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First Congregational Church of in Kensington, New Hampshire / photo: Gregory E. Reynolds

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Editor: Gregory Edward Reynolds • 827 Chestnut Street • Manchester, NH 03104
Telephone: 603-668-3069 • **Electronic mail:** reynolds.1@opc.org
Website: www.opc.org/os.html

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OrdainedServant

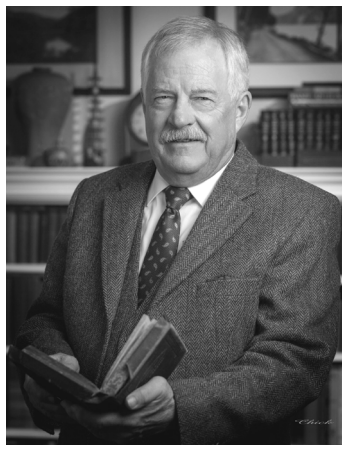
A JOURNAL FOR CHURCH OFFICERS

CONTENTS

ServantReading

REVIEW ARTICLES

From the Editor



This is the nineteenth annual printed edition of *Ordained Servant*, as we completed our thirty-second year of publication in 2024.

It has been another year of appreciating the self-sacrificial service of so many who write for and help publish *Ordained Servant* online and in print.

The cover picture is of the First Congregational Church of Kensington, New Hampshire. The church was formed in 1737 when a group separated from Hampton to form their own parish. Because church and town were one, this was the beginning of the town of Kensington as well. The present building was constructed in 1865 on land known as the "Church Parade," where the local militia had drilled in colonial days. In the eighteenth century the gospel would have been clearly preached in this church. These congregational churches today are mostly liberal in theology.

Once again, I would like to thank the Committee on Christian Education general secretary Danny Olinger, Alan Strange (Chairman of the Subcommittee on Resources for the Churches), and the Subcommittee on Serial Publications—Darryl Hart (chairman), Stephen Tracey, David VanDrunen, and David Winslow (retired)—for their continued support, encouragement, and counsel. I would also like to thank the many people who make the regular online edition possible: Ayrian Yasar, Linda Foh, Stephen Pribble, and the many fine writers without whom there would be no journal. Finally, I want to thank Paul Meyer for his meticulous editorial work on the final print text, and I would like to thank Jackie Oftedahl for her excellent final proofing and formatting of this printed volume.

—Gregory Edward Reynolds
Pastor emeritus
Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Manchester, New Hampshire

Servant

Thoughts

Editorials

The Huguenot Craftsman: Christianity and the Arts

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* January 20241

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

A Biblical View of Creation and Creativity

Wherever they immigrated, the Huguenots were welcomed for their industry and craftsmanship. These desirable characteristics came as the fruit of their biblical view of creation and creativity. Article 2 of the Confession of La Rochelle[2] sets forth the concept that God reveals himself in his creation as well as in the Bible.

> II. As such this God reveals himself to men; firstly, in his works, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures.
>
> VIII. We believe that he not only created all things, but that he governs and directs them, disposing and ordaining by his sovereign will all that happens in the world; not that he is the author of evil, or that the guilt of it can be imputed to him, as his will is the sovereign and infallible rule of all right and justice; but he hath wonderful means of so making use of devils and sinners that he can turn to good the evil which they do, and of which they are guilty. And thus, confessing that the providence of God orders all things, we humbly bow before the secrets which are hidden to us, without questioning what is above our understanding; but rather making use of what is revealed to us in Holy Scripture for our peace and safety, inasmuch as God, who has all things in subjection to him, watches over us with a Father's care, so that not a hair of our heads shall fall without his will. And yet he restrains the devils and all our enemies, so that they cannot harm us without his leave.
>
> IX. We believe that man was created pure and perfect in the image of God, and that by his own guilt he fell from the grace which he received, and is thus alienated from God, the fountain of justice and of all good, so that his nature is totally corrupt. And being blinded in mind, and depraved in heart, he has lost all integrity, and there is no good in him. And although he can still discern good and evil, we say, notwithstanding, that the light he has becomes darkness when he seeks for God, so that he can in nowise approach him by his intelligence and reason. And although he has a will that incites him to do this or that, yet it is altogether captive to sin, so that he has no other liberty to do right than that which God gives him.

Genesis 1 teaches that man is made in God's image and given dominion over the flora, fauna, and other resources of the creation. Man, therefore, is a creative steward, called by God to develop the riches of God's world. So Adam cultivated the garden in Eden and named the animals (Gen. 2). Even after the Fall, man continued to develop

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1098.

2 *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*. The French Confession of Faith, A.D. 1559; also known as The Confession of La Rochelle, A.D. 1571.

his culture. For the redeemed sinner, restored to a proper relationship to his Creator through Christ, the world becomes a theater of servanthood in which he serves God and his fellow man in various vocations. Thus, for the Huguenot, the creation was not a place from which to escape but a setting to restore and develop along biblical lines.

In 1938 Dr. Joseph R. Sizoo, in reflecting on Huguenot industriousness, remarked, "Our American culture was founded, not on the economic determination of Karl Marx, but upon the spiritual determination of a Christian faith."[3] Sizoo understood that Marx's teaching of economic determinism and materialism directly contradicted the Christian view of man and things.

To see a Huguenot workman firsthand, we need to consider a well-known French artisan of the sixteenth century, Bernard de Palissy (1510–1589). M. de Lamartine provides us with a perfect model of the Huguenot craftsman in his biography of Palissy titled *Palissy the Huguenot: A True Tale* (New York, 1864). His description of Palissy begins as follows: "He is a patriarch of the workshop, showing how to exalt and ennoble any business, however trivial, so that it has labor for its means, progress and beauty for its motive, and the glory of God for its end."[4]

Palissy lived in Saintes, a town just south of La Rochelle on the Charente River. This region of Saintonge in southwest France had been a place of refuge for the young Jean Calvin. The same preacher and martyr who had encouraged Calvin to use his writing gifts for the Lord, Philibert Hamelin, also encouraged Palissy to use his artistic gifts for the same grand purpose.[5]

It is noteworthy that Palissy faithfully pursued his calling during a period of intense religious persecution. Many of his friends endured torture for Christ.[6] Palissy himself appeared on a list of preachers in the despised Huguenot church.[7] At one point he was arrested and imprisoned for his faith.[8] Living for Christ and pursuing one's earthly calling were never at odds for the Huguenot.

Since Palissy's God was the Creator of the universe, "the Sovereign Architect,"[9] the young craftsman took his inspiration from the Bible. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 warned him not to bury his talent but to use it for God's glory.[10] Palissy took to heart the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might."[11] After reading the account of God's inspiration of the tabernacle craftsmen Bezaleel and Aholiab in Exodus 15, Palissy declared, "Then I reflected, that God had gifted me with some knowledge of drawing, and I took courage in my heart and besought him to give me wisdom and skill."[12] Palissy viewed all he did as a service to his Savior.[13]

Pottery was raised to a fine art in the deft hands of Palissy. His title was "Worker in Earth, and Inventor of Rustic Small Modellings."[14] Known as "Palissy ware" today, his ceramic pieces depict subtly drafted, bright-colored plants and animals, such as snakes, lobsters, turtles, and crabs found along the French shores, forests, and countryside where he loved to roam and think.[15]

In his day, Palissy was widely recognized as a consummate natural philosopher. *Discourses on Natural Objects* was the best known among his many treatises describing and organizing the flora and fauna of his native land.[16] He read and

3 Dr. Joseph R. Sizoo, "The Huguenot Contribution to American Democracy," Huguenot and Historical Association of New Rochelle commemorative address (Huguenot and Historical Association of New Rochelle, NY, 1938), 7.

4 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter, A True Tale* (American Sunday School Union, 1864), 1.

5 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 81.

6 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 24.

7 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 81.

8 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 132.

9 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 14.

10 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 1.

11 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 14.

12 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 24.

13 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 93.

14 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 93.

15 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 93.

16 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 189.

admired the great scientists of his day.[17]

Palissy labored arduously to the end of his life. "Old age," he tells us, "pressed me to multiply the talents which God had given me," and he desired to "bequeath them to posterity."[18] Today many of his works are displayed in the finest museums in the world.

In old age Palissy was imprisoned in the Bastille and sentenced to be burned for his faith. He commented that prison walls could not conceal him from the sight of God. In God's providence he died a natural death before his sentence could be executed. His final words were, "I am ready to yield up my life for the glory of God."[19]

It is interesting to note that Paul Revere, best known today for his patriotism, was better known in his day as a silversmith and engraver. His father, Apollos Revoire Romagnien, was a Huguenot immigrant and goldsmith.[20]

The much-maligned "Protestant work ethic" —often blamed for the wanton waste and destruction of natural resources and for conspicuous materialism—only becomes a curse when separated from the Protestant faith that spawned it. A capitalism bereft of a commitment to biblical stewardship, and lacking a sense of God's calling, creates the problems—not Protestantism. Without the biblical idea of calling, industry and creativity tend to deteriorate to the level expressed by some modern art; in its introverted quest for self-expression, such art is appreciated by few and understood by almost no one.

Huguenot Craftsmanship in New Rochelle

The Huguenots brought the creativity of their forefathers to New Rochelle. Lucien Fosdick says of the early settlers, "Every household became a little industrial colony. Those who had never before laboured, now learned to do so, and hardships were cheerfully borne."[21] Although not wealthy, these French Protestants were cultivated in their taste and enjoyed more comforts from their industry than most of their contemporaries.[22] The famous Boston businesswoman and diarist, Sarah Kemble Knight (1666–1727), visited New Rochelle during her trip to New York City in 1704. She remarked in her journal that she was "greatly impressed with the neatness of the houses and fields, and the cleanliness and comfort of the inns."[23]

It is amazing what an impressive community these early New Rochellians developed out of practically nothing in a short period of time. John Machett, an elder in the French church, died in 1694, only six years after settling in New Rochelle. In that brief time, he had built a stone house and another wood frame dwelling. He also left a partially finished ship.[24] A perusal of Seacord's *Biographical Sketches*[25] reveals Andre Armaud, a sail maker; Jean Contaut, a chair maker; Jeremiah Chardavoire, a tailor; and Francois Coqcillet, a blacksmith. In whatever line of work he found himself, the Huguenot was an industrious craftsman.

Even today the standing architecture of New Rochelle reflects this emphasis on quality. Nowhere is a more diversified and interesting domestic architecture to be found. The Presbyterian Church of New Rochelle's Pintard Avenue edifice is a monument to Huguenot craftsmanship. The manse, known as the Lewis Pintard House, is one of the oldest buildings in the area, predating 1710. Its dignified simplicity captures the Huguenot spirit. Pintard, a patriot and publisher whose lineage can be traced to La Rochelle, came to

17 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 192.

18 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 189.

19 M. de Lamartine, *Palissy the Huguenot Potter*, 201.

20 Albert Q. Maisel, "The French Among Us" in *The Reader's Digest* (Dec. 1955), 109.

21 Lucien J. Fosdick, *The French Blood in America* (Rochelle Press Almanac, 1880), 409.

22 Fosdick, *The French Blood in America*, 410–411.

23 Henry Darlington, Jr., "The Significance of New Rochelle as a Huguenot Settlement," in *Huguenot Refugees in the Settling of Colonial America* (Huguenot Society of America, 1985), 235.

24 Westchester County, NY, *Book of Wills*, Liber B, 58.

25 Morgan H. Seacord, *Biographical Sketches and Index of the Huguenot Settlers of New Rochelle* (The Huguenot and Historical Association of New Rochelle, 1941).

New Rochelle in 1774 and resided in the home (formerly the Vallade Farm) until his death in 1818.[26] The church building itself, a colonial reproduction designed by the famous American architect John Russell Pope, was completed in 1928. It includes portions of its eighty-year-old predecessor as well as the original building built in 1697. Considered one of the most beautiful church buildings in the nation, it was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1979.[27]

The Huguenots harnessed the creative impulse to reflect God's glory and to serve their fellowmen by fostering the enjoyment of their Creator in this world. On the anniversary of the Huguenot settlement in New Rochelle (1988), Huguenot craftsmanship is another wonderful testimony to the fruitfulness of their religious faith. Ⓢ

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

26 Seacord, *Biographical Sketches*, 44.

27 George M. Walsh, "Church Manse Wins Landmark Status," *The Standard-Star* (Sept. 21, 1979), 4.

Seven Deadly Denials: A Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:12–19

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant Online* March 2024[1]

By Gregory Edward Reynolds

"The Body of Jesus has been discovered in Jerusalem." That is what a 2007 so-called documentary claimed. This claim was nearly two thousand years old. The original story appears in Matthew 28:11–15, "Satan's Great Commission," when the soldiers were commissioned to perpetrate the lie that the disciples had stolen the body. But unbelievers properly understand that the historic resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is foundational to genuine Christian faith. This is the great fact standing at the center of redemptive history. Paul uses the logic of negative consequences to establish that centrality. For example, if you do not do well in school, you cannot read, write, get a job, or live well. God's Word confronts us with the awful logic of denying the historical reality of the resurrection. These deadly denials reveal seven life-saving affirmations.

