



# The Martha Complex

Ordained Servant November 2023

# Ordained Servant Online

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### *From the Editor*

What are the three most published books in the English language? Most would guess one correctly, the Bible; fewer would guess Shakespeare; probably almost no one would guess Agatha Christie. Shakespeare in second and Christie in third is linked, I believe, with what a great influence God's Word had on both. George Morrison makes this case in his 1928 book *Christ in Shakespeare: Ten Addresses on Moral and Spiritual Elements in Some of the Greater Plays*.<sup>1</sup> This month four hundred years ago Shakespeare's first folio edition was published in London. For those interested, there are fascinating articles at the Folger Library website (<https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeare-in-print/first-folio/>) and the *Fine Books and Collections* website (<https://www.finebooksmagazine.com/news/shakespeare-first-folio-major-celebration-folger>). Also, this is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Robert Frost's fifth book of poetry, *New Hampshire*, which begins with the long poem "New Hampshire" and includes "Nothing Gold Can Stay," with its own biblical reference.

Our main article this month is Pastor Allen Tomlinson's "Do! Do! Do! Back to the Same Old Legalism." The Martha Complex has been a problem among believers since Adam's fall and is especially noted by Luke (10:38–42). While Tomlinson addresses pastors in terms of their preaching, much of this article applies to every member. I remember speaking with a pastor's wife years ago who deeply resented being labeled a Martha, because she was tasked with work that others should have been helping with. Tomlinson emphasizes the centrality of God's grace in service.

Chapter 8 of my book on homiletics, *The Voice of the Good Shepherd*, deals with "Hearing God's Word in the Modern World." This is as beneficial for worshippers as it is for preachers. I cover "Dangers to Avoid" and "Attitudes and Practices to Cultivate."

Alan Strange completes his excellent "Commentary on the Book of Discipline of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" with chapter 9, dealing with complaints. This commentary will be published sometime next year.

An Older Elder presents his penultimate offering in "Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 9: The Elder, the Session, and Leadership." I hope that many sessions will read and discuss these thoughtful letters.

I rarely review books that will not be useful for the officers of Christ's church, but now and then I find a book that seems to be popular among our brothers and sisters that

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

raises red flags for me. Meredith M. Kline’s review article “A Tale of Two Exegetes” compares the exegesis of key Old Testament passages in Michael Heiser’s *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* with Meredith G. Kline’s own work. Both Kline and Heiser have a strong commitment to the supernatural, invisible world presented in the Bible, but Kline’s exegesis is more clearly in keeping with the hermeneutics of the Bible and the Westminster Confession.

Nathan P. Strom reviews Lane Tipton’s new book, *The Trinitarian Theology of Cornelius Van Til*, in his review article “Cornelius Van Til’s Trinitarian Theology.” This formidable theologian, apologist, and churchman formed a large part of the original foundation of the OPC, as John Muether demonstrates in his biography of Van Til.<sup>2</sup>

This month, Shakespeare’s poem “Fear No More the Heat O’ th’ Sun” looks at death positively, implying the blessing of the ultimate sabbath rest. The poem comes from his play *Cymbeline*, Act IV.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-31.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-31.pdf)

- “Hearing the Word in the Modern World.” (Gregory Edward Reynolds) 19 (2010): 16–21.
- “Memorial Remarks at the Funeral of Meredith G. Kline.” (Meredith M. Kline) 16 (2007): 40–43.
- “Reading Meredith G. Kline: Where to Begin?” (John R. Muether) 31 (2022): 24–26.
- “Scholar of the Heavenland.” (Yong H. Kim) 16 (2007): 121–24.
- “Van Til on the Reorganization of Princeton.” (Cornelius Van Til) 6:4 (Oct. 1997): 75–76.
- “Why Machen Hired Van Til.” (D. G. Hart and John R. Muether) 6:3 (Jul. 1997): 65–68.
- “Van Til the Evangelist.” (K. Scott Oliphint) 17 (2008): 54–59.

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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 Word

## DO! DO! DO! Back to the Old Legalism!

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by Allen C. Tomlinson

There is a trend I have been observing over the last ten years or so in our Reformed circles, and now I have been hearing various voices from “the pew” expressing concern in this particular area. That is of a call for members of Christ’s church to be more active or to become busier for the work of the church/gospel. The people who have spoken to me regarding this have been people who already are very busy serving Christ in the home and in the church. Sometimes they have been among the busiest church members, faithful for years in witnessing, serving, showing hospitality, personal devotions in the Word and prayer, etc. These exhortations to be “up and doing” have felt like the leadership is putting more pressure on those who are already faithful, while, as I have found to be “normal” in church life, the ones who almost never volunteer continue on as if these exhortations were “water off the duck’s back.” My concern is that this renewed emphasis on Christian activism is another avenue by which legalism, particularly legalism in one’s approach to sanctification and service, creeps back in, even in our circles where we preach sovereign grace. I would like to make a case for this being the wrong approach in our preaching. I would also like to recommend a better way to stir up God’s people to good works and love and hospitality and service.

I do not believe this approach, that of continually emphasizing the need for more hospitality ministry or more time spent in serving in the church, is effective in the long run. There are several problems with this approach. I would like to mention five.

First, it is the preaching of God’s grace in Jesus Christ that not only is used by the Holy Spirit to bring the elect to faith and so to justification in Christ alone, but it is also the motivating tool and source of power by which the Holy Spirit convicts believers to serve Christ and to serve one another. Preaching “do, do, do” does not work long term. Eventually those most sensitive to heeding pastoral exhortations will become worn out or will neglect their other duties at home or at work or, being driven by a sense of guilt, they will collapse under such a burden. Burn out, discouragement, dropping out, even bitterness, these are normal fruits of a legalistic approach to sanctification and service. Having come from a non-Reformed, middle-of-the-road evangelical background, I grew up seeing this. One of the original attractions for me to the historic Reformed faith was the holiness and loving service which I saw in churches that emphasized grace. Grace truly motivates and empowers. Any return to a legalistic “do more, do more” will eventually de-motivate and weaken. Every time. In Ephesians 2:8–10, “by grace . . . through faith” is what produces good works.

My second argument is that the quality of service, hospitality, growth in piety, etc., when grace alone is the motivation is one hundred percent different than the quality of the same when done out of a legalistic spirit. Grace, properly understood in the biblical gospel, will produce in me a greater love for God and for His people and even for the lost. I will *want* to witness to the lost, grow in my devotion to Jesus Christ, and show love

to and serve my fellow believers. Though it will not always be easy or fun, yet it will be, increasingly, the desire of my heart to be pleasing to Him in these ways. When I do serve, it will flow from the heart and not just be a matter of checking off the items on the list or forcing myself to be “a good Christian” or “a good church member” by doing all this “stuff” the preacher tells me I ought to be doing. The source of my motivation and my power will make all the difference in *how* I go about growing in holiness, serving in the church, and witnessing to the unsaved around me.

My third argument flows from the second. Service to other Christians, witnessing to unbelievers, and growth in personal piety will see more positive fruit, as the normal rule, when it flows from a spirit of grace than it can from a spirit that smacks of legalism. My service to my fellow believers and my witness to unbelievers will be more “believable.” It will be seen as coming from a sincere love for the God of grace and for his people in Jesus Christ. When the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses came around to our door when I was a child, fulfilling their “duty” to earn their salvation (and both of these religions, when studied carefully, include such an attitude), it was totally unimpressive and even a “turn off.” However, I have been “witnessed to” by sincere believers who did not know that I was already a believer, and if (as it seemed) this flowed from their sense of wonder at the grace of Jesus Christ towards them, it was truly beautiful to see. I love it when this happens. I believe my response is not abnormal in this regard.

Fourth, the Bible speaks in both Old Testament and New regarding Christians finding “rest” in the New Covenant (e.g. Jer. 6:16 and Matt. 11:28–30). God’s people should not find their lives a heavier burden than they were before they found salvation in Jesus Christ. A “do, do, do” kind of preaching will produce a spirit of burden in the hearts of some of our most spiritually sensitive listeners. Along this line, I believe a close examination of our historic Reformed confessions and catechisms would tend in the direction of emphasizing grace, with our response to the gospel always flowing out of a reciprocal love on our part to God’s free love and acceptance of us in his Son, not from us preachers trying to put more and more pressure on our flocks to do more, do more, do more.

Fifth, are we trying to do the Holy Spirit’s work at this point? Yes, we should make applications that truly flow from the text we are expositing, but is it our job to actually coerce action? Are we even capable of convicting, transforming, and empowering? Are we not conveyers of the truth, as earnestly as we know how, but especially as we believe in the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ? Do we not leave it to the God of grace to actually bring about necessary changes? Can we even see who is “doing all they can and should,” and who is being lazy? Perhaps there is one who does not seem to do much more than attend worship regularly and try to be a faithful spouse or parent or worker. If they have been given only “two talents” by the Master, they might be fulfilling all that He expects. Others may be poor stewards of their “ten talents,” but they do enough so that we are unable to read the heart and to know that they are not being fully faithful. “The last will be first, and the first last” (Matt. 20:16) might have many applications on judgment day.

What do I suggest? Preach every text faithfully. That is, when there is a command for Christians, make sure God’s people understand the command. When there is a promise, preach the promise. When there is a warning, preach the warning. But do not keep coming back to certain commands (be more hospitable, read your Bible more, serve in

more ways in the church) time and time again, unless that command is truly in the text. Of course, every text, command or warning or promise or doctrine, is ultimately about Jesus Christ and his work for us. It is our wonder in his work that will motivate and empower us to work.

What about those who seem to just come and sit? Get to know them better as their pastor. Some you might find are doing more than even you as their pastor knows. I found this to be the case many times. It turned out they were busy in the kingdom but were very quiet and unobtrusive in how they served. Others can be appealed to on a person to person basis. In this way the faithful will not feel so overloaded from an overemphasis on “do, do, do” from the pulpit, and the unfaithful will be particularly and personally challenged in that area in which there is a lack.

We have such an incredible message in this gospel of grace. Let us not weaken our message and wear out ourselves and our faithful people by “do, do, do” kind of preaching. Let us be a joy and a cause of rest and refreshing to ourselves and our hearers. The result will be more lasting fruit, not less.

Appendix: Here is one more important reason to not preach a legalistic message of “do more, do more!” The above arguments I sought to base entirely on the nature of the gospel and how that plays out pastorally, as far as I could see during my forty-four years as a pastor. I would add this argument as an afterword: the need for Christians to take time for their other responsibilities, God-commanded responsibilities. If we keep making the faithful members busier and busier with church related activities, this can wear them out physically and emotionally or cause them to neglect taking the proper time and giving the proper attention to their families (spouses and children) and to their earthly callings. I grew up in a small city in the Midwest that had probably at least thirty evangelical churches. Very few of the preachers’ kids were believers. Of those I spoke with, the failure of their minister father to take any time for them was one of their most frequent complaints. Later, in college, several of my evangelical professors around the age of my father warned us who were studying for the ministry that we needed to make sure we took time for our families. Those who did seemed more likely to have believing and serving children. Taking time to love our spouses and to train and care for our children must never be deemphasized because of an overemphasis on staying busy in church activities every free moment. There must be a balance.

