contemporary readers to the wealth that Sayers's writings still have to offer.

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⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* (New York: Avon, 1927).

⁶ 217–25.

Synopsis of a Purer Theology by *Polyander, et al.*, edited by Antonius Walaeus, translated by Riemer A. Faber, volume 3

By Ryan M. McGraw

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (Synopsis of a Purer Theology), by Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Thysius, and Antonius Walaeus, eds. Harm Gorris, trans. Riemer A. Faber, vol. 3 of 3. Leiden: Brill, 2020, 716 pages, \$113.00.

Reading primary sources is important. Doing so helps us understand what people thought in their own times and in their own words. People in Reformed churches and ministry today can use classic texts as a sounding board for comparing and contrasting the debates of our times with past reflections on Scripture that reflected different debates from other times. Older texts can also help us reflect on our confessional tradition to understand better the context in which the authors of our confessions and catechisms wrote. This is the third and final volume in the so-called Leiden Synopsis, which represented a series of academic disputations, partly contrasting post-Synod of Dort Reformed orthodoxy with the Arminian theological system. The international team of authors sought to set forth a theological textbook that summarized a Reformed consensus against opposing viewpoints after Leiden University had dismissed all of their Arminian faculty members. Once a standard Reformed textbook, the *Synopsis* has long been inaccessible to readers without knowledge of Latin. This volume completes the translation of the *Synopsis* into English. Serving as a superb compendium of historic Reformed thinking, the Leiden Synopsis will help contemporary readers go back to the sources of the mature period of Reformed orthodoxy.

Covering the topics of the sacraments, church discipline, civil authority, and the last things, volume three of the *Synopsis* treats up-to-date theological questions from that time that remain relevant today. The substantial eighty-page introduction is a significant piece of robust historical theology in its own right, serving as an invitation to and analysis of the history and text of all three volumes of the *Synopsis*. Like the first two volumes in the series, the English translation is solid and readable. The inclusion of the Latin text, explanatory notes, a glossary of terms, and historical introduction make this volume a vital text for understanding high orthodox Reformed theology in its own context and on its own terms. Nearly half of the volume is devoted to the sacraments, which continue to serve as a litmus test of the strength or weakness of a theological system by bringing other *loci* to practical resolution. Disputations 48–50, which examine church discipline, councils, and the civil magistrate, augment and complete the material on the church and its government in the preceding volume. The author's assumptions about the necessary relationship between the civil magistrate and the church, especially church councils, will likely surprise some modern readers. This fact reveals how different the world in which we live is from the one in which the *Synopsis* appeared. Disputations 51–52 treat the last

things by starting with the resurrection as the goal of all things and then concluding with the eternal states of the righteous and the wicked.

As with the preceding volumes, sometimes omissions are surprising. For instance, there is very little development of arguments in favor of infant baptism, though the authors both assert and regulate the practice in disputations 44–45. Such omissions are due partly to the fact that pressing controversies tended to dictate content. Other sections are underdeveloped as a result, such as Walaeus’s brief treatment of the renovation of the earth in glory in which he bypasses the standard question at the time of the role that the earth would play in the eternal state (623). On the other hand, Disputation 45 on the Lord’s Supper (172–253) occupies a disproportionate amount of space, offering a robust treatment of the subject from a Reformed perspective against many opposing views. Likewise, many readers will wish for more explanation of the Christological view of the beatific vision through which Christ will reveal the divine nature most fully through the instrument of his human nature (587). Though the treatment of such topics is often uneven, the general explanation of theological topics is well-proportioned and even includes interspersed practical uses of most of the doctrines examined.

The *Synopsis Purioris* is an essential text for anyone interested in classic Reformed thought. Readers with facility in the Latin language will find these volumes even more useful and enlightening. The scholastic distinctions and definitions that characterize the work make the material clear and easy to follow, with the occasional help of the editor’s footnotes. This is an ideal entrance point to reading primary sources related to the historic Reformed theological system that will continue to help readers reflect well on theological topics biblically, clearly, and practically.

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ServantPoetry

by John Donne (1572–1631)

Nativity

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,
There He hath made Himself to His intent
Weak enough, now into the world to come;
But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.