1. If You Deny the Resurrection, then Christ Is Not Risen [vv. 12–13]

If there is no such thing as resurrection, then the primary consequence of such a denial is that there is no resurrection of Christ and thus no gospel—no good news for the nations. The concept of resurrection was foreign to the Hellenistic mind, as it is now for the modern mind; it is not among ideas that are plausible in our cultural mindset. Science and human experience have no room for such concepts—dead men do not rise. It was not essentially different in Paul's day—"because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1109.

worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . ." (Rom. 1:25). The entire gospel is based on the reality of resurrection, especially Christ's resurrection; without it everything crumbles—there is no Christianity. Christianity is not a philosophy or a lifestyle, but rather the story of redemption by the true and living God in history—our history. An empty tomb proves nothing, as Satan's great commission proves; Christ's resurrection does!

Furthermore, denial of Christ's resurrection is a denial of his lordship. To say, "He is risen" means "Jesus is Lord." Anything else is "another gospel." This is the essence of biblical religion: God saves sinners through Jesus Christ in history. Christ's death and resurrection are the only way. Trusting his lordship and believing in the sin-atoning value of his death and the final victory of the historical resurrection saves us miserable sinners from sin and death.

2. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then Preaching Is Meaningless [v. 14a]

The words of gospel preachers are empty unless there is an empty tomb and a risen Christ. The apostolic message is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But if there was no historical resurrection, then the message is mere "campaign rhetoric." Much modern preaching since the Enlightenment is "religious double talk"—Resurrection is merely a primitive superstition but represents a therapeutic help.

Biblical preaching throughout the entire Bible is based on God acting in history, intruding into his world. Noah and the flood, Moses and the exodus, the prophets and the exile; in all of these epochs, historic hope was proffered—public proclamation of what God has done and will do in history. True preaching is not a subjective psychological tool of survival. Based on God's Word, it is never meaningless.

3. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then Faith Is Meaningless [v. 14b]

Empty or vain preaching makes meaningless, empty, futile faith; there is nothing worse than empty promises—like bad checks, broken contracts, broken marriage vows. This is tantamount to believing in nothing. Such faith as a mere psychological benefit is just that—empty! The slogan "hope and change" based on mere wishes is a disaster.

This is biblical faith as Hebrews 11:1 teaches us: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). True biblical faith is not a subjective feeling or mood but trust in God's acts and promises, both present and future. It is only as good as its object. True faith believes that God laid our sins on his sinless Son and raised him from the dead to be our everlasting head.

The world believes only what it can see and control. Christian faith trusts in the God we cannot see, but through the agency of his Word and Spirit. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb. 11:3). So Paul, "we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

4. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then the Apostles Are Liars [v. 15]

The text says that if there was no historical resurrection of Christ, then the apostles are frauds—literally "pseudo-martyrs," false witnesses. Apostles are public witnesses of a fact. If what they claim happened did not occur, then it is not fact but a falsehood, a lie, and they are "false witnesses," like Elmer Gantry. The word "found" implies an evidentiary or judicial standard. The word for preaching describes the apostles as heralds, not orators. The herald was tasked with publicly announcing the message of the king, nothing more, nothing less. Paul is affirming that Jesus is the king whose infallible message he is proclaiming. The world wants to reinforce the official talking point of the

temple officials, that the disciples stole the body while the guards were asleep (Matt. 28:13). The lie of the elders and guards undermines the apostles' true calling as ambassadors of good news. Objective reality is being declared in the gospel. The integrity of the apostolic message was always an issue in the ancient world, as it is in ours. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of this: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Th. 2:13). It is either true or it is not. If it is merely an "encouraging myth," then it is bad news. The apostles were called to be truthful witnesses of Jesus's resurrection—they "must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:22); "this Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

5. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then We Are Still Dead in Our Sins [vv. 16–17]

The entire purpose of the incarnation of the Messiah was to free God's elect from the guilt of their sins and consequent eternal death. Without the resurrection of Christ there can be no atonement for sin, undermining God's plan to satisfy the demands of his justice. The phrase "you are still in your sins" means that we would still remain united to the first Adam, "dead in sin," and sentenced to everlasting condemnation.

Faith is "futile" (μάταιος, *mataios*, is a different word from "empty" or "vain" in v. 14, which is κενός, *kenos*); it is worthless—that is, it cannot take hold of the worth of Christ's sacrifice. It achieves nothing; we remain guilty before God. But faith rooted in the historic resurrection "will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:24–25). "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption" (Ps. 16:10). The historic resurrection of Christ is absolutely necessary for the satisfaction of God's justice.

But now we are no longer dead in sin; we are new creatures in Christ—no longer "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1–3) but now made alive in Christ as a "new creation," part of a new humanity (2 Cor. 5:17).

6. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then Dead Christians Are Destroyed [v. 18]

Destruction here is everlasting. Death is the end and leads to hell and outer darkness. Those who died in Christ simply perish without hope. This is contrary to God's promise that death is the doorway into the paradise of God's presence. Paul is assured of the glorious life to come: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1:21–23). "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

7. If You Deny the Resurrection, Then Hope Is Limited to This Life [v. 19]

Without Christ's resurrection, the church is hopeless and to be pitied; it is just like the world, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). We are pitiable fools, not because we could be having fun instead of denying ourselves but because we have believed a mirage—all we have of blessings are the imperfect and temporary ones of this life. So says the apostle: "What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32). In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher uses this idea positively, "that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man" (Eccl. 3:13, cf. 2:24, 26; 5:18, 20; 8:15; 9:7). He commends our enjoyment of God's temporary blessings in a fallen world as a kind of foretaste of the consummate blessings the believer anticipates. But Paul is lamenting the idea of these blessings being all there is.

The logic of unbelief makes the fallen human mind, and its fallen imagination, the final judge of truth (1 Cor. 15:12). Unbelief says resurrection

is impossible, unthinkable; this is the plausibility structure of unbelief. Technology makes this more credible as it focuses us on the surface of temporary realities. Control is the issue. Given enough research and development, we can overcome all the maladies of living in a fallen world. But who is the master of your future if you are doomed? "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). The lie that this is all there is, and that the empty tomb can be explained in human terms, is the intellectual milieu in which we live.

The logic of faith is the only hope of Paul's bold apostolic assertion (v.20), "but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead," and we long for this future: "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23). The eschatological goal of God is at stake because we seek "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. . . . For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb. 11:10; 13:14).

Conclusion

Notice that Paul is addressing the church not the unbelieving world; to the Corinthian church he asks, "How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12). Remember, people of God, what faith is: "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Your temptation is to believe that the only reality is the city in which you live. The atmosphere of thought surrounding us seeks to impinge on our beliefs and practices; the ubiquity of electronic means exacerbates the temptation.

All seven deadly denials are the opposite of seven faith affirmations. Listen! Because Christ is risen, the preaching of God's Word is true and can be trusted and depended upon; faith is well placed on the proper object, Jesus the risen Christ and the triune God; the apostles and their gospel message are trustworthy; your sins are covered by the pure righteousness of your Savior; and finally, dead Christians will be raised from the dead someday, and so will you.

Is this your hope? Romans 10:9 says, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." I plead with you to make it so. Christian, live like a new creature in Christ: "everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). ©

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

Seeing Red

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By Gregory E. Reynolds

I was startled recently upon reading of the baptism of Jesus by John in Mark 1:11: "And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" While this declaration itself is profoundly startling, I was startled in a less important way by the fact that the heavenly declaration of the living God is not in red letters. Why? Unfortunately, the ESV I use on my iPad is the ubiquitous red-letter version. While the fondness of many for this version is well meant—just as its nineteenth-century originator, Louis Klopsch, was well intentioned—I believe that there is a hidden danger lurking here. To me—and I am sure I am not alone—the danger is obvious: the words of the incarnate Son seem more important than the rest of the Bible. This is patently not true, since the entire Bible is inspired by the Spirit of the Son, as we shall see.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1120.

But first I would like to briefly look at the origin of the red-letter Bible. Here is what Steve Eng says:

> It is a surprisingly recent innovation, instigated by Louis Klopsch (1852–1910), an enterprising immigrant journalist. . . . By 1890 he was American editor of the British weekly, The Christian Herald. . . . Then on June 19, 1899, while composing an editorial, his eye fell upon Luke 22:20: "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which I shed for you." Seizing upon the symbolism of blood, Klopsch asked Dr. Talmage if Christ's words could not be printed in red. His mentor replied: "It could do no harm and it most certainly could do much good." . . . Red letters are especially useful in the King James Version and in other translations where quotation marks are not used. There are also those super-intricate quotations-within-quotations (some of them four times removed), where the red letters are crucial for separating the words of Christ from surrounding text.[2]

The evangelical publisher Crossway pinpoints the first publication:

> The first red-letter New Testament was published in 1899, and the first red-letter Bible followed two years later.[3]

Crossway goes on to defend the red-letter New Testament. But by emphasizing the extensive words of Jesus, the incarnate Christ, mostly in the four gospels, the words of the eternal Word are unwittingly diminished. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:14). The Son is the eternal Word, the second person of the Trinity. Prior to the incarnation he is intimately involved in the history of redemption in the Old Testament. Jude asserts this when he says, "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 1:5). Paul reminds us similarly:

> For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. *For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ*. (1 Cor. 10:1–4, emphasis added)

The capstone of my argument against the red-letter version is revealed by Peter:

> Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time *the Spirit of Christ in them* was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Pet. 1:10–12, emphasis added)

So, the Spirit of Christ inspired the old-covenant prophets, demonstrating that these words are as much Christ's as are his words in his humanity; and they bear the same authority.

Klopsch explained what he believed to be one main advantage of the red-letter version:

> The plan also possesses the advantage of showing how frequently and how extensively, on the Authority of Christ himself, the authenticity of the Old Testament is confirmed, thus greatly facilitating comparison and verification, and enabling the student to trace the connection between the Old and

2 Steve Eng, "The Story Behind: Red Letter Bible Editions," International Society of Bible Collectors, (Bible Collectors World, Jan/Mar 1986), http://www.biblecollectors.org/articles/red_letter_bible.htm. Reprinted by permission of *Triads Quarterly*.

3 "The Origins of the Red-Letter Bible," March 23, 2006, by Crossway, https://www.crossway.org/articles/red-letter-origin/.

> the New, link by link, passage by passage.[4]

He goes on to make an argument for the red-letter Bible that actually undermines his case:

> In the Red Letter Bible, more clearly than in any other edition of the Holy Scriptures, it becomes plain that from beginning to end, the central figure upon which all lines of law, history, poetry and prophecy converge is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. He expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself and the Divine plan for man's redemption, and the Red Letter Bible indicates and emphasizes this Divine exposition and personal revelation at each successive stage, making them so clear that even the simplest may understand. It sheds a new radiance upon the sacred pages, by which the reader is enabled to trace unerringly the scarlet thread of prophecy from Genesis to Malachi. Like the Star which led the Magi to Bethlehem, this light, shining through the entire Word, leads straight to the person of the Divine Messiah, as the fulfillment of the promise of all the ages.[5]

Jesus's own hermeneutic demonstrates that the TANACH (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) reveals him in his suffering and glory (Luke 24:27, 44).

> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

Furthermore, Paul's words, as well as all the New Testament writers', are of equal authority with Jesus's because it is his Spirit that inspired them. Jesus promised this before his death:

> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–14)

Peter equates Paul's writings with Scripture:

> And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, *as they do the other Scriptures*. (2 Pet. 3:15–16, emphasis added)

My initial thoughts were spurred on by the realization that the words from heaven at Jesus's baptism in Mark 1:11 were not in red, and this gave rise to a concluding thought: Even if those words, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," were in red, the problem would not be solved because Mark's historical record of this event is also inspired. Who wants to read red type anyway; it is distracting at least, and misleading at worst.

All my other formats for the ESV do not have the red letters, and I like not seeing red; but when I see red, it makes me grateful that usually I do not, as it tends to undermine the authority of the whole Bible. ©

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

4 Louis Klopsch, "Explanatory Note," in *The Holy Bible: Red Letter Edition* (Christian Herald, 1901), xvi. From Crossway's "The Origins of the Red-Letter Bible," https://www.crossway.org/articles/red-letter-origin.

5 Klopsch, "Explanatory Note," xvi.

Pictures of Heaven: The Covenant of Works in the Theology of Meredith G. Kline

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by Gregory Edward Reynolds

Like his esteemed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary colleague Professor David F. Wells, Dr. Meredith G. Kline knew where to join the spiritual battle in the modern world. Both men have called us back to our roots in Reformed theology: biblical, historical, and systematic. Even as Wells has chronicled and critiqued the incursions of a virulent secularism into the church, so Kline has perceived the importance of faithful exegesis in the explication of orthodox federal theology as the most powerful bulwark against such infiltration. At the center of that concern is clarity and depth in gospel presentation facilitated by articulation of the classic doctrine of the covenants, especially requiring a clear exposition of the covenant of works, as distinct from the covenant of grace.