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# Servant Word

## The Voice of the Good Shepherd: Hearing God's Word in the Modern World,<sup>1</sup> Chapter 8

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By Gregory Edward Reynolds

*Take care then how you hear . . .*

—Luke 8:18

*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

—Psalm 119:18

*People manipulated by propaganda become increasingly impervious to spiritual realities.*

—Jacques Ellul<sup>2</sup>

As covenantal communication, preaching is always two-way. The hearer is always to be a worshipper. It is never preaching *and* worship. Preaching is the supreme act of worship.<sup>3</sup> Thus, listening intelligently and reverently is part of that supreme activity. Along with the internal work of God's Spirit, the effectiveness of preaching depends, in part, on the attitude of the listener. Prior to modern times there were almost as many books written on sermon listening as there were on preaching. This section is meant to help those who regularly hear the Word of God preached to take their covenant responsibilities more seriously. It also provides an outline of issues which the preacher should address in his preaching. God's people, whose stony hearts have been replaced with hearts of flesh, must cultivate the art of hearing God's Word preached. As the prophet Ezekiel looked forward to the New Covenant era God promised: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

### Dangers To Avoid

Every attentive hearer of God's Word must be on the lookout for idolatrous tendencies in the culture of which we are all a part. The apostle John was keenly aware of this danger when he issued this pastoral warning at the close of his first letter: "Little

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 345–53.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 229.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.



children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). The following themes are examples of some of the worst dangers in our culture to avoid.

As Paul states in his exhortation to the Roman Christians in Romans 12:1–2, world conformity is the default position of all human beings until they are redeemed: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Tragically, Israel displayed a central attribute of the unbelieving heart with its disinclination to hear God’s Word: “For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD” (Isa. 30:9). Under cultural pressure, exacerbated by the electronic environment, it is easy for believers to become poor at hearing the Word of God, as the writer of Hebrews laments, “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing” (Heb. 5:11).

### **Avoid Being a Consumer of Entertainment**

Among other unbiblical expectations of the minister in our age, the preacher is often expected to be an entertainer. Television and all the electronic and visual media have cast all of modern life in the entertainment mode. Neil Postman has described the medium as a metaphor: “Media-metaphors classify the world for us.”<sup>4</sup> We have moved from the “Age of Exposition” to the “Age of Show Business.”<sup>5</sup> Thus we are a culture which is regularly engaged by talk show and game show hosts. Entertainers have become the role models and spokesmen for our world. Celebrities lecture at colleges and universities. Their opinions on a variety of “serious” subjects are regularly sought. We have come to expect all of life to be entertaining. This may, unfortunately, color the way worshippers look at the preacher, as well as the way the preacher often looks at himself.

I have a book in my library which I received in a box from the library of a retired minister. I keep it with the spine turned toward the wall because it is titled *The Preacher Joke Book: Religious Anecdotes from the Oral Tradition*.<sup>6</sup> I comfort myself with the thought that I do not recognize any of the names of the contributors. I recently attended a conference at which the main speaker began with a lengthy joke, obviously to loosen up the audience, and assure us that he is, after all, a “regular guy.” It has also become a tradition for presidential candidates and even the president of the United States to appear on late night comedy shows.

Humor is a wonderful gift, but it strikes me that only in the Age of Entertainment would humor be an expected part of the preacher’s repertoire. When we think of the tone which ought to be set in the act of preaching, especially in the Age of Entertainment, we must conclude that it should be one of extreme seriousness. The writer of Hebrews sets worship in the context of coming judgment and the holy character of God: “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb.

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Loyal Jones, *The Preacher Joke Book: Religious Anecdotes from the Oral Tradition* (Little Rock, AR: August House, 1989).

12:28–29). As our culture entertains itself to death, we must attach to the preaching of the Word a solemnity which we rarely find in the modern world.

The analogy of the ambassador gives us biblical boundaries in this regard.<sup>7</sup> Preachers have been given a very serious message from the King of kings. We are to communicate as *his* messengers. As preachers deliver the message of reconciliation to sinners, they must speak in the words and way of the King who sovereignly proffers amnesty to a lost and alienated world. As we enter the very presence of our augustly holy God in worship, dealing with issues of life and death, we must labor as God’s people to be as unlike the “house of mirth” (Eccl. 7:4) as possible. All faithful hearers must expect this, and thereby encourage the preacher with their expectations.

Christians must never expect entertainment in worship—especially from the preacher. The proper mode of worship is the holy presence of our Lord. The committed hearer will look for substantive exposition of the Word of God. Exposition, not entertainment, is the mode of the preacher. That is the point of our favorite verse to prove the inspiration of the Scripture: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This is the profit we must seek from preaching in the Age of Entertainment.

### **Avoid Being a Connoisseur of Celebrity and Entrepreneurial Skills**

The power of celebrity is a uniquely modern problem. As historian Daniel Boorstin notes, celebrity is manufactured fame. It is all about image. Instead of the hero, who was known for his extraordinary character and deeds, the celebrity is a product of the Graphic Revolution. “The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name.”<sup>8</sup> The celebrity is known for being known. He has an impressive persona. This has created a great temptation for the church. If the celebrity has become the role model for the world, the preacher may be expected to be the same, an image of the modern leader—just an image. Thus, the church is at times almost as superficial in its expectations of the pastor as the world is of its celebrities, looking for the “nice” or “dynamic” personality.

It has been observed that the two vocational heroes of our time are the manager and the therapist. The ideal of the “professional” has become an idol of modern culture. This is no less true of the ministry. David Wells comments:

Technical and managerial competence in the church have plainly come to dominate the definition of pastoral service. . . . [T]he minister’s authority or professional status rides not on his . . . character, ability to expound the Word of God, or theological skill in relating that Word to the contemporary world, but on interpersonal skills, administrative talents, and ability to organize the community.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I owe the suggestion of this analogy to T. David Gordon.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image or Whatever Happened to the American Dream?* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 47, 61.

<sup>9</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233–34.

This is reflected in one of the premier journals for evangelical clergy, *Leadership*, launched by *Christianity Today* in 1980. Wells observes that eighty percent of its articles from 1980 to 1988 dealt with problems encountered by ministers, and thirteen percent were devoted to “techniques for managing the church. . . . less than one percent of the material made any clear reference to Scripture . . .”<sup>10</sup> If the pastor is truly called to imitate his Lord, who is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (1 Pet. 5:1–4), in ministry, one need only replace his title with the Chief Executive Officer to get a sense of how out of accord with Scripture the modern conception is.

Burton Bledstein chronicles the development of “professionalism” in its connection with educational ideals in the nineteenth century in *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*.<sup>11</sup> Bledstein demonstrates the shift in the meaning of “career” to include the idea of self-advancement and eventually to replace the Christian ideal of calling, which implies following the will of God in an area of service and usefulness.

Bledstein takes the ministry as a case in point, carefully documenting the emerging shift in ministerial attitudes beginning in the early nineteenth century. As the idea of career slowly replaced the concept of calling, a man’s lifework became *his* choice, and not God’s:

Far from setting an elevated moral example of clerical detachment, the minister often appeared to be an entrepreneur, privately negotiating the contractual terms of a successful career as he moved upward from congregation to congregation. In the course of an individual’s career, every congregation now became a conquest, a stepping-stone to the next challenge.<sup>12</sup>

Paul was careful to distinguish his own work from such: “For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness” (1 Thess. 2:5).

Wells cites several televangelists as the most “exaggerated example” of the professionalization of the ministry. Closer to home, however, is the emergence of Doctor of Ministry programs in almost every evangelical and Reformed theological seminary by the 1980s. With the growing displacement of the ministry as a “respectable” or desirable career, “status anxieties” led to an upgrade of degree nomenclature. “What had been the B.D. became the M.Div. in the early 1970s, and, for those seeking upward mobility, the D.Min. was shortly thereafter added to the arsenal of social tools. . . . the D.Min. was a lucrative new product to sell.” Three quarters of those interviewed expected more respect and more money for their efforts.<sup>13</sup> Along with the baleful effect of self-advancement, the professionalization of the ministry has led to an emphasis on leadership technique and attendant success as opposed to knowledge of the truth and its effective communication.<sup>14</sup> Theology plays second fiddle, if it plays any real role at all. The Bible has a lot to say about godly leadership, but the study of this was never the center of the theological

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<sup>10</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 113–14.

<sup>11</sup> Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 176.

<sup>13</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 234–36.

<sup>14</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 248.

curriculum as it often is today. While we need to be careful not to impugn the motives of men who pursue these degrees, or of those who have determined the nomenclature, the evidence points to a real danger, one with which the earnest minister must deal honestly before God.

The corollary of this new concept of the ministry as a career are congregational consumers, who expect ministry to meet their needs, especially when ministers are paid to do so. The church and the Christian ministry have absorbed such expectations from our consumer culture:

There are those who think in terms of paying the church and minister to meet their needs. If they are disappointed, they quickly look for alternatives, or seek to undermine and replace him. What the consumer looks for most is what the self movement offers, except in evangelical dress.<sup>15</sup>

Biblical expectations, which should be demanded by every congregation of its leaders, are often eclipsed by the new managerial emphasis.

The impact of professionalization on the task of preaching is profound:

If preaching, like the ministry, is now defined by the needs of the church rather than the fabric of truth in the Bible, . . . the pulpit is little more than a sounding board from which the Church hears itself.<sup>16</sup>

The pressure is on to sound “relevant” instead of challenging the idolatry of the modern world. Meanwhile, real needs, identified in Scripture, are often neglected or ignored. An analysis by David Wells of over two hundred Evangelical sermons covering 1980 to 1991, revealed virtually no attempt to account for “the modernity into which the Word was preached.” Instead, congregations are often left “vulnerable to all of the seductions of modernity, precisely because they have not provided the alternative, which is a view of life centered in God and his truth.”<sup>17</sup> That there have been some sermons preached in the 1980s which did address the problems of modernity does not diminish the reality of the problem of which Wells speaks. Perhaps Wells’s strong antipathy toward modernity yields an exaggerated critique. But, surely, in the face of the naiveté with which most Christians approach modernity, such a critique is necessary. Only after we have appreciated its general validity are we in a position to raise cautions about the particulars of the challenge.

Our self-oriented culture is the context into which the Christian minister must speak. The degree to which he imitates the worst aspects of professionalism is the degree to which his message will be muted. The preacher must insist as Wells frames it: “The Bible is not a remarkable illustration of what we have already heard within ourselves; it is a remarkable discovery of what we have not and cannot hear within ourselves.”<sup>18</sup> Only the

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<sup>15</sup> David F. Wells, “The D-Min-ization of the Ministry,” in *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age*, eds. by Os Guinness and John Seel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 187.

<sup>16</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 253.

<sup>17</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 253.

<sup>18</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 279.

faithful preaching of the Word by men who understand the times will bring about repentance in a self-absorbed culture.

The worshipper's attitude, combined with the expectations of the rest of the congregation, will either tempt the minister to consider himself, and therefore act like a celebrity or manager, or it will encourage him to be what God has called him to be: a minister of the Word. There can be little doubt that the professionalization of the ministry has led to a decline in preaching passion and skills. The less God-centered the church's view of the ministry and preaching, the more man-centered the sermons will tend to be.<sup>19</sup> What is worse, as the church expects the pulpit to meet its needs, fallen culture calls the shots.