It is this aspect of theological anthropology in the theology of Meredith G. Kline that I will adumbrate in this chapter. In surveying Kline's rich exposition of this doctrine, I will seek to locate his views within the historical range of the Reformation and post-Reformation theological tradition and demonstrate their consistency with the confessional standards of Westminster. In the recognition that this sketch is a small part of the early assessment of Kline's corpus, it is neither definitive nor comprehensive.

Combining the familiar categories of the post-Reformation dogmatics of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms with an exegetically articulated biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) makes Kline's covenant theology, in my opinion, the best recent account of the covenantal structure of the Bible, expressed in terms of the classic Reformed categories and structure. For all his creativity—especially in his descriptive vocabulary—his covenant theology clearly distinguishes works and grace in the various administrations of the single covenant of grace. The centrality of Kline's concern to maintain the purity of grace in the Reformation doctrine of justification is reflected in such articles as "Covenant Theology Under Attack."[2] All the while, in the great tradition of Reformed confessional and theological writing, his dogmatic assertions proved to be the fruit of careful biblical exegesis as a consummate Hebraist. He echoed Wilhelmus à Brakel's contention:

> Acquaintance with this covenant [of works] is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ by his active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect.[3]

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1131, https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1138.

2 Meredith G. Kline, "Covenant Theology under Attack," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 15:2 (Feb. 1994): 3–5. The unexpurgated original of this article has only been published on the Internet URL: http://www.upper-register.com/papers/ct_under_attack.html. This was intended as a review of Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1992); *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Eerdmans, 1980). In this article Kline also references his own exegetical article, "Gospel until the Law," *JETS* 34:4 (1991): 433–46, as well as T. David Gordon, "Why Israel Did Not Obtain Torah-Righteousness: A Translation Note on Rom. 9:32," *WTJ* 54:1 (1992): 163–6. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace" *Presbuterion* 9 (1983): 85–92.

3 Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Logike Latreia, dat is Redelijke Godsdienst in welken de goddelijke Waarheded van het Genade-Verbond worden werklaard* (Dordrecht, 1700), translated as *The Christian's Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated*, 4 vols., trans. Bartel Elshout, with a biographical sketch by W. Fieret and an essay on the "Dutch Second Reformation" by Joel Beeke (Soli Deo Gloria, 1992–95), 1:355, in Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and

Historical theologian Richard Muller has alerted us to the lack of clarity displayed by scholars since the early twentieth century regarding the origin and the theological content of this doctrine. Muller has convincingly demonstrated that two fundamental contentions of these writers are misleading. 1) The term "covenant of works" used by older Reformed theologians indicates a radical priority of law over grace. 2) The term "works" indicates a form of legalism. In both cases, the sources show otherwise, as Muller summarizes: the "permanence of the original divine intention to ground fellowship in the nature of God and in the *imago Dei*."[4]

The late systematic theologian John Murray (1898–1975) provides an example of this lack of clarity—although Muller does not mention him—in his exposition of covenant theology, especially the covenant of works.[5] In self-consciously distancing himself from the historical exegesis and dogmatic conclusions of the older Reformed theologians, Murray appears to have paved the way, or at least opened the door, for the development of the virulent monocovenantalism that has emerged in recent decades.[6] Current theological reflection has noted the impact of Murray's call for "recasting" the doctrine of the covenants and offers an alternative position more in concord with post-Reformation dogmatics and confessions.[7]

Meredith G. Kline has been among the first theologians in the second half of the twentieth century to notice the inherent dangers of an incipient, as well as a developed, monocovenatalism and to argue for a more orthodox, confessional account through the application of Reformed biblical theology. Already in 1983, Kline launched an exegetical inquiry into John Murray's proposed revision of covenant theology, in his article "Of Works and Grace."[8] Then, in 1991, he dealt directly with Murray in "Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant,"[9] thus signaling a growing concern with what he called the "Fuller-Shepherd theology," as it took its cue from Murray. Then, in 1994, he popularized his concerns in "Covenant Theology Under Attack."[10]

The importance of the covenant of works in Kline's theology evolved throughout his writing and teaching career. While each of his published books represents that development chronologically, his magnum opus, *Kingdom Prologue* (*KP*),[11] stands at the heart of Kline's articulation of the covenant of works because he revised it over the years as he expanded and refined the course that defined his teaching career, "Covenant-Kingdom Foundations," in which he approached Genesis as the prologue to the entire Bible. From this course his biblical theology was spun. It was his stated desire that his federal theology be understood

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the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus A Brakel," *CTJ* 29 (1994): 76.

4 Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law," 99.

5 John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblical-theological Study* (Tyndale, 1954); "The Adamic Administration," *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:47–59; "Covenant Theology," *Collected Writings*, 4:216–240; "Law and Grace" *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Tyndale, 1957), 181–201; "Covenant" in J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 264–8. The latter article does not even refer to a prelapsarian covenant.

6 Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (P&R, 2009), 16, 26, 253–8. See also T. David Gordon's assessment of the influence of Murray's incipient monocovenantalism on Norman Shepherd, Greg Bahnsen, and advocates of the Federal Vision, 257–8. It is interesting that both Murray's and Fuller's covenantal aberrations were forged in opposition to Dispensationalism. Murray was on almost every other theological topic an expositor of sound Reformed orthodoxy, as his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1955) and *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), among so many other works, demonstrate.

7 "Introduction," Bryan D. Estelle, et. al., eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith*, 13, 15–17; T. David Gordon, "Abraham and Sinai Contrasted in Galatians 3:6–14," 240–1, 252–8.

8 Meredith G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace," *Presbuterion* 9 (1983): 85–92.

9 Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel until the Law," *JETS* 34:4 (1991): 433–46.

10 Cf. f.n. 1 above.

11 Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Two Age Press, 2000). Readers should be aware that this book has undergone several revisions since its first publication in three parts in 1981, 1983, and 1986. The first one-volume edition appeared in an edited edition in 1993, and the final version in 2000. Earlier editions are often cited in articles prior to this date. The pagination is not the same.

then from *KP* and his final book, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* (*GHH*).[12] These two volumes represent his most mature thought on the covenant of works,[13] clarifying his "more obscure and less mature formulations in *By Oath Consigned*."[14]

Early in his career, however, Kline already perceived the importance of an orthodox understanding of the covenants in avoiding practical errors of all kinds. In a 1953 article in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, Kline emphasized how the unique pedagogical and typological nature of the Mosaic theocracy militates against using Israel as a model for the secular state.[15]

1. Defining of the Covenants

Kline was careful to preserve the unique meaning of God's redemptive activity in the covenant of grace by defining a biblical divine covenant in non-redemptive terminology to include the creation covenant with Adam in the general definition,

> The evidence from all sides converges to demonstrate that the systematic theologian possesses ample warrant to speak of both promise covenant and, in sharp distinction from that, of law covenant. . . . This definition must correspond in its formal structure to one of the actual types of arrangements historically called "covenant" and at the same time be serviceable as a unifying formula for the totality of divine-human relationship from creation to consummation.[16]

Thus, he defined a covenant more broadly as "an administration of God's lordship, consecrating a people unto himself under the sanctions of divine law. In more general terms it is a sovereign administration of the kingdom of God."[17] He took issue with O. Palmer Robertson's definition, "a covenant is a bond in blood, sovereignly administered,"[18] which had in turn been influenced by Murray's definition, "The covenant is a sovereign dispensation of God's grace. . . . From the beginning of God's disclosures to men in terms of covenant we find a unity of conception which is to the effect that a divine covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and of promise."[19] Defined this way, it is understandable that Murray would balk at using the word covenant before the fall. But the temptation to do so emerged in the Fuller-Shepherd theology.

Furthermore, Kline understands the covenant relationship between God and man as essential to the *imago Dei*. It cannot be defined merely in terms of sin and grace.

2. The Nature of the Adamic Covenant

Kline's doctrinal understanding of the Adamic covenant goes far beyond the narrow concerns of covenantal structure. Kline profoundly understood that God can only relate to man made in his image by way of a covenant. For Kline, the twin realities of covenant and the *imago Dei* are constitutive of one act of creation. "Man's creation as image of God meant . . . that creating the world was a covenant-making process. There was no original non-covenantal order of mere nature on which

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12 Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Wipf and Stock, 2006).

13 See the disclaimer from the "Meredith G. Kline Resource" site, URL: http://meredithkline.com/?page_id=37: "Dr. Kline has changed or clarified his views on details of covenant theology found in *By Oath Consigned* (specifically on the questions of grace before the fall and whether there are curses associated with the new covenant). . . . He would rather people read *Kingdom Prologue* and *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon* to understand his mature views." Cf. "Law Covenant" WTJ 27 (1964/65): 18, fn. 26. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Eerdmans, 1968).

14 Meredith M. Kline to Richard Belcher, Jr., 27 July 1992, Orthodox Presbyterian Church archive.

15 Meredith J. [sic] Kline, "The Relevance of the Theocracy," *The Presbyterian Guardian* 22 (Feb. 16, 1953): 26–7.

16 Meredith G. Kline, "Law Covenant," *WTJ* 27 (1964/65): 8, 11.

17 Kline, "Law Covenant," 17. Cf. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 1–7, 59.

18 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Baker, 1980), 4.

19 Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 19, 30.

the covenant was superimposed."[20] The nature of this primal covenant reveals the essence of biblical anthropology, as well as soteriology and eschatology. This is why the "Covenant of Nature," or "Life," is an appropriate title for this covenant, since the essence of man's nature is always seen in relationship to his Creator. Law defines the character of God and its reflection in the *imago Dei*. Thus,

> law constitutes the ground structure of redemptive covenant administration and thus . . . a definition of covenant as generically law covenant would be applicable over the whole range of history as is necessary in a systematic theology of the covenant. . . . [T]he principle of law is more fundamental than that of promise even in a promise covenant. . . . The difference is rather that redemptive covenant *adds* promise to law."[21]

It is in Christ that law and promise cohere, in whom the eschatological goal of all covenants is realized. German theologian Heinrich Heppe (1820–79) summarizes the Reformed doctrine nicely:

> 1.—As God's creature man possessed nothing but the duty of obedience to God, without being able to raise any claim to enjoy blessed communion with Him. At the same time, as a creature in God's image man was made capable of and appointed to such communion by God Himself, since God wished to ensure this to him by entering into a covenant relation with man. Consequently man as a creature in God's image was created for covenant communion with God.[22]

Heppe's first quoted source after his summary is WCF 7.1:

> The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

So, Kline says,

> Our conclusion is, therefore, that Genesis 1–3 teems with evidence of the covenantal character of the kingdom in Eden. We have in fact seen that the covenantal identity of this creation order was given to it with its very existence, particularly in the creation of man, its head, in the image of God. The creational covenant will here be called "The Creator's Covenant of Works with Adam." By continuing the use of the term "works" we preserve an important advantage that the traditional name, "Covenant of Works," has when combined with use of "Covenant of Grace" for redemptive covenant—the advantage of underscoring the fundamental law-gospel contrast. . . . Furthermore, though Adam could not enrich God by adding to his glory, it was nevertheless precisely the purpose of man's existence to glorify God, which he does when he responds in obedience to the revelation of God's will.[23]

For Kline, the idea of defining covenant in purely redemptive terms undermines not only the grace of the gospel but the eschatological goal of creation and redemption, since for Kline the Edenic "Covenant of Works was eschatological. . . . The change in covenants from Works to Grace does not change the canons of eschatology."[24]

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20 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 92–3. Cf. David VanDrunen, "Natural Law and the Works Principle under Adam and Moses," in *The Law Is Not of Faith*, 291–2. Cf. Lee Irons, "Redefining Merit: An Examination of Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology," in Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, eds., *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline* (Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 266.

21 Kline, "Law Covenant," 11–13.

22 Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson, ed. Ernst Bizer (1950; repr., Baker, 1978), 281.

23 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 20–1, 111.

24 Meredith G. Kline, "Intrusion and the Decalogue" *WTJ* 16 (1953/54): 2, 3.

Was There Grace or Merit in the Garden?

In the last three decades of his career, Kline became more dogmatic about the importance of excluding the word "grace" from the definition of the first covenant between God and Adam in Eden. This became evident when he reviewed Fuller's *Gospel and Law* in 1983.[25] While it is clear in the history of doctrine that grace, or similar words such as gratuitous, has been used by Reformed theologians with reference to the original covenant with Adam, Kline believed that care in terminology was the best defense against monocovenatalism and its threat to the grace of the gospel. Thus, he defined grace carefully. "The distinctive meaning of grace in its biblical-theological usage is a divine response of favor and blessing in the face of human violation of obligation."[26] Hence,

> Theologically it is of the greatest importance to recognize that the idea of demerit is an essential element in the definition of grace. In its proper theological sense as the opposite of law-works, grace is more than unmerited favor. That is, divine grace directs itself not merely to the absence of merit but to the presence of demerit. It addresses and overcomes violation of divine commandment.[27]

It should be remembered that those older theologians who have spoken of a gracious element in the Adamic covenant were not proposing a monocovenantal view of grace and works before the fall but were using "grace" in a non-redemptive way to refer to undeserved favor.[28] Undeserved in this case was not due to sin, but rather to the creator-creature distinction and the utter dependence of the first man on his Creator's favor in all of life. So A. A. Hodge comments on WCF 7.1,

> This covenant is variously styled, from one or other of these several elements. Thus, it is called a "covenant of works," because perfect obedience was its condition, and to distinguish it from the covenant of grace, which rests our salvation on a different basis altogether. It is also called the "covenant of life," because life was promised on condition of the obedience. It is also called a "legal covenant," because it demanded the literal fulfillment of the claims of the moral law as the condition of God's favour. This covenant was also in its essence a covenant of grace, in that it graciously promised life in the society of God as the free-granted reward of an obedience already unconditionally due. Nevertheless it was a covenant of works and law with respect to its demands and conditions.[29]

Kline, in the tradition of Charles Hodge, enunciates precisely what is at stake in properly defining the covenant of works in terms of the works principle,

> "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). There was a first man Adam and a first covenant of works. And for the redemption of the lost world there is a second and last Adam, the Adam from heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45–49), and another covenant of works. This second covenant was kept, this second man was obedient and his obedience under this covenant of works is the foundation of the gospel order. The redemptive program as well as the original kingdom order in Eden is thus built on the principle of works.[30]

25 Kline, "Of Works and Grace" 85–92. See fn. 11 above.

26 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 112.

27 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 113.

28 Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:578, shows that he is concerned to protect the Creator-creature distinction enunciated later in WCF 7.1. He refers to God's obligation in the covenant of works as a "gratuitous promise." Cf. "Herman Bavinck on the Covenant of Works," trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. in Howard Griffith and John R. Muether, eds., *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator*, 169–85.

29 A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (1869, repr. Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 122.

30 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 138.

> Appeal is made to the fact that man as a creature is an unprofitable servant even when he has done all that has been required of him in the stewardship of God's gifts. Or, stating it from the reverse side, man cannot possibly add to the riches of his Lord's glory for God is eternally all-glorious; everything belongs to the Creator. Hence, the conclusion is drawn that in the covenant relationship we must reckon everywhere with the presence of a principle of "grace" and, therefore, we may never speak of meritorious works. The rhetoric of this argument has gone to the extreme of asserting that to entertain the idea that the obedience of man (even sinless man) might serve as the meritorious ground for receiving the promised kingdom blessings is to be guilty of devilish pride, of sin at its diabolical worst. With respect to the over-all structuring of covenant theology, once grace is attributed to the original covenant with Adam, preredemptive and redemptive covenants cease to be characterized by contrasting governmental principles in the bestowal of the kingdom on mankind. Instead, some sort of continuum obtains. A combined demand-and-promise (which is thought somehow to qualify as grace but not as works) is seen as the common denominator in this alleged new unity of all covenants.[31]
>
> Because grace cannot be defined apart from this context of covenantal stipulations and sanctions and is specifically a response of mercy to demerit, it must be carefully distinguished from divine love or beneficence.[32]

When older theologians, such as A. A. Hodge, held some notion of grace in the pre-redemptive covenant, and when such references are put in context, there is a clear presentation of two different kinds of covenants. Nor is it to say that the use of the word "grace" in the Adamic covenant, given the present confusion over justification, is prudent. It would seem that since the word is used almost universally in Scripture of the undeserved redemptive favor of God towards sinners, the Westminster Confession is conscious of the wisdom in using the words "voluntary condescension on God's part" (WCF 7.1).[33]

On the other hand, Kline understood that if we deny merit in the creation covenant, we will undermine it in the covenant with the second Adam and endanger the imputation of Christ's active obedience. According to Paul in Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." So "Adam, like Christ, must have been placed under a covenant of works."[34] Charles Hodge affirms this reality, "By the offense of one all were made sinners. (4.) This great fact is made the ground upon which the whole system of redemption is founded. As we fell in Adam, we are saved in Christ. To deny the principle in the one case is to deny it in the other. . . ."[35] So Kline argues,

> In the offer of eternal life, so we are told, we must therefore recognize an element of "grace" in the preredemptive covenant. But belying this assessment of the situation is the fact that if it were true that Adam's act of obedience could not have eternal significance then neither could or did his actual act of disobedience have eternal significance. It did not deserve the punishment of everlasting death. Consistency would compel us to judge God guilty of imposing punishment beyond the demands of justice, pure and simple. God would have to be charged with injustice in inflicting the punishment of Hell, particularly when he exacted that punishment from his Son as the substitute for sinners. The Cross

31 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 108.

32 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 113.

33 Cf. *Justification: Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification*, Commended for Study by the Seventy-third General Assembly (The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2007), 27–33.

34 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 108–109.

35 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1878, repr. Eerdmans, 1975), 2:121.

> would be the ultimate act of divine injustice. That is the theologically disastrous outcome of blurring the works-grace contrast by appealing to a supposed disproportionality between work and reward.[36]

The fear that a concept of "strict justice" may eclipse God's condescension in the covenant of works is adequately addressed both by the clear assertion of the Creator-creature distinction, discussed above with reference to WCF 7:1, and by defining merit in a biblical way, in terms of the sanctions determined by God, as Lee Irons suggests, rather than importing the idea of merit expounded by late Medieval nominalism.[37] If the very creation of man in God's image is covenantal, as Kline asserts, then the original nature of man inherently reflects the character of God. The terms of the original covenant involved the essential loyalty of Adam to that created covenantal relationship. Thus, rather than thinking in terms of either congruent or condign merit,[38] Kline suggests covenantal merit:

> And according to the revelation of covenantal justice, God performs justice and man receives his proper desert when God glorifies the man who glorifies him.
>
> To be so rewarded is not an occasion for man to glory in himself against God. On the contrary, a doxological glorying in God in recognition of the Creator's sovereign goodness will become the Lord's creature-servants. But if our concepts of justice and grace are biblical we will not attribute the promised reward of the creation covenant to divine grace. We will rather regard it as a just recompense to a meritorious servant, for justice requires that man receive the promised good in return for his doing the demanded good. Indeed, if we do not analyze the situation abstractly but in accordance with the created, covenantal reality as God actually constituted it, we will see that to give a faithful Adam anything less than the promised reward would have been to render him evil for good. For we will appreciate the fact that man's hope of realizing the state of glorification and of attaining to the Sabbath-consummation belonged to him by virtue of his very nature as created in the image of the God of glory.[39]

Far from eclipsing the intimacy of paternal relation between God and man in Eden, the works relationship is one of love, "Bestowal of the reward contemplated in the creational covenant was a matter of works; it was an aspect of God's creational love, but it was not a matter of grace."[40] Even in what Kline believed was his less mature understanding of the nature of the Adamic covenant in relationship to grace, in his 1968 *By Oath Consigned*, he makes this distinction:

> Grace, in the specific sense that it effects restoration to the forfeited blessing of God, is of course found only in redemptive revelation. But in another sense grace is present in the pre-redemptive covenant. For the offer of the consummation of the original beatitude, or rather the entire glory or honor with which God crowned man from the beginning, was a display of the graciousness and goodness of God to this claimless creature of the dust.[41]

3. The Nature of the Covenant of Redemption: A Covenant of Works in the Work of Christ

The covenant of redemption was of primary importance in Kline's theology. The works principle has its origin in the original heavenly covenant between Father and Son. Kline insisted on using

36 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 114–5.

37 Irons, "Redefining Merit," 265–9.

38 Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Eerdmans, 1967), 471–2.

39 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 111.

40 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 112.

41 Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 36. See also fn. 12 above.

the term "works" in naming this covenant:

> By continuing the use of the term "works" we preserve an important advantage that the traditional name, "Covenant of Works," has when combined with use of "Covenant of Grace" for redemptive covenant—the advantage of underscoring the fundamental law-gospel contrast. And our additional terms, "Creator's" and "with Adam," will serve to bring out the parallelism between this covenant of works and what we shall be calling "The Father's Covenant of Works with the Son" (i.e., the eternal intratrinitarian covenant), namely, the parallelism of the two Adams scheme, each of these covenants involving, as it does, an Adam figure, a federal representative under probation in a covenant of works.[42]
>
> This second covenant of works (with Christ) is the eternal covenant, which we shall call "The Father's Covenant of Works with the Son." The series of temporal administrations of redemptive grace to God's people are subsections of what we shall call "The Lord's Covenant of Grace with the Church" (or, for brevity's sake we may use the traditional 'Covenant of Grace').[43]
>
> The messianic mission performed on earth began in heaven: "For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Jesus was sent forth from heaven to earth on a covenantal mission with covenantal oath-commitments from his Father. . . . the Son of God in prayer recalled the Father's commitment to him in love before the foundation of the world, a commitment to grant him as obedient messianic Servant the glory he had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5, 24). He presented his claim of merit as the faithful Servant who had met the terms of the eternal covenant of works by obediently fulfilling his mission: "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). And then he made his request that the grant of glory proposed in that covenant now be conferred: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Jesus, the second Adam, standing before his judgment tree could declare that he had overcome the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit and that he had accomplished the charge to judge Satan, and, therefore, he could claim his right of access to the tree of life.[44]

Coming as the second federal head, the Son of Man, whose origins were in heaven, would undergo probation in another covenant of works, the covenant which he made with the Father before he left heaven and for the fulfillment of which he came to earth as the seed of the woman. The covenantal commitments made in eternity in the intratrinitarian counsels must be fulfilled on earth in historical time. In the world of the generations of Adam and the woman the second Adam, as the representative of God's elect, must gain the reward of the covenanted kingdom for himself and for them, as had been decreed in Genesis 3:15. By his obedience in the earthly probation phase of his eternal covenant of works the champion of the woman's seed would open the way for the Covenant of Grace, whose proper purpose is to bring salvation to the rest of the woman's seed and to bestow on them the kingdom of the Glory-Spirit won by their messianic kinsman-redeemer. Indeed, in suffering the bruising of his heel the messianic seed would ratify this new covenant.[45]

42 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 21.

43 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 138.

44 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 139–40.

45 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 144–5. "This covenantal commitment to the Son was renewed in the course of the historical administration of the covenant of grace." Kline, *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-theological Reading of Zechariah's Night Visions* (Two Age Press, 2001), 222.

Vos explains, "The covenant of redemption is the pattern for the covenant of grace. However, it is more than that. It is also the effective cause for carrying through the latter."[46]

4. The Nature of the Mosaic Covenant: A Republication of the Covenant of Works?[47]

The most controversial aspect of Kline's covenant theology is his rendering of the Mosaic covenant. The range of understanding within post-Reformation thought is nonetheless essentially unified in seeking to account for the presence of a works principle in the Sinai covenant.[48] Geerhardus Vos puts it succinctly as he summarizes the perspective of historical theology:

> The older theologians did not always clearly distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant. At Sinai it was not the "bare" law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.[49]

Kline believed that the covenant of works in Moses was an overlay with a substratum of grace running through it. The works principle evident in the Sinai covenant functioned typologically and pedagogically as a republication of the covenant of works. The Mosaic Covenant is "governed by a principle of works."[50]

Most familiar of the instances of the introduction of a works principle in a premessianic redemptive economy is the Mosaic Covenant. According to the emphatically and repeatedly stated terms of this old covenant of the law, the Lord made Israel's continuing manifestation of cultic fidelity to him the ground of their continuing tenure in Canaan. . . . another notable example of the pattern which finds the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously, yet without conflict, because the works principle is confined to a separate typological level. Paul, perceiving the works principle in the Mosaic law economy, was able to insist that this did not entail an abrogation of the promises of grace given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centuries earlier (Gal 3:17), precisely because the works principle applied only to the typological kingdom in Canaan and not to the inheritance of the eternal kingdom-city promised to Abraham as a gift of grace and at last to be received by Abraham and all his seed, Jew and Gentile, through faith in Christ Jesus. The pedagogical purpose of the Mosaic works arrangement was to present typologically the message that felicity and godliness will be inseparably conjoined in the heavenly kingdom, or, negatively, that the disobedient are forever cut off from the kingdom of the eschaton.[51]

The typological objective in the case of the Israelite kingdom was to teach that righteousness and prosperity will be conjoined in the consummated kingdom. For the purpose of keeping that symbolic message readable, persistent wholesale apostasy could not be allowed to accompany possession of the promised inheritance. But, on the other hand, the pedagogical point of the typological arrangement could be satisfactorily made, in a positive fashion, in spite of the inevitable

46 Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 252.