The temptation to esteem the "famous" preacher is one of the greatest threats to preaching today, especially among those who esteem preaching. The preacher who has made a name for himself on the conference circuit, even though that may not have been his motive, makes the everyday preacher look drab and dull. There is no glossy photo in the bulletin, no recognition beyond the local church. This undermines God's basic institution. What he has provided for his people in the local church week after week, through thick and thin, is the greatest blessing of all—a minister who preaches faithfully each Lord's Day and pays attention through prayer and visitation to the ordinary lives of God's people. How can celebrity recognition be important in light of the message of a Savior who was crucified as a despised and rejected criminal?

### **Avoid Looking for Therapy**

In our day the Devil simply caters to an age-old addiction when he promotes the therapeutic. This same anthropocentrism was evident in Calvin's day. In seeking to bring a biblical concept of the church to expression in Geneva, he noted of his opposition:

they were entangled in so many errors, because they would not follow that form which God had appointed. . . . The first difference between true worship and idolatry is this: when the godly take in hand nothing but that which is agreeable to the Word of God, but the other think all that lawful which pleaseth themselves, and so they count their own will a law . . .

Instead, they "forge to themselves a carnal and worldly god."<sup>20</sup>

How much of our modern attitude toward worship reflects this same self-oriented pleasure quest? How many judge the preacher and his sermon in terms of the question, "Is it meeting my needs?" This is usually what the slogan "relevance" refers to. This, of course, is the wrong question. Believers should be asking, "Is the preaching faithful to God's Word?" and "Am I being changed by it?"

The market-driven church has as its motto, "Find a need meet it, find a hurt heal it."<sup>21</sup> The entire "self esteem" philosophy, which permeates every cultural institution,

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<sup>19</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 251.

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* [7:44] (1540–1563. Translation and reprint. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society. 1847. Repr. vol. 18) (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 298, 299, 303.

<sup>21</sup> Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 62–67.

reverses the biblical concern when it claims that loving our neighbor as ourselves is a call to first love ourselves. This falls hard on the central ethical implication of the cross: self-denial. The gospel message, from the modern perspective, is irrelevant by its very nature. It demands repentance from our self-preoccupation and a liberating call to a God-centered life rooted in the kingdom of heaven. As George Macdonald poignantly observed: “that need which is no need, is a demon sucking at the spring of your life.”<sup>22</sup> Expect and pray for preaching which will challenge and root out such demons.

### **Avoid Being a Passive Listener**

One of the great dangers presented by our entertainment and therapy culture is that they cultivate passivity. We are entertained or have our problems solved for us. Our participation is simply to enjoy or feel better about ourselves. In the consumer mode we are “programmed” to view everything, every situation, every person as a product or service to be consumed. We ask questions like, “What can this church do for *me*? How can this preacher make *me* feel better or solve *my* problems?” So we tend to sit, waiting to be entertained, waiting for our *needs* to be met. Even in the singing of fine hymns, worshippers are often not singing, because they are used to being sung to by a solo performer. But this is not the mode, position, or attitude of the true worshipper.

The cry for “participation” in worship is one of the most misdirected quests of worshipping communities. It is just the wrong response to the problem of passivity. It is often motivated by the desire to share the spotlight “on stage,” or to feel the excitement of an emotionally charged group experience. Covenantal participation, on the other hand, is primarily an inward reality. Outwardly it means being prayerfully engaged in every element of the order of service. This is especially true of listening to the sermon. “Hearing a sermon correctly is an act of religious worship.”<sup>23</sup> Physically the worshipper may be passive, but spiritually and intellectually he or she is called to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd in the ministry of God’s Word. This takes an intense effort, which challenges the “couch potato” mentality of our day. Listen to Pastor Kornelis Sietsma:

Hearing God’s Word is not only an activity of the first order but the only activity befitting humans in relationship to their God. A relation of equality never exists between God and His people; however that fact in no way detracts from the dignity or office of the believer. Therefore, when in the administration of the Word, this relationship between speaking God and listening man shines forth, then the office of believer is most beautifully displayed and exercised. Thus we are not called to find a liturgy in which preaching is minimized so that the congregation can be given a more obvious role. The congregation’s duty is to listen. Rather, we are to practice improving and increasing our ability to listen, so that the congregation may listen to the Word with all its heart and soul and mind. That is not a slight task.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Guinness, *Dining with the Devil*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> T. David Gordon, “Presuppositions Regarding Preaching,” unpublished manuscript, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> K. Sietsma. *The Idea of Office*. trans. Henry Vander Goot (Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1985), 99.

## Avoid Being Self-oriented<sup>25</sup>

All the problems that tend to inhibit proper worship, which I have warned about above, are rooted in a more fundamental malady: self-orientation. Narcissism is the logical outworking of sin in its most extreme form. Enamored of his own image in a fountain, Narcissus died of despair and frustration in his vain attempt to connect with the ephemeral object of his affections. The “Me Generation,” characterizing many in the generations following World War II, has unwittingly imitated this ancient god. In 1979 American historian Christopher Lasch published an alarming book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. He begins:

This book . . . describes a way of life that is dying—the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of the narcissistic preoccupation with the self. . . . Liberated from the superstitions of the past, he doubts even the reality of his own existence.<sup>26</sup>

Cultural critic Jacques Barzun observes: “Throughout our culture, the most visible trait is concentration on what is owed to the self.”<sup>27</sup>

Early in our nation’s history Alexander de Tocqueville noted a troubling characteristic of American culture: “The woof of time is every instant broken, and the track of generations effaced.”<sup>28</sup> Individualism, slowly loosed from a framework of Christian tradition, eventually ends in narcissism. The self without heritage, without purpose, without transcendence or transcendent values is left with only a self. We are left with self-analysis, self-discovery, self-awareness, searching for the “child within,” an endless quest to figure out one’s feelings and get “in touch” with oneself. We then turn to reinventing the self, as if human nature were infinitely manipulable. In school, “values clarification,” no fault grading, and self-image propaganda teach children that they are number one and should “feel” good about what once would have been called “selfishness.”

The self-fulfillment and self-awareness movement focuses on the self to the exclusion of an objective referent and thus leads to “privatizing” as opposed to the healthy self-reflection encouraged in Christian tradition. Many aspects of electronic media encourage “privatizing,” thus isolating the self from its context in the world and before God. The self-reflection of “individualizing” in Christian meditation, on the other hand, deepens the self in relationship to God and world. As Lasch points out, not all psychological therapies tend toward narcissism.<sup>29</sup> However, given the relativism of the contemporary setting, it is difficult to see what convincing objective reasons therapists

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<sup>25</sup> Adapted from Gregory E. Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 214–17.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), xv, xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Barzun, *The Culture We Deserve*, Arthur Krystal, ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 105.

<sup>28</sup> Barzun, *The Culture We Deserve*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 31ff.

can offer for relating to the world which will effectively counter the narcissistic bent of our times:

The mass media, with their cult of celebrity and their attempt to surround it with glamour and excitement, have made America a nation of fans, of moviegoers. The media give substance to dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars, and to hate the “herd,” and make it more and more difficult to accept the banality of everyday existence.<sup>30</sup>

I once imagined how glorious it would be to be Napoleon Solo or Illya Kuryakin in the 1960s television spy series *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, until I realized that in the real world of espionage there is no audience. Such are the aspirations cultivated by television. The very existence of photography tends to be self-conscious about how we look. The increase in medical labels for character disorders combined with a dizzying array of medical examination technologies tend to make us think about our physical and psychological well-being in a self-absorbed way.<sup>31</sup>

The literary movement of deconstruction reflects and cultivates narcissism by viewing the text chiefly as a means of reflecting the self, like the reflection in the pool of Narcissus. This is the way in which most Christians read their Bibles. They treat the text of Scripture as a mirror, rather than a picture, or a window viewing a reality transcending the self.<sup>32</sup> While seeking what the text asks as a response from the reader is essential to a true reading of the Bible, it is not the proper place to begin. By seeking personal guidance first and only, the reader misses almost entirely the objective meaning of the text itself (the picture) in its context of the history of redemption (the window) and our situation in relation to God’s world. The danger in this omission is multiplied by the fact that the personal application is often distorted and sometimes even contradictory to the meaning intended by the primary author, the Holy Spirit. Is it any wonder the church is filled with “need” and “feeling” oriented people when they look in the Bible for *themselves*? That is sadly just what they find, only the self, and not the Word of God. An equal and opposite error lies in discarding the mirror and failing to give in to the divine pressure of the text.

A typical example of narcissism is given in Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*. Nurse Sheila Larson, after much therapy to overcome an obsessively conformist upbringing, describes her faith as “Sheilaism.” While claiming to believe in “God,” she describes her belief: “It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other.”<sup>33</sup>

Personal choice is another theme of narcissism. The apotheosis of choice is a catch-22 for modernity. Choice, the unlimited menu of possibilities, is constantly presented as an ideal. Yet along with this comes a dark sense of meaninglessness as standards by which to choose disappear, and as history and meaning are deconstructed. With the loss of meaning comes the sense of not having any *real* choice. Our creations, especially the

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<sup>30</sup> Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 49ff.

<sup>32</sup> I owe this hermeneutical metaphor to Richard Pratt and T. David Gordon. Cf. Richard L. Pratt, Jr., “Pictures, Windows, and Mirrors in Old Testament Exegesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 156–167. Cf. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William N. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven, M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 221.



electronic media, seem to be out of control and overwhelming us with choices which lead nowhere, in a labyrinth of emptiness.

The center of gravity for late modern thought is inexorably the self.<sup>34</sup> Given the growing economic, political, technological, and psychological investment in narcissism, it would seem that Neo-Enlightenment alternatives will have great difficulty in persuading the self-satisfied of the validity of their agenda. Where the bankruptcy of Liberal rationalism will lead is difficult to tell. As long as people are sinners in the electronic age, the gospel offers the only sufficient and compelling alternative to the preoccupation with self which seems to continue on its ascendancy. Because the self only and always exists in relationship to God and the socio-cultural context in which he has placed us, modernity can only go so far in its attempt to establish difference as the ultimate category. I suspect that more moderate modern people will strike up a bargain with Neo-Conservatives and agree on a combination of lesser narratives to keep the barbarians at bay.

Nothing is better calculated by the forces of darkness to undermine true worship like its opposite: self-worship, which is after all the essence of idolatry.

### **Attitudes and Practices to Cultivate**

Elizabeth Elliot speaks wise words about our attitude toward worship: Hymns constitute a crucial part of worship, but not by any means the whole. In churches which use almost exclusively what are called “praise songs,” that part of the service is usually referred to as “Worship,” as though prayer, preaching, offering, and listening were something else. May I lodge a plea to those who use overhead projectors to make sure that some great hymns are displayed in addition to the praise songs? Hymns will get you through the night. . . . Everywhere I go I try to point out what a tragic loss is the disappearance of these powerful aids to spiritual stamina.<sup>35</sup>

*The Westminster Larger Catechism* (Question #160) gives hearers of the Word excellent instruction:

Q. What is required of those that hear the word preached? A. It is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

How seriously our forefathers took the responsibilities of the listener. In light of the following suggestions, meditating on the Scripture references provided by the authors of the *Larger Catechism* will be an important aid to becoming a better hearer: Proverbs 8:34; 1 Peter 2:1–2; Luke 8:18; Psalm 119:18; Ephesians 6:18,19; Acts 17:11; Hebrews 4:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; James 1:21; Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Luke 9:44;

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<sup>34</sup> See Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Elisabeth Elliot, “Whatever Happened to Hymns?” [WWW document] URL <https://elisabethelliott.org/resource-library/newsletters/whatever-happened-to-hymns-2/>

Hebrews 2:1; Luke 24:14; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Proverbs 2:1; Psalm 119:11; Luke 8:15; James 1:25.

While preachers should always be open to criticism, one common complaint, “I’m not getting anything out of your sermons,” should be answered with a question: “What are you putting into them?” The following is meant to help worshippers to put something into their sermon listening.

### **Come to Worship Prayerfully Expectant**

Prayer in preparation for worship is essential. It should be noted, as we will see below in connection with the Scriptures, that praying in the Bible, even in private, was with the voice. David in countless places in the Psalms says that he cried out to the LORD with his voice. The voice lends concreteness to our words and to God’s Word. Paul pled with the Ephesian church:

praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18–20)

As the *Larger Catechism* instructs, we are to come to attend to preaching with diligence, preparation, and prayer. Certainly, both diligence and prayer must be part of our preparation. Preparing with prayerful reading of God’s Word, especially on the eve of the Lord’s Day, will cultivate the diligence to hear when the public worship begins. We will come expecting to hear from our good and great Shepherd.

It must not be forgotten that as surely as preaching requires the Spirit’s presence, so hearing the Word is no less a supernatural reality:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:12–14)

### **Be Engaged in Listening as a Reader**

The regular habit of good reading will help prepare worshippers to be good listeners to faithful preaching. The very act of reading helps us to think more clearly, logically, and cogently. It helps the reader to develop depth through contemplating what is being read. It provides a counter environment to the simultaneity of the electronic media, which tends to bypass thought processes and undermine concentration.

The non-reader will be prepared only for content-light preaching. Like Bud Lite, lightweight preaching is nonfattening, and so it will not fortify the soul in Christian faith. This, of course, is especially true of Bible reading. Because the Bible was written in oral

cultures it is designed to be heard. That is why the King James Version has the subtitle “Appointed to be read in churches.” Reading the Bible aloud even in private devotions helps the reader remember what is being said. Thus, the sensibilities and habits of mind necessary for hearing sound biblical preaching will be cultivated. The disciplined Bible reader will bring a store of knowledge of biblical concepts, stories, and teaching to their listening. They will also bring the art of worshipful meditation to the pew, which is a requirement for engagement in biblical preaching. The Bereans profited from Paul’s ministry precisely because they were good readers of God’s Word (Acts 17:11).

## **Listen to the Voice of the Good Shepherd**

“The ‘book religion’ of the Hebrews, as Siegfried Morenz points out, lay in the Hebrew ‘genius for hearing’.”<sup>36</sup> In the modern world there are many other voices competing for our attention. This has always been the case since Adam and Eve listened to the wrong voice in the Garden. The environment of this world is cultivated by the voices of communication. The world now has a heightened ability to impose its environment of thought, one which is contrary to the Word of God, on the church. We must always ask what the voices around us are appealing to, commitment to the world’s idols, or worship, service, and enjoyment of our gracious God.

Psalms 1 is most instructive in this regard. The Psalmist frames his inspired poem in negative terms. The believer is distinguished by his opposition to the entire environment of unbelief. He does not walk in the counsel, stand in the way, or sit in the seat of the scornful unbeliever. He has a whole different approach. The world is the environment into which he is born. That environment is the given, default position of every human being. But as a person of the covenant of grace, he is part of the LORD’s invasion of history through the Seed of the woman. The Psalmist cultivates a “counter-environment” by meditating on the Word of God day and night. Through redemption the believer is to develop a completely different approach to God, and thus, to all of life. He is to work at the development of a Christian mind so that he can withstand and navigate the environment of this “present evil age,” as he bases his thinking on the written Word of God.

One of the elements of poetry in the Bible, which is largely lost on contemporary people, is that it was written to be read aloud as I have noted above. The correlation between the written and the spoken word in the Bible is essential to cultivating a Christian counter-environment. Its writtenness protects the Word from the corruption of the fallen mind. But the individualizing tendency of writing/print, while important in its own way, needs to be balanced with the hearing of the Word, as well as the seeing, touching, tasting of the Word in the sacraments. Along with preparation for hearing God’s Word read and preached each Lord’s Day, it is important to read the Word daily in private and family devotions. Catechizing, in oral culture, meant to teach by “sounding in the ear.” Oral instruction was the staple of ancient pedagogy. God has made us to know him through all the *natural* media of communication.

In listening to the voice of Jesus Christ, the committed listener must cultivate respect for his ordained under shepherds. Many in our day believe that reading the Bible on their

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Ong, Review: *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (William A. Graham) in *America* (Mar. 4, 1989): 204.

own is sufficient. But if we believe Paul's great statement: "faith comes by hearing" (Rom. 10:17), we will recognize the absolute necessity of the preacher in his office as minister of the Word. In fact, we would be hard-pressed to find instances of conversion through mere reading of the Bible *in* the Bible itself. What we find, rather, are people like the Ethiopian Eunuch, who need an interpreter, or preacher, to explain the meaning of a biblical passage from Isaiah. The worshipper must always take the position of the eunuch who, when asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30–31). Even the Scripture-searching Bereans received the gospel by *hearing* Paul (Acts 17:10–11). Only the radical individualism of our day leads us to believe we can do without the biblical teacher and preacher.

One of the dangers of the printed book as a medium is its tendency to undermine the authority of the spoken word and the authority of the speaker. This should never be the case in the church, because God has designed the means of grace, as well as the church itself, to overcome this democratizing, privatizing propensity. The Bible is the book of the church, not merely of individuals. It is addressed to the church as the body of Christ. God's Word, applied by God's Spirit, *is* what unites God's people in Christ. Long before printing was invented, this sinful tendency of the human heart was addressed by the writer of Hebrews:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24–25)

Those who hear the voice of our Savior should be prepared to obey all that *he says*. Whatever attitudes, ideas, words, and activities need to be repented of, changed, or practiced, the true worshipper will be ready to respond in repentance and faith. Remember that the biblical idea of "hearing" ( *'āzan* אָזַן ) is obedient response to the Word of God, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (1 Sam. 3:9). If he is the Lord of the believer's life, this should be the *only* response to biblical preaching. An unrepentant attitude tends to create bitterness toward preaching and the preacher (Heb. 12:14–17).

Worship, with its covenantal order—liturgy—is meant to provide and cultivate a counter-environment to the ordinary life of the fallen world. The Sabbath is God's antidote to idolatry, as it teaches us our connection with heavenly realities (Lev. 26:1–2). It is God's way of cultivating his call, in the life of God's people, to live vitally connected with Christ. We are called to re-enact the heavenly pattern of Lord's Day worship in everyday life. Careful attention to God's Word preached is meant to inculcate moment by moment hearing and heeding of the Word of God, as the applied Scripture rings in our ears throughout each moment of each day. Our attitude as worshippers, and thus as hearers, is summed up by the hortatory refrain of the glorified Lamb to the seven churches: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13:9). The power of the electronic environment is no match for this voice. The power of modern images in their tendency toward idolatry is nil for a people of the Word.

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# ServantStandards

## Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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by Alan D. Strange

### Chapter IX Complaints

1. A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency or error. It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject, by one session against another session, by a session against the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, or by one presbytery against another presbytery.

**Comment:** A complaint is sometimes confused with a charge. A charge is an allegation of an offense in life or doctrine, a violation of God's Word (and the secondary, or doctrinal, standards), that is brought against an individual, though it can be brought against a group of individuals as well, alleging that they together committed a violation of Scripture and Confession. A complaint, on the other hand, is a written representation, other than an appeal or protest (appeals to higher judicatories or protests also allege error on the part of a judicatory), alleging that a judicatory has committed delinquency or error. Delinquency generally indicates illegality or otherwise unacceptable behavior. An error is a mistake. Note that a complaint is not the charge of an offense: the judicatory, when a complaint is brought against it, is not being charged with a sin as such.

The basis for a complaint then, ordinarily, is an allegation either that an illegality or something unacceptable (such as a violation of the Westminster Standards or the Church Order) has occurred or that a mistake has been made by a judicatory in applying the Scriptures or constitution of the church (the secondary and tertiary standards). All this is to say that the basis of a complaint is a substantive or procedural violation of the Scriptures, Standards, or Church Order, *not* that a judicatory has done something unwise, unhelpful, or the like. Judicatories acting within the Scriptures and constitution have discretion, and a member disagreeing with a particular action of a judicatory (e.g., "the recording system that the session wishes to purchase is too expensive") has no right whatsoever to file a complaint. A disagreement with a judicatory acting within its lawful parameters is not subject to complaints from those second-guessing or disagreeing with the lawful exercise of its discretion.<sup>1</sup>

The second sentence of the section indicates the parties who, in the various judicatories of the church, have standing to bring a complaint. Standing involves the matter of whether a particular party or parties has the right and is qualified properly to

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<sup>1</sup> Alan D. Strange, "Conflict Resolution in the Church, Part 2," *Ordained Servant* (Dec. 2019), [https://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=786](https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=786).

bring a complaint. First, it says, "It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject . . ." This means that it may be brought, in the case of the session, by a member of the local church in question against the session of that church. It may also be brought by an officer, namely, a minister called by the local congregation as well as a deacon or ruling elder, the latter two also being members of the local congregation.

This means, then, in the case of a local church, that any members of the session (the elders and ministers serving on that session) may bring a complaint against the session. It is the case that the elders, together with the deacons, could bring a complaint, since they are all members of the local congregation: that is patent, of course. Additionally, ministers (pastor, associate pastor, teacher) who serve under congregational call and are thus members of the session may also file a complaint against the session.

This does mean, however, that the members of local church "a" would not have standing to file a complaint against local church "b." Neither would the members of the session of local church "a" have any standing to file a complaint against local church "b." As far as individual members of any particular local congregation are concerned, which would include elders and deacons but exclude ministers, they may not file a complaint against the session of another church; neither can a minister file a complaint against the session of another church in which he has no sessional service, but only in the church in which he is called and in which he has sessional service.

Having dealt with complaint at the sessional level and seeing that only members and ministers on a session in a particular local congregation can file a complaint against that session (when it comes to individuals who may do so, that is, other sessions can file a complaint against a session), the question now involves the presbytery. And the section indicates, as with a session, the one who has standing to file a complaint with a presbytery is one who is subject to a particular presbytery. This is taken to mean the body to which one is immediately subject.

For this reason, some have interpreted this as meaning that only ministers can complain against an action of the presbytery. Others have argued that since the presbytery, as the governing body of the regional church, is defined as consisting of "all the ministers and all the ruling elders of the congregations of the regional church" (FG 14.2), this would mean that, just as ministers can file complaints against a session because they are members thereof, so ruling elders can file a complaint against the presbytery of the regional church of which they are a part.