47 Cf. the "Report of the Committee to Study Republication," presented to the Eighty-third (2016) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

48 Brenton Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy," in Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law Is Not of Faith*, 76–105.

49 Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," 255.

50 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 320. See also Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:227. Turretin refers to the Mosaic covenant as "a rigid legal economy."

51 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 237.

imperfections of the people individually and as a nation.[52]

By virtue then of both the filling of the land of Canaan and its characterization as a sabbath-land, this first level, Canaanite fulfillment of the land promise is seen to be an anticipatory portrayal of the consummated kingdom-land, the Metapolis kingdom-city of the new heavens and earth which the Creator covenanted to man from the beginning.[53]

Besides preparing an appropriate context for the messianic mission, a broadly pedagogical purpose was served by the typal kingdom in that it furnished spiritual instruction for the faithful in ages both before and after the advent of Christ (1 Cor. 10:11). Thus, in addition to calling attention to the probationary aspect of Jesus' mission, the works principle that governed the Israelite kingdom acted as the schoolmaster for Israel, convicting of sin and total inability to satisfy the Lord's righteous demands and thereby driving the sinner to the grace of God offered in the underlying gospel promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.[54]

Hand-in-hand with the pedagogical function of the typal kingdom went its purpose of contributing to the preservation of the covenant community on earth. . . . This end was furthered by constant reminders, as in the system of things clean and unclean, of their holy distinctiveness as God's people.[55]

The story of the typological kingdom of Israel was an historical parable in which mankind under the covenant of works in Adam was represented by Israel under the law. For according to Jeremiah the Torah-covenant viewed as a grant of the land of Canaan to Israel for a temporal, typical inheritance was another breakable works-arrangement, unlike the new covenant of grace to be made in the days to come (Jer. 31:31). The apostle of the new covenant, the apostle of justification by faith, proclaimed justification through Christ from all things "from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). "That no man is justified by the law before God is evident," said Paul, "for, 'The righteous shall live by faith,' and the law is not of faith, but 'He that doeth them shall live in them'" (Gal. 3:11,12). And again, "For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise" (Gal. 3:18). It is the typological story of Israel's history under its covenant of works that provides the symbolism of the prophet's gospel for mankind in Zechariah 3.[56]

The Old Covenant order, theirs by national election, was one of highest historical privilege. And while a works principle was operative both in the grant of the kingdom to Abraham and in the meting out of typological kingdom blessings to the nation of Israel, the arrangement as a whole was a gracious favor to the fallen sons of Adam, children of wrath deserving no blessings, temporal or eternal. The Law covenant was a sub-administration of the Covenant of Grace, designed to further the purpose and program of the gospel. By exhibiting dramatically the situation of all mankind, fallen in and with Adam in the original probation in Eden, the tragic history of Israel under its covenant-of-works probation served to convict all of their sinful, hopeless estate. The Law thus drove men to Christ that they might be justified by faith. All were shut up in disobedience that God might have mercy on all (Rom. 11:28–36; Gal. 3:19–25).[57]

52 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 239–40.

53 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 338–39.

54 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 353.

55 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 353–4.

56 Kline, *Glory in Our Midst*, 105.

57 Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*, 128.

Kline's depiction of the Mosaic Covenant displays a rich eschatological trajectory, which as a republication of the Edenic covenant, and fleshes out a picture of protological Paradise, which in turn looks forward to a consummated cosmos. Accenting the legal dimension, rather than reducing the Mosaic Covenant to an arid irrelevance, or a crippling legalism, Kline has limned for us the typology of heaven, or the "Heaven Land." "What is true of Heaven is true of its divinely ordered type, the Theocracy. For though the Theocracy was in the world of common grace, as a type of Heaven it transcended its environment and anticipatively shared in the world to come."[58]

WCF 19, by inference, identifies the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works alongside its being also a covenant of grace. "This law [given to Adam as the covenant of works, 19.1], after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments. . . . Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned . . . " (WCF 19.2, 6). Even when referring to it as an administration of the covenant of grace, the Confession calls it the "time of the law," implying the centrality of a works principle (WCF 7.5). It also makes clear that there can be no eschatological inheritance without fulfillment of the covenant of works, typified in the Mosaic covenant. Both Scripture and the Confession refer to the Mosaic administration as a "law" covenant. "For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17, emphasis added). But the revival of the covenant of works in the Mosaic administration is in the interests of revealing both the need for, and God's provision of, grace in the mediator, Jesus Christ. Those who were saved under the Mosaic covenant were saved the only way sinners can be saved since our first federal head failed: through the grace of the second federal head, Jesus Christ.

58 Kline, "The Relevance of the Theocracy," 27.

5. Continuity and Discontinuity in One Covenant of Grace

Kline did not consider the Mosaic covenant a separate covenant. While he used various language to describe the legal aspect of this covenant in relation to it being an administration of the covenant of grace, he most often referred to it as "overarching." For example, as early as 1953 Kline had formulated his basic understanding of the nature of the Mosaic theocracy as part of the development of the covenant of grace forming an organic unity throughout redemptive history: "This covenant (Israel at Sinai) was pursuant of the earlier covenant promises made to Abraham." Kline goes on to quote Vos in his *Biblical Theology* to the effect that the theocracy was unique in that it "typified nothing short of the perfected kingdom of God, the consummate state of Heaven."[59]

Much later, in 1991, Kline observes,

> Classic covenantalism recognizes that the old Mosaic order (at its foundation level—that is, as a program of individual salvation in Christ) was in continuity with previous and subsequent administrations of the overarching covenant of grace. But it also sees and takes at face value the massive Biblical evidence for a peculiar discontinuity present in the old covenant in the form of a principle of meritorious works, operating not as a way of eternal salvation but as the principle governing Israel's retention of its provisional, typological inheritance.[60]

In *Kingdom Prologue*, Kline notes,

> Preeminently the Covenant of Grace finds expression in the new covenant, but it also includes all those earlier covenantal arrangements wherein the benefits secured by the obedience of Christ in fulfillment of God's eternal covenant with him were in part already bestowed during premessianic times, in each

59 Kline, "The Relevance of the Theocracy," 26–7.

60 Kline, "Gospel until the Law," 434.

> case according to the particular eschatological phase of covenant history.[61]

Then in his last published book, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*, in 2007, Kline says,

> The overarching Covenant of Grace, which was to unfold in several premessianic administrations (including the Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants) and have its full, culminating expression in the New Covenant, was inaugurated by the divine declaration of Gen 3:15 and the divine act of symbolic sealing recorded in Gen 3:21. . . . Carrying forward the Abrahamic Covenant as they do, both the Old and New Covenants are, like it, administrations of the Covenant of Grace.[62]
>
> Redemptive history enters a distinctive new stage with the Abrahamic Covenant but without interrupting the underlying continuity and coherence of the Covenant of Grace.[63]

Charles Hodge, whose *Systematic Theology* is considered a standard exposition of Reformed orthodoxy, expresses himself in much the same way as Kline on the discontinuity between the Mosaic and new covenants, and the essential continuity of the covenant of grace underlying both. In commenting on 2 Corinthians 3:6 he says,

> These words [*letter* and *spirit*] therefore express concisely the characteristic difference between the law and the gospel. . . . How is it that the apostle attributes to the Mosaic system this purely legal character, when he elsewhere so plainly teaches that the gospel was witnessed or taught both in the law and the prophets? . . . Every reader of the New Testament must be struck with the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law as he does of the moral law considered as a covenant of works; that is, presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience. He represents it as saying, Do this and live; as requiring works, and not faith, as the condition of acceptance. Rom. 10:5–10. Gal. 3:10–12. He calls it a ministration of death and condemnation. . . . On the other hand, however, he teaches that the plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning; that Christ was the propitiation for the sins committed under the old covenant; that men were saved then as now by faith in Christ; that this mode of salvation was revealed to Abraham and understood by him, and taught by Moses and the prophets. . . . To reconcile these apparently conflicting representations it must be remembered that the Mosaic economy was designed to accomplish different objects, and is therefore presented in Scripture under different aspects. What, therefore, is true of it under one aspect, is not true under another. 1. The law of Moses was, in the first place, a re-enactment of the covenant of works. The covenant of works, therefore, is nothing more than the promise of life suspended on the condition of perfect obedience. The phrase is used as a concise and convenient expression of the eternal principles of justice on which God deals with rational creatures, and which underlie all dispensations, the Adamic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian. . . . It is this principle which is rendered so prominent in the Mosaic economy as to give it its character of law. Viewed under this aspect it is the ministration of condemnation and death. 2. The Mosaic economy was also a national covenant; that is that it presented national promises on the condition of national obedience. Under this aspect also it was purely legal. But 3, as the gospel contains a renewed revelation of the law, so the law of Moses contained a revelation of the gospel. It presented in its priesthood and sacrifices, as types of the office and work of Christ, the gratuitous method of salvation through a Redeemer. This necessarily supposes that faith and not works was the condition of salvation. . . . As the old covenant revealed both the law

61 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 138.

62 Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon*, 75, 96.

63 Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 292.

and the gospel, it either killed or gave life, according to the light in which it was viewed.[64]

Confessional or Innovative?

For those who question Kline's confessional orthodoxy on his doctrine of the covenants, especially on the covenant of works and its relationship to the Sinai covenant, it is my contention that they have erred in one of three ways: 1) from ignorance of post-Reformation dogmatics, in which the doctrine of the covenants was being developed;[65] 2) from a misunderstanding of the taxonomy of the post-Reformation theologians;[66] or 3) from a simple lack of a close reading of Kline. The central contours of Kline's theology of the covenants are classic federal theology. Then there are aspects that have historical precedent in the minority.

Genetically, Kline's doctrine of the covenants, and the covenant of works in particular, can be traced through Geerhardus Vos, back to Charles Hodge, and to Francis Turretin.[67] Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679–85) was used as a textbook by Charles Hodge at Princeton Theological Seminary until he published his own from 1871 to 1873.

Brenton Ferry developed a very helpful Reformed taxonomy of works in the Mosaic covenant. Within that taxonomy he suggests that Kline fits in the category described by Roland Ward as "the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace." Ferry refers to this with his own rubric, "typological, formal republication." "Kline believes that the Mosaic covenant is organically part of the covenant of grace, yet at the administrative level it is a typological covenant of works."[68] In *By Oath Consigned*, Kline notes,

> For all its difference, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is still patterned after the Sinaitic Covenant. In fact, Jeremiah's concept of the New Covenant was a development of that already presented by Moses in the sanctions section of the Deuteronomic renewal of the Sinaitic Covenant (Deut. 30:1–10). According to Jeremiah, the New Covenant is a writing of the law on the heart rather than on tables of stone (v. 33; cf. 2 Cor. 3:3), but it is another writing of the law. It is a new law covenant. Hence, for Jeremiah, the New Covenant, though it could be sharply contrasted with the Old (v. 32), was nevertheless a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant. It belonged to the familiar administrative pattern of periodic covenant renewal (of which the cycle of sabbatical years was an expression), and renewal is the exponent of continuity. . . . But if the distinctiveness of the New Covenant is that of consummation, if when it abrogates it consummates, then its very discontinuity is expressive of its profound, organic unity with the Old Covenant.[69]

Organic unity was not a new concept to Kline. He had learned it well from Vos. In his 1953 article "The Intrusion and the Decalogue," explaining the place of the judgement of the Exodus conquest of the land of Canaan by Israel, he refers to the underlying unity of the covenants: "within this temporary periphery of the Intrusion there is a permanent core. . . . Finally, this concept of Intrusion Ethics does not obscure the unity of the Covenant of Grace throughout its various administrations."[70]

Finally, Kline contributed to federal theology in significant ways that were helpfully innovative. He showed that the covenant relationship is inherent, not extraneous, to the Creator-creature relationship. He clarified the importance of using

64 Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (1859, repr. Baker, 1980), 54–58. See also Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (1878, repr. Eerdmans, 1975), 2:375.

65 See D. Patrick Ramsey, "In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 373–400.

66 See the critique offered by Brenton C. Ferry, "Cross-examining Moses' Defense: An Answer to Ramsey's Critique of Kline and Karlberg," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 163–68.

67 Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:637.

68 Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant," 79–80, fn. 11.

69 Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 75–6. Cited in Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant," 80 fn. 14.