However, a called pastor or teacher is a continuing member of a session and for this reason, presumably, can file a complaint against it, even though it is not his court of original jurisdiction. It is not the case that all the ruling elders of the regional church are continuing members of the presbytery; rather, they are only occasional members, as commissioned by their own sessions to serve as commissioners at any given meeting of the presbytery. All ministers of the presbytery are continuing members and are subject to the presbytery's immediate jurisdiction. For this reason, ministerial members of a given presbytery are always able to file a complaint against complainable actions of their presbytery as those who are continuing members of the governing body of their regional church.

Commissioned elders to any given meeting of presbytery should also be able to file a complaint against actions of the meeting to which they were commissioned, in my view.

Is such standing to be granted, however, to all ruling elders, whether commissioned to a particular meeting of presbytery? This has been a subject of some debate. This commenter tends to believe that only ruling elders commissioned to a particular presbytery meeting, as well as any ministerial member, have proper standing to file a complaint against an action of that presbytery. I am also willing to concede that an argument can be made that any ruling elder of the regional church can file such a complaint. However, those who are unordained members of local congregations (this includes deacons but excludes ruling elders) do not have standing and may not file a complaint against the presbytery of their regional church.

Now the question of standing expands from that of the individual parties that may bring a complaint against the session or presbytery to that of “what other judicatories may bring a complaint against the session or presbytery?” One answer is simply that any session, regardless of presbytery, may bring a complaint against another session, and any presbytery may bring a complaint against another presbytery. Additionally, a session may bring a complaint against the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it and to which it is subject. While there is debate over whether a session may file a complaint against another session in a different presbytery, there is not debate about whether a session can file a complaint against another session in its own presbytery or a session against the presbytery that has jurisdiction over it. In both of those cases there is a clear subjection: both presbyteries would be under the jurisdiction of and subject to the general assembly. In the case of a session against its presbytery, it is subject to it, and an appeal may be made by either party, depending on the way the decision goes, to the general assembly. All that is undisputed and thus garners widespread agreement.

The controverted case, the one that divides opinion with respect to the standing question, is the one of “one session against another session.” There are those who believe that the sessions in view here need to be in the same presbytery; otherwise, the reasoning goes, this results in potentially confused jurisdiction, allowing a session in one presbytery to complain against the session in another and, subsequently, to appeal an adverse decision of the complained against session to that presbytery and subsequently to the general assembly. This would allow the complaining session not only to take something to the general assembly by a route other than through its own presbytery, which seems anomalous and disorderly, but would also, in effect, allow a session to complain against the action of a presbytery to which it is not subject, a seeming violation of the principle that a session can only bring a complaint against its own presbytery.

There are others who reject this logic, and, in recent years, the GA has permitted a cross-presbyterial complaint and has also resisted attempts to clarify (or modify, depending on one’s position on the matter) BD 9.1 by amending it to read “one session against another session in the same presbytery.” Both historic and prudential arguments have been made maintaining that there should be the right for any session in any presbytery to file a complaint against any other session regardless of presbytery. Attempts from both sides to amend the BD (making explicit either that any session can file against another or that they must be of the same presbytery) have failed, and the language remains “one session against another session” (GA minutes from 2021–23). Thus, the interpretative battle continues and likely will continue in the coming years.

2. A complaint shall first be presented to the judicatory which is alleged to be delinquent or in error, and this judicatory shall be asked to make amends. The complaint shall be presented

as soon as possible after the alleged delinquency or error, and always within three months, unless it is shown that it could not have been presented within that time.

**Comment:** A complaint against the action of a session does not start as an appeal to the presbytery, nor does the complaint against the action of a presbytery start as an appeal to the general assembly; this is how a judicial appeal works. Rather, a complaint, as an administrative action, shall first be presented to the judicatory which is alleged to be delinquent or in error. So, a complaint against an action of the session is first brought to the session, and the session alleged to be delinquent or in error is given opportunity to reexamine the action and either to defend it and deny the complaint or to agree that it erred or was delinquent and to sustain the complaint and make amends. The ones bringing the complaint have the right to ask for specific amends, but the judicatory, if it sustains the complaint, is not bound to those amends but may amend matters as it sees fit. It should here be noted that grounds for appeal of a complaint lie not only in the failure or refusal of the judicatory complained against to sustain, but proper grounds for appeal include amends that the complainant finds insufficient or otherwise unacceptable.

The complaint should be presented as soon as possible after commission of the alleged delinquency or error. In any case, it should be presented within three months after the alleged delinquency or error occurred. If a complainant seeks to present a complaint outside of this three-month period, he or she must justify to the court the granting of an extension, and the court should be clear on its reasoning if it grants an extension. In other words, a putative complainant, who wishes to file a “late complaint,” must show the reasons for why it could not have been presented within the three-month time frame, reasons that the court finds compelling and that prompts the court to take up the case. Otherwise, untimely complaints can either be found out of order or simply denied on the grounds of their not being timely. A ruling that a complaint is either out of order or is not sustained due to untimeliness is appealable by the complainants.

3. If, after considering a complaint, the judicatory alleged to be delinquent or in error is not convinced that it has been delinquent or has erred, and refuses to make amends, the complainant may appeal to the next higher judicatory having jurisdiction. The appeal shall carry the complaint to that judicatory. Appeal shall be entered at the earliest possible time. Before this action is taken, notice of intention to appeal must be given to the judicatory against which the complaint is directed. The complaint carried to the higher judicatory must be the same complaint presented to the lower judicatory.

**Comment:** A complaint is brought by parties with standing (if parties bringing such do not have standing, the complaint is out of order and not properly before the judicatory) to a judicatory. The judicatory to which it is brought must consider it, in a timely manner, and either sustain the complaint (and make appropriate amends) or deny the complaint because it is not convinced that it has been delinquent or errant as the complaint alleges. In the case of a judicatory denying a complaint, the one bringing the complaint has the right, should they choose to exercise it, to appeal the denial of the complaint to the next higher judicatory. This means that a complaint brought against a session by a member of that local congregation may be brought on appeal to the presbytery and, if satisfaction is not achieved there, may be further appealed to the general assembly (a lack of satisfaction may include dissatisfaction with the amends offered by the complained



against judicatory, as noted above). Complaints duly brought against the presbytery may also be brought on appeal to the general assembly.

The appeal document, which may contain reasons for why appeal is being made (see comments on BD 9.5, below), is not what will be chiefly considered by any appellate judicatory; rather, as the last sentence of this section indicates, and the importance of this can be hardly overestimated, it is the complaint itself that will receive the lion's share of the attention of the appellate judicatory: this is the reason why the complaint brought on appeal must be the same complaint as presented to the lower judicatory.

For example, a complaint filed against a session may ultimately be brought on appeal to a general assembly. That complaint will have appeal documents accompanying it that were its carriers to the presbytery and then to the general assembly. The general assembly considering it may give whatever weight it deems appropriate to the reasons contained in the appeals document, but ultimately its chief consideration will be given to the original complaint document. It is that document that the appellate court will either sustain, deny, or remand (see comments on BD 9.6, below).

4. When a complaint has been carried to a higher judicatory, the clerk of the judicatory which is charged with delinquency or error shall submit to the clerk of the higher judicatory the relevant papers, including a statement of the facts of the case arranged by date in the form of a chronology, and a certified copy of any minutes or other documents evidencing the alleged delinquency or error. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall give the complainant and the judicatory against which the complaint is directed reasonable notice of the time, date, and place fixed for the hearing of the complaint by the higher judicatory. Neither the complainant nor any member of the judicatory whose alleged delinquency or error is complained of shall propose or second motions, or vote in any decisions concerning the matter.

**Comment:** This section describes the details of the process in the appeal of a complaint. When a complaint has been carried to a higher judicatory, the clerk of the judicatory from whom appeal is taken (the judicatory charged with delinquency or error) shall submit to the clerk of the higher judicatory to which the appeal is brought, the relevant papers. Among the relevant papers is, minimally, a statement of the facts of the case arranged by date in the form of a chronology, a certified copy of relevant minutes, or other documents that may give evidence of the alleged delinquency or error. All this information shall be transmitted to the clerk of the higher judicatory with as much dispatch as possible.

The clerk of the higher judicatory to which appeal is taken shall notify the complainant and the judicatory against which the complaint was brought, of the date, place, and time when the appeal will be heard by the appellate judicatory. This is qualified by "reasonable," meaning that the notice for the time of the hearing of the appeal should be duly in advance of the hearing date, so that all parties (complainant and judicatory on appeal) can readily be in attendance because there is sufficient advance notice given for the adjustment of schedules. At the hearing of the appeal, none of the involved parties (the complainant and the judicatory complained against) may make motions, second motions, and vote on motions (which is to say, engage in any of the activities that characterize those who have the right to rule in a body). It is always the case that one may never sit in judgment in or on their own cases. This is true in administrative discipline as well. A judicatory whose decision is taken to a higher

judicatory on appeal may not be active in the way herein described (though they have privilege of the floor).

5. If a complaint against a session has been carried to the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, and the presbytery has rendered a decision, either the complainant or the session may appeal the decision to the general assembly. The appeal shall carry the complaint against the session to the general assembly and the general assembly shall adjudicate the case as constituted by that complaint. Appeal shall be entered at the earliest possible time. Notice of intention to appeal, and copies of the appeal itself, shall be given to both lower judicatories, and the clerks of those judicatories shall submit the relevant papers to the clerk of the general assembly. Reasons may be appended to the appeal. These reasons may include alleged delinquencies in the presbytery's handling of the case and other matters germane to the issues of the case as constituted by the complaint against the session.

**Comment:** In the case of the appeal of a complaint against a session that has been carried to the presbytery having jurisdiction over it, and the presbytery having rendered a decision to sustain or deny the complaint, either the complainant or the session complained against may appeal the decision to the general assembly. What goes to the general assembly, the second sentence makes clear, and is adjudicated by that assembly, is the case as constituted by that complaint. In other words, the appeal document, which is the carrying document, is not what the general assembly rules on, but rather, it rules on the complaint as originally brought, as noted above, that is now before the general assembly on appeal.

The appeal is to be entered “at the earliest possible time,” such a statement giving a degree of discretion on the part of the appeals court in considering its timeliness. When the appeal is filed with the general assembly, both the notice of intention to appeal and copies of the appeal itself should be furnished to both clerks of the lower judicatories (of the session and of the presbytery). Accordingly, the clerks of the two lower judicatories should furnish all the relevant documents to the stated clerk of the general assembly.

The appeal document itself, as noted above, serves to carry the complaint against the session to the general assembly; reasons for appeal may be appended to this carrying document, and these reasons “may include alleged delinquencies in the presbytery’s handling of the case and other matters germane to the issues of the case as constituted by the complaint against the session.” In other words, the appeal document, as the carrying document to the higher judicatory to which appeal is being made, may give all sorts of information, as long as it is germane to the complaint, reflecting circumstances and the like, matters that support the complaint. However, as noted in BD 9.3, the complaint carried on appeal to the higher judicatory must be the same complaint as originally brought, and it is that complaint, as noted in this section above, and not the appeal document itself, that the appellate judicatory must ultimately consider and render a decision on.