70 Kline, "Intrusion and the Decalogue," 4, 13. Cf. 7.

grace properly in defining the various biblical covenants in order to protect and elucidate biblical soteriology. More comprehensively, he pursued a program of understanding classical covenant categories through biblical, theological exegesis, building on Vos's Reformed biblical theology. A superb example of his profound exegetical skill is seen in his reinterpretation of Genesis 3:8,[71] in which he reinterpreted "the cool of the day" within the context of eschatological judgment. In so doing he explored the major theme of probation in its relationship to heavenly entitlement. Finally, he expounded the typology of heaven throughout covenant history. In sum, Kline's theology of the covenant of works was thoroughly eschatological.[72]

6. Conclusion

Kline's theology of the covenant of works is set in the context of a rich account of the continuity of the history of redemption rooted in the detailed exegesis of the text of Scripture within the framework of confessional orthodoxy. His defense of the covenant of works clearly demonstrates that by muting probationary works before the fall, one ends up undermining grace after the fall—grace based on the merits of the Second Adam, which is our only entitlement to heaven. Nothing less than the gospel is at stake. "May Machen's heirs not let go of their commitment to covenant theology but continue to cherish it, and in particular its precious doctrine of the righteousness secured for us by the active obedience of Christ. As Machen said: No hope without it."[73] Ⓢ

71 Cf. Bryan D. Estelle, "The Covenant of Works in Moses and Paul," in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, ed. R. Scott Clark (P&R, 2007), 115, f.n. 101.

72 Cf. Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology of the Psalter," *The Princeton Theological Review* 18 (Jan. 1920): f.n. 3. "In so far as the covenant of works posited for mankind an absolute goal and unchangeable future, the eschatological may be even said to have preceded the soteric religion."

73 Kline, "Covenant Theology under Attack," last sentence of electronic version cited above. Machen's last words from a telegram sent to Professor John Murray, January 1, 1937. Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Eerdmans, 1955), 508.

Gregory Edward Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and editor of* Ordained Servant: A Journal for Church Officers.

How Did You Become a Poet?

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

When asked "How did you become a poet?" Robert Frost answered, "I followed a procession down the ages."[2] As I thought about the procession I have followed as a poet, I had to ask myself who my favorite poet is. In many ways it is an impossible question to answer, because I have so many favorites based on various criteria and influences. For sacred poets, George Herbert would be a favorite, then John Donne; and for contemporary poets, who are both sacred and profane (meaning poets whose subjects are secular), T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden. There are dozens of others. Shakespeare's sonnets are in a unique category and were studied well by my all-around favorite poet, Robert Frost, the consummate New England poet. We share many things as New Englanders, but his exclusive love of New Hampshire seals the deal for me. From a historical, cultural, and natural perspective (not political) it is the Shire for me.

Oddly, he was born in San Francisco, becoming a New Englander at age eleven. I was born in Boston and became a New Hampshirite at age two. He was not a believer, but as a classicist he revered

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1152.

2 Kathleen Morrison, *Robert Frost: A Pictorial Chronicle* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 6.

the King James Bible for its literary and oral excellence. He was deeply affected by both its content and beautiful Elizabethan cadences. He was a philosophical dualist, always sensing something beyond what we see. His poetry was outwardly accessible, unlike so much modern poetry, because it is couched in the rural realities of early twentieth-century New England, especially New Hampshire. Hence, he is the secular or profane bard with whom I most resonate and seek to emulate. In the end, the exclusively profane Frost and the exclusively sacred Herbert have made excellent mentors.

Frost believed in structure and the influence of the history of poetry. I discovered both of these qualities years ago in the first poem of his first published book, *A Boy's Will* (1913 in England, 1915 in the United States). "Into My Own" is a Shakespearean sonnet with an allusion to the Bard's Sonnet 116 in line 4, "unto the edge of doom." Frost looked beyond the visible. In that sense he is just like me. E. e. cummings was the first to catch my interest in poetry after a childhood of hearing my father's repetition of lines from Shakespeare's plays and the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Just recently I came across a poem by Cummings that I would have used for my Thanksgiving issue of *Ordained Servant* but for copyright problems: "65" *XAIPE* (1950), the first line of which is, "i thank You God for most this amazing." The final quatrain reads:

> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any—lifted from the no
> of all nothing—human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You?[3]

His juxtaposing of words and their use in odd ways assures the reader's attention. Yet unlike much modern poetry his unusual wording yields meaning. This stanza nicely encapsulates the flavor of Cummings's last book, titled *XAIPE*, meaning rejoice or greetings in ancient Greek. Paul uses this word almost thirty times in his letters.

Cummings and my father's recitations paved the way for me to love the sound of well-ordered words. Then, as Frost, "I followed a procession down the ages." Several years ago at Shiloh Institute, after I had taught on the importance of appreciating and reading poetry for preaching, one of the students asked me to read one of his poems. It was doggerel, but I did not tell him so. Instead, I asked him who his favorite poets were. He answered that he did not read poetry; he only wrote it. I encouraged him to start following the "procession down the ages."

I am reminded that we embark on a similar journey in theology, and perhaps any intellectual discipline. Theology cannot be done without historical theology. Our world of expressive individualism has spawned the dangerous idea that we should create unique spontaneous poetry or theology, spun out of the whole cloth of our imaginations. But unless our imaginations are filled with the best poetry and theology of the past, our creations will be of little value.

In closing, let me recommend several books that exemplify the "procession down the ages." In historical theology, Crawford Gribben's *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*[4] is a gem, providing a different perspective on Owen—appreciative without being hagiographic. Tracing the influences on Owen's theology, Gribben provides a rich picture, including an initial powerful influence from Thomas Aquinas.

For poetry, the 2015 two-volume biography by Robert Crawford of T. S. Eliot is a superb exploration of the influences on Eliot's poetry and criticism, ranging far beyond poetry itself. This is especially true of the first volume, *Young Eliot*.[5]

Finally, for exploring the literary influences on Frost, William Pritchard's *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* provides a thorough and fascinating account.[6]

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3 e. e. cummings, *Poems 1923–1954* (Harcourt, Brace, 1954), 464.

4 Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford University Press), 2016. See Darryl Hart's review in *Ordained Servant* 26 (2017): 121–23. *Ordained Servant Online* (August-September 2017) https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=643.

5 Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to the Wasteland* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

6 William Pritchard, *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (Oxford

I hope these suggestions will help my readers to enjoy investigating the "procession down the ages" in theology and poetry, and many other disciplines.

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

University Press, 1984).

Servant Word

Were Peter and John "Ignorant" or "Uneducated"? A Non-Egalitarian Reading of Acts 3:1—4:22

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by T. David Gordon

Nathan O. Hatch served us well when he published *The Democratization of American Christianity* in 1991.[2] He observed throughout the book that the same tendency toward a radical egalitarianism that undergirded the American Revolution quickly manifested itself also in the American churches.

> Christianity was effectively reshaped by common people who molded it in their own image and who threw themselves into expanding its influence. Increasingly assertive common people wanted their leaders unpretentious, their doctrines self-evident and down-to-earth, their music lively and singable, and their churches in local hands.[3]

I noted the same tendency when I attempted to correct the common egalitarian mis-translation of Ephesians 4:12, arguing that such a mis-translation required not one, but three, erroneous decisions about Greek grammar or lexicography.[4] What I had not noted at the time was the almost-desperate effort to find justification for such egalitarianism in other passages in the New Testament, such as the now-almost-universal egalitarian mis-reading of Galatians 3:28. Among such would-be-egalitarian texts, Luke's statement about how Jewish rulers evaluated Peter and John in Acts 4:13 is a favorite, to which we now turn.

The apostles had healed a crippled man (Acts 3), which occasioned quite a public stir and a demand for some accounting, which Peter attempted in the portico of Solomon (Acts 3:11–26). This account, however, made a bad situation worse, as Peter's account "greatly annoyed" the priests, the temple captain, and the Sadducees, who "arrested them and put them in custody until the next day" (Acts 4:3). About five thousand people believed Peter's speech, so on the next day "their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family," to investigate the disturbance (Acts 4:5–6).

Peter's address at that point merely threw gasoline on an already-burning fire, especially by his arguably tactless reference to Jesus as "whom *you* crucified, whom God raised from the dead," and as "the stone that was rejected by *you*, the builders, which has become the cornerstone," citing Psalm 118:22 (Acts 4:10–11, emphases mine). Luke, no stranger to litotes,[5] probably under-estimated the rulers' reaction:

> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1096.

2 Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1991).

3 Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

4 T. David Gordon, "'Equipping' Ministry in Ephesians 4?" *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1994): 69–78.

5 Acts 12:18; 19:23.

> standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. (Acts 4:13–14)

Litotic[6] or not, Luke's observation has fueled many egalitarian fires, and I would like to attempt to extinguish them, on three grounds.

First Ground: Luke did not affirm that Peter and John were ignorant or uneducated

Acts 4:13 may be the only passage in the New Testament in which Christian readers endorse the (mis?) perceptions of the enemies of Christ and his apostles. Luke faithfully recorded what these rulers "saw" and "perceived," without indicating at all that he agreed with their perception. The text of Acts 4:13 does not say that Peter and John *were* ignorant or uneducated, but that the rulers were amazed at what they saw. They were surprised that men who had no credentials to speak publicly were doing so. Indeed, the word translated "boldness" often refers to public speaking, as the reasoning in *BAGD* indicates: "'Openness' sometimes develops into *openness to the public*, before whom speaking and actions take place."[7] Indeed, *BAGD* refers also to the use of the term in the last verse of Acts (Acts 28:31), which records that Paul "*welcomed all who came to him*, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with *all boldness and without hindrance*" (μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας ἀκωλύτως, *meta pasēs parrēsias akōlutōs*, emphases mine). Paul had most of the freedoms of any Roman citizen, including that he could welcome visitors and speak with them because he had, as *BAGD* put it, "openness to the public."

Had Peter and John been regular attendees at the synagogue, or been credentialed to speak publicly there, they would have been well-known to the rulers, who would not have been surprised to hear them speaking publicly. But the rulers present knew nothing about them, or whether they had the rights of Roman citizens (they probably did not) or permission to speak publicly in the synagogue, and this is why the rulers were surprised by their public speaking.

They "perceived" that Peter and John were "uneducated, common men" (ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται, *anthrōpoi agrammatoi eisin kai idiōtai*), which probably meant that they were not known to be the disciples of any of the schools of philosophy or religion in their day. Indeed, "uneducated" does not convey the Greek sense of *agrammatos* (ἀγράμματος), which might be translated "unlettered," because access to manuscripts was highly restricted 1,500 years before the printing press, and very few people would have been permitted access to valuable hand-copied manuscripts. Indeed, the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah in Acts 8 proves the point; the only way of accounting for his access to a scroll of Isaiah is there in the text itself: "And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of *all her treasure*" (Acts 8:27). It was therefore surprising that a person without known access to a scriptorium could have knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures (*hai graphai* [αἱ γράφαι], from the same root as *gramma* [γράμμα], or its negated *a-grammatos* [ἀ-γράμματος]), yet Peter made six references to these Scriptures/*hai graphai* in his speech, several of which were direct, word-for-word citations. To not have access to written manuscripts/*graphai* does not mean that an individual was less educated than the general population, none of whom would have had access to such manuscripts. To be ἀγράμματος (*agrammatos*) is not necessarily to be ἀμαθής (*amathēs*), "without knowledge,"[8] or "unknowing" (ἀγνοέω, *agnoeō*), or "uninstructed" (ἀπαίδευτος, *apaideutos*), all of which also appear in the New Testament.

Similarly, the designation "common" (ἰδιῶται, *idiōtai*) is used most often in the New Testament

6 Merriam-Webster Dictionary Version 24.0.3 (WebCatalog, arm64): "understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary (as in 'not a bad singer' or 'not unhappy')."

7 Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, ad loc. παρρησία.

8 Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1843, *ad loc. cit.*

to refer to people who do not know any language but their own, since the root, ἴδιος (*idios*), means "one's own," which in this case would mean people who speak only their "own" native language. In three of the other four uses of the term in the New Testament, it plainly refers to speaking only one's own language:

> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an *outsider* (τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἰδιώτου, *tov topon tou idiōtou*) say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?…If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and *outsiders* (ἰδιῶται, *idiōtai*) or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or *outsider* (ἰδιώτης, *idiōtēs*) enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all . . . (1 Cor. 14:14, 15, 16, 23, 24)

Note that ESV's "outsider" is evidently someone who does not speak the language being spoken in the assembly, but only his "own," native language. And, in the only other place where the term occurs, Paul used it sarcastically, to refute those who belittled his ministry in comparison to others, and even here it was not his intelligence but his *linguistic* ability that was challenged:

> Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. Even if I am unskilled in speaking (ἰδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ, *idiōtēs tō logō*), I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. (2 Cor. 11:5–6)

When Peter and John were perceived to be "common" men, this term therefore had none of the negative connotations our English word "common" has today, suggesting a person of *less*-than-usual refinement or intelligence; to the contrary, as its dictionary use suggests, it would mean a person who had at least the knowledge "common" to an adult in his community or culture, though possibly only his culture's own language.

Therefore, even if the perception the rulers had of Peter and John were an accurate perception, the combination of terms employed would not necessarily designate them as being of less-than-typical attainments compared to the population of their day, the vast majority of whom would not have had access to manuscripts, and the majority would not have been multi-lingual.[9]

Second Ground: Peter demonstrated remarkable knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures

Certainly, Peter was not "ignorant" of the Old Testament writings. Even in a day before the printing press, when manuscripts were rare and expensive, he made six references to those sacred writings, several of which contained verbatim quotes. In Acts 3:13, he mentioned "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers," something my college-

9 Though I have demonstrated that neither "uneducated" nor "common" likely meant a person of lesser competence, I still would contend that the *perception* the Jewish rulers had of Peter and John was incorrect. Peter employed "Silvanus" in 1 Peter 5:12, which is the Latin form of either a Semitic/Aramaic word or its Greek abbreviation. He would have been more familiar with the Semitic form, "Silas" (12 times in the NT), yet he employed the Latin "Silvanus," which only appears in three other places in the New Testament. Further, we know that Jesus spoke in Aramaic from the several places where a New Testament author would provide a Greek translation of the Aramaic original (e.g. Mat. 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:38, 42; 9:7, Acts 4:36; 9:36; 13:8). Peter understood those discourses of Jesus, which nearly all scholars concede were delivered in Aramaic, yet he also wrote elegant Greek. Jesus called him "Cephas," an Aramaic derivative (John 1:42), assuming that Peter could understand either the Greek or the Aramaic. Therefore, Peter was not a "common" man in the sense that idiotes/ἰδιώτης meant an individual who knew only his "own" native language. The evidence of the New Testament suggests that Peter had some familiarity with three, and possibly four, languages: Aramaic (or Hebrew, or both), Greek, and Latin. Whether he knew only Hebrew (but not Aramaic), cf. R. Buth and C. Pierce, "Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean 'Aramaic'?" in *The Language Environment of First Century Judea: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*, vol. 2, eds. R. Buth and S. Notley (Brill, 2014), 66–109.

level Bible Survey students could not often do. In Acts 3:18, he mentioned "what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled," indicating he had grasped what Christ had taught the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:44–47). In verses 22 and 23, he cited a direct quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19:

> Moses said, "The LORD God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people."

He continued his discourse in verse 24 by indicating not only a comprehensive understanding of the Old Testament prophets, but also of their chronological *order*, accurately affirming that Samuel was the first: "And all the prophets who have spoken, *from Samuel and those who came after him*, also proclaimed these days." In the next verse Peter cited by direct quotation of Genesis 22:18 the third great promise God had made to Abraham: "And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Peter appears to have cited Ezekiel 3:19 in Acts 3:26, "God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness." This appears to be a reference to Ezekiel's having said, "But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way . . ." (and ESV references Ezek. 3:19 in its marginal note to Acts 3:26). Finally, in Acts 4:11, speaking directly to these rulers, he cited a passage ordinarily cited at Jewish festivals, and did so in judgment of those very rulers: "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone" (cf. Ps. 118:22).

Such a rich weaving together of a broad range of biblical texts, in a society where manuscripts were rare and expensive, suggests that Peter was a person of much more than ordinary intelligence, who had learned profoundly from the discourses of Jesus, especially by grasping a hermeneutic by which the entirety of Old Testament Scripture anticipated the coming of Christ. Today, a person with such understanding would be regarded as "*un*common," who had/has a rich and thorough understanding of the pre-apostolic sacred writings.

Third Ground: The evidence from Peter's letters suggest that Peter was, by the standards of his day, erudite

1 Peter is arguably the finest Greek in the New Testament. I taught Greek for forty-one years, at several institutions, and we rarely studied many New Testament texts in first-year Greek. In second-year Greek, however, we ordinarily translated from both gospels and epistles, to get a sense of both bodies of literature, narrative and epistolary. Only those who persevered to a third year of Greek were ready for really demanding, really erudite Greek—Greek beyond most second-year students. I treated such fortunate students to things like Plato's *Apology* of Socrates, if they were interested in Attic Greek; or, if they were interested in further New Testament writings, I would take them initially to 1 Peter, knowing that if they could handle it, they could handle anything else the New Testament could throw at them. It is a masterful example of Koiné Greek (as are Luke's two volumes). While, of course, Peter may have enjoyed the services of an amanuensis,[10] the thinking itself in the letter, in addition to its remarkable syntax, gives evidence of a person of well-beyond-ordinary intelligence and learning.

In our populist, elitist-despising (and elite-envying?)[11] culture, we have fastened onto Acts

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10 Silas/Silvanus may merely have been a courier, "through" whom Peter sent his letter, since he is not listed with Mark as one who "sends his love" (1 Pet. 5:12–13). Further, such amanuenses, such as Tertius (Rom. 16:22), may merely have functioned as stenographers taking dictation.

11 "Elite" is actually a biblical term, ἐκλεκτός (*eklektos*), which passes into Latin as *elligere*, to French as *élire*, then *élite*, then English "elite." In its neutral sense it merely means "chosen" or "selected" or "elected," and, therefore, for presumably good reasons. We "elect" an apple that has no worms, or an automobile that runs well or efficiently. It is perhaps evidence of our populist culture that "elite" often has negative connotations. There is little virtue for anyone in being mediocre. For those who profess that humans are made in the image of God, there is *no* virtue in mediocrity, whether in attaining it or in applauding it. There is also

4:13 with the fervor of a dachshund biting a mailman's ankle. We would like to think that Christ founded his church *via* people of modest attainment and ability, and some of them, prior to knowing Christ, may have been people of such modest attainment. Some of them, however, such as Matthew, had been entrusted with significant responsibilities prior to knowing him; and Paul would have been in the ninety-eighth percentile in the Jewish-Roman culture of the first century. And the others Jesus trained well, and thoroughly, for several years. Eleven of the twelve (all but John) attained the highest of Christian attainments—martyrdom—and Peter himself was crucified upside down. Insofar as they have left us their writings, they are of an extremely high character, reflecting uncanny understanding of how Christ fulfilled all that came before in the Old Testament writings, and they articulated that understanding in clear, intelligent, and, at times, masterful language.

In our circumstances, as we face the apparently inevitable anti-clericalism of the American/egalitarian world, it is important for us to acknowledge just how competent the original apostolic clergy were. First, nearly all, if not all, were conversant in Koiné Greek. Early on, they knew the portions of the Greek New Testament as they emerged, and their citations of the Old Testament were ordinarily citations of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the Septuagint). They knew well, and firsthand, the realities of first-century life in the Jewish-Roman world, including its varied customs and geopolitical tensions. Many had known Jesus personally, had attended his instruction, and had even witnessed him in his post-resurrection body. To know any of these things now, if possible at all, would require years of diligent study. Those who neglect such study are the ones who are truly sub-standard, and unqualified to serve the church. Ⓢ

no virtue in envy, a vice that is prohibited throughout Scripture, a vice that motivated Cain to murder his brother Abel, and a vice that is the second of the seven deadly sins.

T. David Gordon *is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and is a retired professor of religion and Greek at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

Reflections on Plagiarism in Preaching

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by Andrew H. Selle

This article presents a few thoughts on a topic that has received much airtime in the past decade—plagiarism in preaching. I am quick to add that if you searched the Internet hard enough and long enough, you might discover that someone else said or wrote something nearly identical to this article. Perhaps I am plagiarizing while writing on the topic of plagiarism!

That is part of the quandary that preachers live in today. The overwhelming power of Internet technology never ceases to astonish me. We must use that resource well, for God's glory, to serve his purpose "in his own generation" (Acts 13:36) with opportunities afforded to us that were inconceivable to our forebears. There are legitimate ways to do so. With respect to biblical understanding, all God's people—certainly the most mature among them—make it their mission to learn from others who know more than they do about Scripture and how to apply it. God teaches the whole church, not merely individuals, over the entire course of human history. That is a good thing. It means I do not have to start from scratch to hammer out the doctrine of the Trinity. And a preacher does not start from scratch when he is preparing a message

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1110.

on any text from the Bible. The best writers on the topic of plagiarism agree.

The nuances in the discussion, however, surround the issue of the *attribution of sources* within a sermon. Note carefully that our focus is upon spoken sermons, not written and published ones. The rules are different for a variety of reasons that I will not get into here. Our concerns about plagiarism surround the application of the Ninth Commandment: we must be truthful, never deceitful. The most egregious cases of plagiarism demonstrate an obvious violation of trust, compromise of integrity, failure to speak truthfully, perpetration of a lie. There is also an obvious violation of the Eighth Commandment: plagiarists steal something from another. Plagiarism is sin.

Yet most cases of supposed plagiarism are far less obvious. To illustrate, let us consider a sermon I preached recently from Genesis 14: "Faith for Battle, Faith to Worship." I first preached from this text in the 1980s, early in my pastoral ministry. Back then I used my fresh seminary training to carefully exegete the Hebrew text (the *real* text in a *book*, not a bunch of ones and zeros on a screen! Harumph.). I also read a couple sermons that were available, such as those by James Boice. Or maybe that was ten years later when I prepared version two or three of the message. What books did I read, what preachers did I hear, and when? I do not remember. That is the problem. I have decent retention for quotes but a poor one for sources. Not to mention that aging is not kind to long-term memory. After four decades, I truly do not know what I borrowed or from whom.

But does it matter? Seriously? Everything I declared from the pulpit came from my own mind and heart with the conviction of its truth. The sermon was my own, as the Holy Spirit has taught me through the Word. And I freely and joyfully admit that the Spirit used the gifts of many other students and preachers to teach me over the years, such that now I can teach others also. Does that sound faintly like, "what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2)?

The implication of Paul's instruction to Timothy is clear: Whatever God teaches individual believers from his Word is never meant only for their personal edification; it is for the whole church. That fact is particularly true for pastor-teachers who are called by God "to equip the saints for the work of ministry . . ." (Eph. 4:12). By all means, let us always speak truth, never lie, and never steal. Yet I wonder if some concerns about "plagiarism" in preaching arise from the modern idea of "intellectual property" and the demand for individual rights. We will not deny that the Eighth Commandment applies to published works. But ought we apply the same standard to the living words spoken from our pulpits, by men taught by the Holy Spirit? We must not allow a preoccupation with twenty-first-century academic protocol to bind our consciences, hinder corporate learning, and undermine effective preaching.

Some charges of plagiarism might be facile and shallow at best, slanderous at worst. Yet another concern looms even larger. We must ponder the very nature of preaching itself. To plumb this, let us change the perspective from the preacher to the worshiper. On the Lord's Day, I sit with the congregation, while the preacher mounts the pulpit. He reads the inspired Scriptures, prays, and then opens his mouth to speak. He informs my mind from that particular text, explaining its meaning within the context of the whole Bible. He urges me to believe it *in* my heart and obey it *from* my heart—and to repent where I have failed to do so. There I hear the very "oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:10–11; cf. 2 Cor. 2:17; 6:3–7), the Living God's authoritative voice binding my conscience to serve my Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, even if I must die as a result. Nothing less qualifies as good preaching.

If we hold to this biblical view of preaching, what are the implications for plagiarism? How can we avoid it? Let's begin here: I emphatically do *not* want to hear a bunch of footnotes from the pulpit about this author or that author, with chapter and page number! I did not come to church to hear a lecture, carefully annotated to satisfy the strict scruples of academics and publishing house editors. Yet we acknowledge that we must avoid real

plagiarism, after carefully defining it, in ways that maintain the Christ-centered nature of preaching. You readers may have practical suggestions about how to accomplish this. Here is one of my own (Really. I did not get this idea from anyone else. Cross my heart and hope to die. And my fingers are not crossed behind my back—which according to 1950s folklore allows children to lie with impunity.) Place a written note in every Sunday bulletin, giving proper attribution where necessary, along with this note: "The speaker has learned from many other writers and preachers and is thankful to God for them. If any important acknowledgments have been missed, please let him know, and he will gladly correct the oversight."

We have been hard on any practice that requires us to read reams of distracting acknowledgments from the pulpit. But we can lighten up a bit here. You do not lose your humanness in the pulpit. You can still thank God for particular writers you have learned from. You can even urge people to read this or that particular book, including the chapter and page number information for them. Just go easy on those things. Get back to your main task—proclaim the oracles of God to the people of God for the glory of God. As you do, you will behold the Spirit of God building up Christ's church in love, in holiness, and in number. Ⓢ

Andrew H. Selle *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as a Teacher at Covenant OPC, Barre, Vermont. He is a biblical counselor and conciliator.*

Poetry and the Heart in Preaching the Psalms

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by A. Craig Troxel

> I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure. . . . Certainly it is my desire that there shall be *as many poet* rhetoricians *as possible*, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily. . . . Therefore I beg of you that at my request (if that be of any weight) you will *urge your young people to be diligent in the study of poetry* and rhetoric.
>
> —Martin Luther, "Letter to Eoban Hess, 29 March 1523"[2]

A minister of the Word aims for the heart no matter what Scriptural text he is preaching. But he is never more conscious of this as when he handles biblical poetry. All poets insist upon making an impression—one that is to be felt. They draw from an ample collection of devices and images to provoke the imagination. Lyrics compress language in one stanza, while metaphors expand horizons in the next. Poetry sets the heart on fire.