6. A complaint, carried by appeal to a higher judicatory, may be sustained; or, denied; or, remanded, with grounds, to the next lower judicatory. A decision to remand shall state whether jurisdiction in the matter is being returned to the lower judicatory, or retained by the higher judicatory.

**Comment:** A complaint carried by appeal to a higher judicatory (a presbytery or general assembly), by either the complainant(s) or the judicatory complained against,

may be sustained by the appellate judicatory, denied, or remanded with grounds. In the case of a remand, it is to the next lower judicatory, meaning that the general assembly remands everything to the presbytery, and the presbytery to the session, in cases in which it deems such appropriate. The higher judicatory may retain jurisdiction, which is to say that it may remand (send it back down) to the next lower judicatory but require that judicatory to report back to it about the final disposition of the matter. This is a way that the higher judicatory, if it wishes, may retain oversight of the matter until it is successfully concluded.

Alternatively, the appellate judicatory may choose not to retain such oversight and may return jurisdiction to the next lower judicatory. If a general assembly returns jurisdiction to the presbytery, the presbytery may retain it or decide to return it to the session in the cases of a complaint brought originally against a session. In any case of remand, it ought to be “with grounds,” which means that the appellate judicatory remanding the complaint should furnish the reasons for doing so (i.e., provide its rationale) and thereby give appropriate guidance to the next lower judicatory.

7. If a judicatory is adjudged delinquent or in error by a higher judicatory, the higher judicatory shall determine what amends are to be made.

**Comment:** In the case of appeal (from the session to the presbytery or the presbytery to the general assembly), the appellate judicatory, ultimately the highest one to which appeal is made, shall determine what amends are to be made in cases of complaints sustained on appeals. As noted, the bringers of the complaints may propose amends. Even as the judicatory to which the complaint is originally brought is not bound to those amends, neither are any appellate judicatories. Appellate judicatories are thus free to order the amends that they think most fitting in the case. In any and all such cases, if the desire for appeal continues until the final court of appeals, the general assembly will have the last word on what it deems to be appropriate amends.

[Suggested forms to use when filing a complaint or for an appeal are located on pages 174–75.]

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# Servant Work

## The Elder, the Session, and Leadership

Letters to a Younger Ruling Elder, No. 9

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By An Older Elder

Dear James,

Job said, “My days are swifter than a runner” (Job 9:25). I feel much the same. My good doctor tells me that my race is almost over. I thanked him for the good news. If a pauper knew he would awake a prince, why should he fear falling asleep? Teach me, Lord, to number my days! Your letters have been a singular blessing and encouragement to my soul. What little I have learned about serving faithfully as a ruling elder in Christ’s church I am humbly willing to pass on.

You asked about any advice I might have for working *as part of a session*. This is a vitally important topic. When it comes to the effectiveness of working as part of the session, nothing is so important as to take up God’s call to collectively *lead the people of God*. Leadership is now, and always has been, the great need of the hour. Far too little has been written about this. Shepherds must lead! “He leads me beside still waters . . . He leads me in paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:2–3). The call to serve the Lord as a ruling elder is a call to serve God’s people by leadership. I am convinced now more than ever before that what the church needs is a generation of humble, holy, God-fearing, Christ-exalting, Spirit-filled elders to rise up and lead the flock.

What is a leader? Office, title, position, rank, authority—none of these make you a leader. One thing, and one thing only, makes you a leader, James, and that is *willing followers*. When people are willing to follow you through good times and bad times by the very force of your godly example, commitment to Christ and Scripture, courage, faith, and love, then, and only then, is a leader is born. The church needs sessions who are willing to lead. God will surely raise them up. But you, and the session, must be ready to answer that call. As a session, humbly and sincerely ask yourselves this question: Are we leading, or are we simply showing up? Scripture and church history are replete with examples of great leadership. Such were the likes of Moses, David, Nehemiah, and Paul. Such were the likes of Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Machen, and Sproul. Such was preeminently our Lord and savior Jesus Christ himself. You and your session may never be called to leadership of that scope or scale, but the effectiveness of your service still hangs on your commitment to lead. I believe J. Oswald Sanders was right when he said that “churches grow in every way when they are guided by strong, spiritual leaders with the touch of the supernatural radiating in their service.”<sup>1</sup>

Sessions, in my experience, fall short in leadership by one of two extremes. They may abuse their authority by an unholy tyranny on the one hand, or by simply abdicating all

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<sup>1</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 18.

efforts at leadership on the other. Of the two, I fear effortless, lazy leadership is far more common today. Leadership takes work. And it is only when leaders lead that you will find a people who are willing to rise up and serve as well (Judges 5:2). No wonder Paul prodded “the one who leads” in Romans 12:8 to do so “with zeal.”

Zeal can be exhausting; and for that reason, many elders and sessions take the softer road of leading to nowhere but the status quo. “Pace yourself,” is their motto. While some wisdom may be found in that advice, I fear that sessions today are too often pacing themselves to death. Leadership has always been hard work, and spiritual leadership the hardest of all. Mark my words, the church has rarely grown except by the godly leadership of tired men.

God’s leaders have also been men of vision, courage, and action. Prophets in the Old Testament were called “seers.” The elder in leadership needs to be a seer too. He must not look upon the church merely as she is, but as the glorious bride of Jesus being prepared for that majestic return of her groom. The ruling elder who sees the church this way, and is doing something about it, is truly leading the people of God. “Vision leads to venture, and history is on the side of venturesome faith.”<sup>2</sup>

James, maybe one of the most common causes of failed leadership is when ruling elders simply expect that the pastor do all the leading himself. Yes, there are times when the Lord grants the pastor remarkable gifts of leadership. He, working hard to develop these gifts, becomes a great source of encouragement, growth, and service to the church. But sometimes this has not been the case. The leadership skills of the pastor may be undeveloped. Therefore, every member of the session must work at leadership, stirring one another up to the task.

Allow me to close this letter with a plea to *lead the flock of our Lord as an example of sacrificial, service-focused, Christian living*. That is the type of leadership our churches need most of all (1 Pet. 5:3). And the more that your life reflects the humility, beauty, and holiness of Christ, the better your leadership will be (1 Cor. 11:1). He leads the best, who follows Jesus the best.

Your soul’s well-wisher,

An Older Elder

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<sup>2</sup> Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 57.

# Servant Work

## A Tale of Two Exegetes

### A Review Article

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By Meredith M. Kline

*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, by Michael S. Heiser. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2015, 413 pages, \$14.99.

Heiser's *The Unseen Realm* is not aimed at deniers of the supernatural; it seeks to correct the ideas of primarily non-Pentecostal evangelicals, like himself, concerning the traditional understanding of the invisible heavenly realm and its inhabitants which all branches of the church have confessed for two millennia (chapters one and two).

Seeing the Bible through the eyes of an ancient reader requires shedding the filters of our traditions and presumptions . . . a mixture of creedal statements and modern rationalism. I want to help you recover the supernatural worldview of the biblical writers." (13)

"The Bible tells us of the existence of a realm our mortal eyes cannot see." This quote is not Heiser's opening sentence but that of Meredith G. Kline's *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*<sup>1</sup>. The two authors deal with the same debated biblical texts; however, they come to contrasting exegetical conclusions.

Heiser's underlying theme is a limited conception of a peripheral second-temple Jewish group: the geographical domain authority of rebellious angels.<sup>2</sup> This concept is developed by unfolding the results of years of research expanding his doctoral dissertation; though conversational in style to persuade educated parishioners to accept his perspective, the book is academic, containing forty-two chapters in eight parts, building an exegetical web of many controversial biblical passages, with lengthy footnotes and discussions of ancient Near Eastern materials; it is accompanied by an online supplement covering each chapter. Heiser elaborated his ideas in several subsequent books and online videos until his death earlier this year.

### Exegesis

The direction of Heiser's interpretational trajectory was set when he felt evangelicals who interpreted Psalm 82, who were criticizing human kings, dishonestly filtered the

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<sup>1</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* (GHHM) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Heiser introduces the concept of "geographical domain rulership" on page 121 in the context of a discussion of angelic powers mentioned in passages like Ephesians 6:12; the concept is based on his exegesis of Deuteronomy 32:8–9 in chapter fifteen.

text, so he “looked beyond the world of evangelical scholarship” to resources that integrated biblical and non-canonical texts (12). The foundation of *The Unseen Realm* is the non-canonical Book of the Watchers,<sup>3</sup> the first thirty-six chapters of 1 Enoch,<sup>4</sup> a Hellenistic period Jewish text popular at Qumran, which is the source for interpreting the phrase “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2 as rebellious angels, a view subsequently adopted by multiple, non-canonical, second-temple period writings, and currently a common academic position.

After arguing against previous evangelical interpretations of Genesis 6:1–4, Heiser promotes the 1 Enoch 6–8 view of Genesis 6:2 in which angelic beings (the “sons of God”) cohabited with “the daughters of man” and produced giants, whose spirits at death became the demons of the New Testament (chapters 12 and 13). In addition to their own sin of transgressing the boundary between angels and humans, the sinful angels corrupted humans by transmitting knowledge about making iron weapons of war and seductive jewelry, about practicing sorcery and casting magic spells, and about astronomy (108).

Heiser also argues for the common position that 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 rely on the 1 Enoch interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4. But these New Testament passages are vague in describing the transgression of angels: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4); “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). These texts could refer to demon-possession (GHHM 84–85), thus not being dependent on 1 Enoch. Even if these human rebels are demon-possessed, the focus in Genesis 6:1–8 is on the depth of human depravity that necessitated the flood. If the text is interpreted as portraying a purported angelic rebellion, why are the angels not depicted as objects of God’s wrath in the flood account? Heiser prefers an interpretational position that seems textually inconsistent with its context.

Heiser supports his interpretation of Genesis 6:2 by correlating the supposed cohabiting angels with the gods of Psalm 82:1, arguing that the psalm depicts God as judging the angels אֱלֹהִים (*’elohîm*) for mismanaging the earth’s nations they were assigned to govern. In both Genesis 6:1–4 and Psalm 82 his interpretation contrasts with that of Kline, who understands both the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2 and the *’elohîm* of Psalm 82:6 as human kings, in Genesis 6:2 as self-deifying tyrants<sup>5</sup>, and in Psalm 82:6 as God-ordained authorities of common-grace kingdoms (GHHM 37). For Kline, the term *’elohîm* in Psalm 82 can refer to living human kings based on Jesus referring in John 10:33–36 to Psalm 82:6 to show the Jews that humans could be called “*gods*.” Thus, Jesus thwarted their charge of blasphemy. Heiser, however, tries to support his position (page 268 fn 3, plus an extended defense in the book’s online supplement) that Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> Translation of an Aramaic term of Nebuchadnezzar referring to supernatural beings in recounting his dream as reported in Daniel 4.

<sup>4</sup> For translation and commentary of the Book of Watchers see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> As argued in Kline’s 1962 article “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4”; see *Essential Writings of Meredith G. Kline* [EWMGK] (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 63–78.

quoted Psalm 82:6 to indicate he was “superior to all divine sons of God.”<sup>6</sup> But, the Jews surely understood Jesus to be claiming oneness with the Father, not with angels.

Heiser postulates three angelic rebellions: the first by the snake figure in Eden who tempted Adam and Eve; the second by the pre-Flood action of the purported 200 Watchers (1 Enoch 6:6) of Genesis 6:2; and the third by a post-Flood group of angels from the Tower of Babel account (Gen. 11:1–9), also tied to Psalm 82. Based on God saying in Genesis 11:7 “let us go down,” good angels who accompanied Yahweh were assigned to control the scattered nations. That concept is based on Heiser’s understanding of Deuteronomy 32:8–9: “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.” Verse 8 supposedly indicates God disinherited the nations and delegated their control to the angels, the “sons of God”<sup>7</sup> (113). According to Heiser, his “seventy gods” of Deuteronomy 32:8–9 were later judged by God for corrupting the nations (Ps. 82), but he admits there is nothing in the Bible that would indicate how these angels changed from good to bad (116). He seeks support from the translation of Psalm 82:8: “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!” The last line is better translated as: “For it is you who possess all the nations.” Note, also, that the first line indicates it is the earth’s inhabitants, not heaven-dwellers, who should be judged.

Nevertheless, for Heiser “the concept of realm distinction was fundamental to the supernatural worldview of ancient Israel” (171). Heiser links realm distinction to Daniel 10, which describes conflicts of angels associated with the nations of Israel, Persia, and Greece (119). Palestine was a holy territory, in contrast with the rest of the world, during the Old Testament theocracy. Yet, Daniel 4:14 says the Most-High is sovereign over the kingdom of man; rebellious angels did not have autonomous control over nations in the way Heiser envisions. The Holy One is he “who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness” (Isa. 40:23). “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!” (Ps. 103:19–20).

According to Heiser, the concept of “geographical domain rulership” “applies to all nations of earth at any time period. All nations whose God is not Yahweh are under the dominion of lesser gods” (329, fn 22), so the concept continues through the New Testament period (322–23) and culminates in a physical military attack against Christians at earthly Jerusalem (370, 373). For Heiser, the angelic powers were not disarmed at Jesus’s resurrection and ascension into heaven but remain in control of the world’s nations until the battle of Armageddon (376). However, even if Heiser’s theory applied when the covenant community existed in the form of a national theocracy, after Pentecost the covenant community as church is no longer a nation but a global, non-political institution, so the nation-versus-nation-conflict paradigm no longer is an appropriate model.

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<sup>6</sup> The use of ‘divine’ in this quote is disconcerting when combined with unguarded statements based on Psalm 82 like “the God of the Old Testament was part of an assembly — a pantheon — of other gods” (11).

<sup>7</sup> The Masoretic text has “sons of *Israel*.” The Septuagint has “*angels of God*.” The ESV is a hybrid version. Since the Genesis 10 Table of Nations numbers around seventy and the number of Jacob/Israel’s family descending to Egypt numbered seventy, which would support the ‘sons of Israel’ reading, Heiser justifies his exegesis by appealing to Ugaritic El’s divine council, which numbered seventy (114 note 7).



In addition, outside the theocratic territory of Israel, Heiser sees the world as a demonic realm with hostile “gods” exercising dominion (343), not as a common realm where God sovereignly directs common blessing and curse. God, however, controlled the rulers of Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia while the descendants of Abraham were under their authority outside the holy land. Even in the patriarchal period, when rebellious angels purportedly also dominated the nations, God was the ultimate authority over Job and his friends in the land of Uz as well as over Melchizedek in Canaan. Likewise, the resurrected Christ directs historical events during the church age. Indeed, after the flood all inhabitants of the planet are subjects of the Noahic covenant, with God as their Suzerain.

Heiser adds speculative exegesis to prop up his theory. For example, since 1 Enoch 6:6 says the two hundred transgressing angels descended on Mount Hermon, he claims it is a counter mountain-headquarters of the heavenly rebels who oppose the God whose throne is on Mount Zion (chapters 25, 32, 33, and 40); Mount Hermon is depicted as sinister, even though, other than being mentioned as a geographical location, in the Old Testament it is only referred to positively: brotherly unity “is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore” (Ps. 133:3).

A revealing example of Heiser using scholarly insight but skewing it is his approval (371, note 3) of Kline’s translation of “Armageddon” in Revelation 16:16 as “the mountain of gathering.”<sup>8</sup> Kline takes Har Magedon as the name for heavenly Mount Zion/Jerusalem, location of the throne of the universe’s Suzerain. In contrast, because the term “Jerusalem” is associated with the heavenly mountain, Heiser claims the eschatological battle of Armageddon does not occur at the city of Megiddo, a popular view, but instead as a physical conflict at earthly Jerusalem (371–73). Kline views the battle as spiritual and located at the heavenly temple from Adam to the eschatological crisis, with an emphasis in the church age on the worship of God at Mount Zion (Heb. 12:18–29). Heiser claims to be agnostic on eschatology, though he does note disagreement with Kline’s amillennialism, but the detail about the battle occurring at earthly Jerusalem reveals what drives his whole book, since for him the “battle of gods and men” is where the rebellious angels who supposedly control the nations are finally defeated (373–75).

## Method

While the core of Heiser’s geographical-domain-authority-of-rebellious-angels thesis is founded, and founders, on The Book of the Watchers portion of 1 Enoch in a way that distorts the interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 and Psalm 82, his interpretations also raise many problems.

A major methodological issue of *The Unseen Realm* is Heiser’s handling of worldviews. Knowledge of ancient social and cultural practices that differ from modern

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<sup>8</sup> Meredith G. Kline, “Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium.” *JETS* 39 (1996): 207–22; included in EWMGK, 259–77. Despite undermining his position, Heiser does list GHHM in the additional bibliography for chapter forty-one in the online supplement to the book. While Heiser reports a voluminous academic bibliography, he does not mention any other of Kline’s publications besides the Armageddon material, even though many deal with Heiser’s topics.

life is helpful in appreciating details of biblical historical records or literary accounts like parables.<sup>9</sup> But care needs to be exercised in relation to intellectual concepts. Heiser thinks all biblical writers believed the earth was physically flat “because they lived at a time before scientific discovery proved otherwise. It’s that simple.” (online supplement to chapter 2). Not necessarily.<sup>10</sup>

More importantly, neither ancient nor modern worldviews are culturally monolithic, as indicated by current culture wars or different factions within ancient Roman or Jewish culture. Heiser claims that all biblical authors shared the same understanding of the supernatural realm, but his definition of “supernatural worldview” is restricted. It is not about the invisible heavens where God is enthroned among myriad angels or the visible manifestation of heaven in the shekinah Glory Cloud, nor about cosmological concepts which varied from the times of Moses to the Apostle John, nor about the locations of imprisoned angels or deceased humans. Biblical authors had different views of the supernatural to choose from. Sadducees did not even believe in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8)! Heiser restricts the supernatural worldview to the perspective of the Book of Watchers, that wicked, unseen angels corruptly direct earthly nations. That thesis is not established by his seemingly plausible, but imbalanced, biblical exegesis.

The book has other methodological problems. First, Heiser exhibits a strange literalism with respect to Satan. Despite Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 indicating that the great dragon is “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world,” he holds that associating the name Satan with the serpent is a second-temple Judaism and New Testament development (242 note 6). Thus, the Genesis 3 snake is not the Job 1–2 and Zechariah 3 “accuser,” or the tempter of Jesus, since the snake lost his position in the divine council and was cast to the underworld, according to Heiser’s interpretation of Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:14–17 (91 note 6).<sup>11</sup>

Second, Heiser has strange uses of typology. Another example of his literalism undermines typology involving the gospel: Heiser argues that the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is never treated in the New Testament as a picture of crucifixion or resurrection, since Isaac did not die; we should not make connections New Testament authors do not claim (242).

In contrast to not seeing typology in a canonical text, he fabricates a type from a non-canonical text. 1 Peter 3:18–19 is a difficult passage about Jesus going in the Spirit to preach, through Noah, to (now) imprisoned spirits.<sup>12</sup> In Heiser’s interpretation, Jesus is a

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Dutton, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> A flat earth as part of the standard cosmography of the Bible as presented by scholars “would have been unrecognizable to ancient Israelites.” William Lane Craig, *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Heiser takes the Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 passages as indicating the serpent-cherub was cast out of heaven at the Fall rather than as a result of Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection. If Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 do include references to Satan rather than Adam, it could indicate devil possession of the kings of Babylon and Tyre and support application of that concept to pre-Flood kings as well as kings of the eschatological crisis. See GHM 65–69.

<sup>12</sup> “Noah’s prophetic activity is described in 2 Peter 2:5 as a heralding of righteousness in the face of the world of the ungodly. According to the probable meaning of 1 Peter 3:19, 20, Noah performed his prophetic preaching as the mouth of the Spirit of Christ, that Spirit-Presence from whom all the true prophets were sent forth in the judicial administration of God’s covenant.” Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 209.

second Enoch who goes to declare to imprisoned angels that God will not change his mind about punishing them in hell, as taught in 1 Enoch 12–16 (335–38). This is another example of how the Book of Watchers is the driving force of *The Unseen Realm*.

Third, Heiser reshapes the traditional doctrine of sin by putting significant responsibility for human sin on rebellious angels as well as on Adam: “Contrary to the dominant Christian tradition the Fall of Adam is not the exclusive touchpoint for the depravity of humankind . . . the proliferation of evil throughout humanity should not be placed at the feet of Adam but of the Watchers.”<sup>13</sup> Heiser thus understands Colossians 1:20 (“and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”) to indicate that Jesus came not only to rectify sin introduced by Adam but also the sin of the Watchers responsible for the human problem.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, Heiser argues against a Reformed understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. For him, both angelic and human creatures need to have libertarian freedom from any necessary causation: “Free will in the hearts and hands of imperfect beings, whether human or divine, means imagers can opt for their own authority in the place of God’s” (68). God did not predestine sinful acts of his creatures. “The risk of creating image bearers who might freely choose rebellion was something God foresaw but did not decree.” (55).

Fifth, Heiser has confusing comments about angels existing before creation: “the heavenly host was with God before creation” (23); “heavenly beings, those sons of God who were already in existence at the time of creation” (41). He also misinterprets Psalm 74:12–17 as describing creation as “Yahweh’s victory over the forces of primeval chaos” (154) rather than as defeating the Egyptians at the exodus from Egypt; the psalm’s terminology such as day/night, summer/winter reflects Genesis 8:21–22, not Genesis 1.

Sixth, Heiser misunderstands the goal of human history. God created humans to guard God’s earthly temple from evil and build a holy race of ever-living humans which would be transformed into a glorified people entering God’s sabbath realm, a goal which is achieved after the Fall by the salvation provided by God’s beloved Son. For Heiser, the goal of post-Fall humanity is returning to Eden. The Old Testament is the record of a long war between Yahweh and the gods and between Yahweh’s people and the nations in order to re-establish Eden. That is achieved in the battle of Armageddon at earthly Jerusalem by defeating the beast of the Apocalypse who directs the nations against Yahweh’s holy city, a victory which topples the rebellious עֲלֹהִים (*’elohim*) from their thrones (376), thus enabling the transformation of the earth into the new Eden—the kingdom-abode of God on earth with believers as glorified members of the divine council along with angels (online chapter 42). This is not the new-earth-Jerusalem descending out of heaven.

Seventh, Heiser sometimes makes bombastic statements: “Any work on Gen. 6:1–4 that seeks to defend a non-supernaturalist view and does not seriously interact with the treatment of the original context for the passage discussed by Annus and Kvanvig via

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers & the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Crane, Missouri: Defender Publishing, 2017), 103, 105.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, 119. However, according to 1 Enoch, the Watchers asked Enoch to mediate for them with God that he not punish them, but God did not relent and Enoch conveyed to the Watchers that their doom was certain.

primary sources can be safely ignored” (Online supplement, chapter 13). The cited authors discuss Mesopotamian texts about seven divine figures who bring cultural knowledge to the inhabitants of the Tigris and Euphrates area before the flood and have partially-human descendants after the flood, so must have cohabited with humans, and whose evil members were driven to the abyssal regions. While such figures may be the background for the Watchers of 1 Enoch, this material does not invalidate previous non-Watcher interpretations of Genesis 6:1–4.

Eighth, what Heiser leaves out is surprising and revealing. Probably because his focus is on human physical conflict with angels at Jerusalem, he refers to Ephesians 6:10–20 only for the terms relating to angels in verse twelve, but he does not discuss spiritual warfare, probably because the armor of soldiers is metaphorical for spiritual realities.

## **Conclusion**

Heiser confesses that the *Unseen Realm* reflects “the struggle of being a modern person with a believing heart trying to think like a premodern biblical writer” (20). While many of the passages he deals with are controversial and his arguments thought-provoking and plausible-seeming, he ends up thinking like a 1 Enoch writer rather than a biblical author, and not enough like a modern tradition-appreciating, yet creative, researcher.

For the scholar familiar with ancient Near Eastern languages, literature, and culture, *The Unseen Realm* provides an abundance of detailed material and issues to wrestle with, grappling with whether Heiser’s avowedly incompletable mosaic of interpretational results is congruent with a redemptive-historical biblical theology. While the exercise might stimulate some refining of interpretational details, the endeavor is a constant struggle to identify and counter exegetical imprecision and distortion. Pastors, elders, and educated parishioners would find Heiser’s wide-ranging arguments challenging and time-consuming to carefully and critically assess.

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# ServantReading

## *The Trinitarian Theology of Cornelius Van Til,*

by Lane G. Tipton

A Review Article

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by Nathan P. Strom

*The Trinitarian Theology of Cornelius Van Til*, by Lane G. Tipton. Libertyville, IL: Reformed Forum, 2022, 218 pages, \$34.99.

A book's significance is found at the intersection of its content and its context. Lane Tipton's latest book is no exception. Regarding content, consider the subject. The most foundational theological beliefs of, arguably, the second most influential figure in our denomination. Love him or not—Cornelius Van Til shaped the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in undeniable ways. He is, therefore, unavoidable for those entrusted with carrying on our church's spiritual heritage and theological identity.

Dr. Tipton's goals are ambitious for a one-hundred-and-fifty page book. Some may find the densely packed prose *chewy*—difficult to digest but filled with nutrients. Pastors will have the easiest time grasping the content, but the book is accessible to engaged elders and lay people. So, why yet one more book on Cornelius Van Til? Dr. Tipton explains. First, Dr. Tipton sets out to reassess Van Til's image as a dangerous innovator. Tipton desires to illustrate that Van Til was a faithful synthesizer of figures like Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, the Hodges, and Bavinck (xii). Second, Tipton offers Van Til's theology as the best hope for an intellectually honest confession that God does not change, "For I the LORD do not change" (Mal. 3:6); nor is he "served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (Acts 17:25, xi). It is one thing to nod at those statements, but how do we hold them alongside claims like "God created the world" and "He entered a 'new relation' with Adam"? Tipton offers Van Til as our quartermaster in the struggle for intellectual integrity. Third, Tipton aims to lay bare the true foundations of Cornelius Van Til's apologetic project. If that is the job, what tool has he wielded?

The tool is both simple and infinitely mysterious. Simply put, it is an idea or a proposition. Now the mysterious part: God exists as three persons (who are themselves self-conscious, inhabit one another, and yet remain distinct, totally coincident with the divine essence) *and* as one divine substance or essence (who is eternal, dynamic, and absolute *personality*; fully possessed by each trinitarian person). The words outside the parenthesis represent a simple statement of the oldest and simplest Trinitarian beliefs in Christ's church: one God, three persons. The words inside the parenthesis are Van Til's distinctive development of the Nicæan tradition, building on Vos before him. We now turn to those distinctive contributions.

First, Van Til teaches that the persons are in some sense conscious in a unique way (72–73). That is, the Son is conscious that he is not the Father. So too, the Father is conscious that he is not the Son (73, fn 32). Second, Van Til, as Tipton summarizes him,

claims that God is absolute personality (75–86). To fully grasp what is meant by “absolute personality” one needs to read the full section. However, key to Van Til’s idea is that the one is also self-conscious. It is being “conscious” that seems central to the idea of the one as “absolute personality.” Here then is the tool that Van Til, and Tipton, offer to account for God’s relating to his creation without changing. There is no *change* in the being of God to enter into dynamic (i.e. interpersonal) religious fellowship with his creature *because* his eternal being is inter-personal religious fellowship. Additionally, the heart of Van Til’s apologetic is his construal of the Triune God as one absolutely personal (self-conscious) essence and three (also self-conscious) persons. With this construct in view, Van Til can assert “the impossibility of the contrary,” since, for Van Til, this construct has resolved the main problem of philosophy. According to Van Til, the one and the many are equally ultimate in classical Nicaean and Reformed theology.

How might we evaluate this volume? Tipton has served us well, providing the clearest summary of Van Til’s distinctiveness as a theologian and, therefore, as a defender of the faith. This small volume may join Bahnsen’s and Frame’s volumes to form a triumvirate of authorities on Van Til’s theology and apologetic. The book fills an important gap in the secondary literature on Van Til.

Van Til’s legacy has looked tenuous in recent years. Rising interest in older theologies has given the sense that scholastic sources are better suited for defending the faith. Controversial statements from Van Til’s most well-known publicists have also caused many to wonder, “Has the well been poisoned?” Tipton’s book offers promise as a timely elixir, stabilizing a movement nearing life support. As officers charged with maintaining the purity of Christ’s church, we must not ignore these matters. Tipton’s book is significant for understanding our past and for building a healthy future.

As content greets context, this volume’s significance is seen in three ways. First, the long-term stability of Van Til’s, and therefore Tipton’s, proposal is questionable. Professor Tipton is highly capable, wielding the technical vocabulary and avoiding pitfalls as he writes. For example, Tipton eschews the word “person(s)” when speaking of the one, opting for words like “personality,” “personhood,” etc., (one exception is p. 66) instead. His awareness of technical pitfalls is clearly seen in the section titled “Divine Simplicity and Trinitarian Personality” (72–74).

Tipton understands the shifts in the cluster of terms historically used in the history of doctrine—*πανυμ* (*panym*), *προσωπον* (*prosōpon*), *ὑποστασις* (*hypostasis*), *persona*. These terms were debated, and their specific meaning shifted throughout the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the ancient church. The concept of “person” undergoes additional redefinition in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology. The English word “person” and its inflected forms cannot fully communicate the nuances inherent in the genealogy of this term.<sup>1</sup> If very capable hands strain to wield these terms appropriately, what will happen when wielded by less capable ones?

Van Til’s ideas seem to swim against the tide of the ancient fathers who gave us our creedal form—one essence and three persons. For Van Til’s apologetic to work, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 298–304. “Now even in the case of humans this concept of personality fails to cut ice. . . . But it is even much less applicable in the doctrine of the Trinity. Here the term “person” has a meaning of its own” (302). See Stephen Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012) for trends in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Trinitarian theology.

oneness and threeness of God must be said of the same “thing.” Hence, it becomes vital that “consciousness” and “personality” can be predicated of both the one and the three. The fathers worked to make a sharp, clear boundary; eager to say the one was a different kind of “thing” than the three. They bled to preserve this distinction. I fear Van Til’s construction will diminish the essence-person distinction if taken up at a popular level.<sup>2</sup> The development of further technical terms could help. New vocabulary is unlikely to command adherence, however, given the differences between fourth- and twenty-first-century Christianity.

Secondly, and decisively more positive, Van Til’s trinitarian theology is the healthiest version of the social-turn characteristic of much modern reflection on the Trinity. In line with one of Tipton’s stated goals, Van Til has given us an ontology which more safely and securely undergirds the language of modern practical theology, e.g., “. . . he is a social God.”<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the self-consciousness of the persons while avoiding speaking of centers of consciousness puts “social God” talk on a safer, more secure footing (72–73). Van Til’s connection to historic, Nicæan theology makes his thinking safer than the social Trinitarian theology of the last hundred years.

There is yet a third reason this volume is significant for officers in the OPC. It is the product of a developing debate between former colleagues. In a footnote, Tipton estimates that Westminster Theological Seminary professor and fellow OPC minister Scott Oliphint “effectively redefines the notion of voluntary condescension in mutualist terms<sup>4</sup> that are out of accord with the Reformed doctrine of the covenant enshrined in WCF 7.1” (Tipton, 34, fn 28). In other words, Tipton believes Oliphint has departed, perhaps unintentionally, from the theological standards he has vowed to uphold. One can only pray that professors Tipton and Oliphint are continuing to pursue peace and purity at a personal level, even as words like those are printed for all to read.

This short book’s significance may be compared to the brilliance of a light. Tipton’s work certainly is brilliant. However, only time will tell if that brilliance is the life-giving, healing light of a therapy lamp or a foreboding signal of some foreign conflict destructively intruding into more peaceful quarters. Much like eastern European conflicts, Westminster Theological Seminary rivalries have a history of disrupting the peace of others. As undershepherds of Christ, we are obliged to guard the Church’s peace as zealously as we protect her purity. OPC officers will need to read this book to faithfully protect both. *Tolle lege!*

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<sup>2</sup> This loss in transmission can be seen even in Van Til’s dependence on Vos and Bavinck. Tipton quotes both as foundational for Van Til’s construction, and yet both of them seem to ground the personality of the One in its unfolding in the three. See Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics* (single volume edition), 60, where he says ascribing personality to the essence of God is inappropriate. Similarly, Bavinck says our use of the word person falls short of predicating “personality” to God. “The emphasis here in no way lies on the elements of rationality and self-consciousness . . .” (Bavinck, *RD*, 2: 302).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tripp and Tim Lane, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>4</sup> “Mutualist” is taken to mean that it posits *mutually* shared categories of being between God and man. Put in more popular terms, mutualists undermine the distinction between Creator and creature.

# Servant Poetry

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William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

## Fear No More the Heat o' th' Sun

from *Cymbeline*, Act IV

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great;  
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;  
Care no more to clothe and eat;  
To thee the reed is as the oak:  
The scepter, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning flash,  
Nor the all-dreaded thunder stone;  
Fear not slander, censure rash;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan:  
All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorciser harm thee!  
Nor no witchcraft charm thee!  
Ghost unlaid forbear thee!  
Nothing ill come near thee!  
Quiet consummation have;  
And renownèd be thy grave!