Divine poetry goes even further. Its revelations dive as deep as the human heart can bear. Words of flesh and blood are authorized to bear the "living and active" word, which pierces and divides unseen things within. What first appears in swaddling clothes proves to shroud eternal truth.

Application is always a challenge, but with poetry, the test begins with exposition. The most compressed, stylized, symbolic, metaphorical

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1159.

2 In *Luthers Briefwechsel*, in D. Martin Luthers Werke, 120 vols. (Böhlhaus, 1883–2009), 3:50. As quoted in *The Beauty and Power of Biblical Exposition*, 153.

language in all of Scripture causes even the most experienced preacher to be confronted by his literary limits and quietly muse, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Nevertheless, the "approved worker" must "rightly divide" all the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), including the one third that is shaped poetically. It is a sobering stewardship. Yet rarely does the preacher's task admit such beauty or permit him to pull at the intimate strings of a pilgrim's heart as when preaching poetry, especially the psalms. His task is to rise to this challenge and handle these elegant forms with care, using every God-given aid to take aim at his quarry, the hearts of God's people.

Our Aim: The Heart

We aim at the heart in preaching because man's entire inner self is governed from this one point of unity. The heart is the fountainhead of every motive, the seat of every passion, the center of every thought, and the spring of conscience.[3] It is the "hidden control-center" in every person.[4] All of your inner life is bound with it, and from it "flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). As Abraham Kuyper stated, the heart is "that point in our consciousness in which our life is still undivided and lies comprehended in its unity."[5] It is the helm of the ship that sets the bearing your life will follow. Everything in your life—whether it is your treasure, inner beauty, repentance, faith, service, obedience, faithfulness, worship, love, daily walk, or seeking the Lord—all of it is to be done "with all your heart."[6] The preacher must not aim at anything less.

The word "heart" is different from the other words in the Bible that describe our interior life (like "soul," "spirit," "conscience," or "the inner man"). Within the unity of the heart there resides a triune complexity of functions: the mind, the desires, and the will. That is to say, the heart includes what we *know* (which is our intellect, knowledge, thoughts, intentions, ideas, meditation, memory, imagination); what we *love* (what we desire, want, seek, crave, yearn for, feel); and what we *choose* (our decision-making—whether we will resist or submit, whether we will be weak or strong, whether we will say "yes" or "no").[7] The heart "combines the complex interplay of intellect, sensibility, and will."[8] This threefold scheme of the heart (mind, desires, will) was foundational to the Puritans, who understood the importance of preachers aiming for the heart. The word "heart" in Scripture is simple enough to reflect our inner unity and comprehensive enough to capture our inner threefold complexity.

Preaching to the heart means preaching to *all* of it—the heart's mind, desires, and will. A preacher must bear in mind that the heart's threefold complexity does not eclipse the heart's unity. What the heart knows, desires, and chooses are in constant, mutual interaction. Every function of the heart is inseparably related to the rest of the heart's capacity. We are not capable of dispassionate reasoning. The health of our mind is connected to the health of our desires, just as it is joined to the resolution of the will. The mind, desires, and will work in tandem. It is the way God made us. The poetry he gave us makes that clear.

Our Terrain: The Psalms

> "Just as we taste food with the mouth,
> so we taste the psalm with the heart."
> —*Bernard of Clairvaux*

When discussing the genre of poetry there are a variety of categories one can use. Those of *form*, *thought*, and *image* will guide our reflections here.

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3 O. R. Brandon, "Heart," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Baker, 1984), 499.

4 John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting* (Eerdmans, 1989), 42.

5 Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism* (Eerdmans, 1943), 20.

6 Matt. 6:21; Luke 6:45; 1 Pet. 3:4; Deut. 30:2, 10; 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 8:48; Jer. 24:7; Prov. 3:5–6; Deut. 10:12; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 119:34; 1 Kings 2:4; Ps. 86:12; Zeph. 3:14; Deut. 10:12; Matt. 22:37; Isa. 38:3; Deut. 4:29; 2 Chron. 15:12; Jer. 29:13; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37

7 Gen. 6:5; Pss. 19:14; 49:3; 77:6; 139:23; Prov. 15:14, 28; Matt. 5:19; Luke 2:19; 6:45; Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:18; 4:18; Heb. 4:12; 8:10

8 Bruce Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Zondervan, 2007), 225.

Form

When it comes to form or structure, a poem reminds us that it is not just what is said, but the way it is said. Accordingly, a psalm should be read in the way that it is constructed. Most modern translations print the Psalms with the structure that helps us recognize them as poems. Setting a psalm into verses, strophes, and stanzas displays the lyrical symmetry that gives the psalm shape. It is not a mash-up of phrases. It is a sculpture.

Psalms are structured artistically. Some are arranged *acrostically*, in which the first letter of each colon (Ps. 111), line (Ps. 34), strophe (Ps. 37) or stanza (Ps. 119) is in the successive order of the Hebrew alphabet. Some psalms have a *symmetrical* structure, as in the case of a *chiasmus*—where phrasing or ideas are marked by matched repetition. The main point may lie at the center of the symmetry (Ps. 22), or it may be repeated in the opening and closing thoughts (Ps. 1). Some psalms are stylized by a *cyclical* form, which repeats one or more themes (Ps. 25).

Although these forms permeate the Psalter, they are unwieldy in the pulpit. How does saying "this psalm is acrostic in the Hebrew" do the listener any practical good? It may come off as elitist or nerdy, but rarely as helpful. The same is true of chiasms. It is a rare day that drawing attention to this structure will benefit the congregation. It would be better to trace the thought of the psalm in an unpretentious way and simply say, "the psalm closes with the same thought it began with" or "look how these same ideas are repeated, only in opposite order." Even so, whenever we can highlight the aesthetic construction of Scripture to underline its supreme dignity and beauty, we are not laboring in vain. Such moments give the people of God another reason to "look up" with thankfulness to the master designer.

What some have characterized as *the* distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetry is its parallel structure—in which a phrase is repeated (Ps. 19:7, 8), contradicted (Ps. 1:6; 25:3), or explained (Pss. 23:1; 125:2) by the following line. It is "the same in the other," as C.S. Lewis puts it.[9] The wonderful advantage of this feature of Hebrew poetry is that it "survives in translation."[10] The preacher can readily show how successive lines nuance the earlier line. He can explain how they advance the thought—either by addition, contrast, or specification.[11] After all, the point is to trace the idea no matter which way it develops. A preacher does well to pause and draw his congregation's appreciative eyes to the sculpted text. Beauty is inevitably the fascination of a curious believer.

The phrasing of Hebrew poetry is also shaped by various devices. Psalms use *alliteration*, in which the same consonant sound is repeated, or *assonance*, in which the same vowel sounds are repeated in discernable ways. Yet here again, a reader must be acquainted with the Hebrew language to detect these features. One feature that transcends the original language is *personification*, where something inanimate takes on human characteristics. For example, the creation is often directed to praise its Creator, as only humankind can do. The "trees of the forest" are commanded to "sing for joy" (Ps. 96:12). The "mountains skipped like rams" (Ps. 114:4, 6). And the heavens are to "bow" (Ps. 144:5). These expressions are readily accessible to the reader, and the preacher can single out their presence and their purpose. God enlists his creation and creatures to carry out his purposes—whether it is raining fire and brimstone; sending locusts, frogs, and hail; causing the sun to stand still; making the sea divide and then drown; or closing the mouths of lions. The psalmists regularly summon creation to prompt God's image-bearer to give the Creator his due, whether with adoration or allegiance. Where the Proverbs would shame a lazy man to look down and consider the ant (Prov. 6:6), the Psalms inspire a man to look up and consider his God (Ps. 8:3).

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9 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958; reprint, HarperOne, 2017), 4.

10 Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 3.

11 Dan G. McCartney, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (P&R, 2002), 216.

The psalms dare the heart to soar, and the faithful preacher should not get in the way.

Thought

The first rule, as is true with all poetry, is to read the psalm through without stopping. The second rule is to do it again, only this time reading it out loud.[12] It is better to get a sense of the lay of the land before choosing your spots for mining. The psalm was composed as a complete unit of thought, and it was meant to be heard that way. Isolating a single verse or section from the wider flow of thought stops us from hearing the psalm's wider patterns and hinders us from appreciating its overall unity. The poet asks us for patience, since his art is adapted for appreciation and contemplation.

I think of this initial stage as listening for the melody. We recognize and remember a song by its melody, which is usually the song's main theme. The same is true with the Psalms (which, after all, are poems put to tunes). Each psalm has its own voice and message that one needs to hear. Eventually the melody emerges with more and more clarity so that you can "hum the tune" of it when you recall it. As soon as we begin to detect this melody or theme, a second task confronts us. We need to reflect on how the melody of our psalm connects to the wider themes of the Bible.

The great themes of the Bible are large rivers, which are fed by a variety of smaller tributaries. Your psalm is one of those smaller streams that probably supplies one of the Bible's great themes—like creation, redemption, covenant, the land, the temple, the king, human suffering and persecution, the faithfulness of God, the hope of future salvation; or perhaps God and his titles, attributes, works, and providence. Your psalm is like a phrase of notes that make a single impression and then contribute to the richer and longer song.

One can link to these larger biblical themes by way of "echoes" and "references." An echo looks back, while a reference looks ahead. Does your psalm echo (repeat or answer) another significant Old Testament text or event? An echo is more than another passage that happens to have a similar word or idea. It reflects a momentous historical event or a conspicuous passage. "The sea" in Psalm 18:15 refers to Israel's crossing the parted Red Sea, not to every verse that mentions water. A reference has in view those places in the New Testament that quote or allude to your psalm (only twenty-nine psalms are not referenced in the New Testament). The real challenge here is deducing how credible an allusion is. What may first appear as an "obvious" allusion may ultimately prove to have flimsy evidence to support it. While upon further study some less obvious connections show themselves to be quite credible.

The final task regarding the thought of the psalm is discerning its flow. Here the task is tracing the direction of thought in your psalm and following its path to the main or final idea. The poet has made specific choices about what to say and how to say it, and all of it is meant to convey a thought. A drawing, painting, photograph, or sculpture is fashioned with beauty, but its creator is still sending a message. Similarly, poetry is stylized with grace and symbolism, but it is still telling a story. It has a point, and it does so by sustained argument. Even the most decorated psalm carries its main idea to a conclusion.[13] Whether its structure is linear (Ps. 73) or loopy (Ps. 25), your task is to find it and follow it to its intended end. An important marker of the success of your sermon will be whether your listeners can trace the psalm's line of thought after you have preached it.

Discerning the melody, echoes, references, and the flow of thought all require our people to engage with their minds. John Flavel wrote, "The mind is to the heart as the door is to the house. What comes into the heart comes through the mind."[14] The preacher does not apologize for asking his people to think. The Bible (especially the Old Testament) teaches that the heart is the

12 Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book* (1940; reprint, Touchstone, 1972), 229–30.

13 Gordan D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 2014), 173.

14 John Flavel, *Christ and His Threefold Office* (Reformation Heritage, 2021), 79.

seat of our intellectual abilities—our planning, ideas, meditation, imagination, convictions, and wisdom.[15] How does a preacher not appeal to a congregant's mind when explaining the context and meaning of an ancient text before bringing him the significance? A sermon does not always need to "begin" with the mind, but it must never finish before making it a port of call.

Imagery

C.S. Lewis wrote, "Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood . . ."[16] Figures of speech not only awaken the imagination; they also spur the desires (affections) of the heart. The language seems "intentionally emotive."[17] With metaphor, God takes the dead bones of concrete things and breathes life into them to make them walk straight into our hearts.

The psalms use an array of images that touch the believer's emotional life—feelings like anger, joy, envy, rage, anxious fear, longing, sorrow, anguish, despair, and others. One such desire is the intensity of spiritual longing, which is expressed in the language of "thirst." Psalm 42 begins, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." The pitiful sight of an animal gasping in its desperate search for water portrays the worshiper who is in the spiritual wilderness, despairing and feeling far from God. The absence of communion has him distressed and frenzied. He is starting to panic.

Psalm 42 starts similarly, as David's thirsty soul dwells in a grim dry place—far away from God's presence in Jerusalem. Then, abruptly, David addresses his spiritual depression with a completely opposite set of images (in vv. 6–10). Now he hears the roar and turmoil of a waterfall. Like a piece of driftwood, he is cast into the turbulent water and is at the mercy of falling water as it cascades over boulders and rocks. Then the current takes him and spills him into a larger and deeper body of water, where wave over wave comes over his head. He is sinking. First, he was dehydrating, and now he is drowning. Spiritual desertion feels like that. One moment you seek God without satisfaction and the next you are completely overwhelmed and bogged down. What a picturesque way to appeal to God with, "Why have you forgotten me?"

Often insult is added to injury as David's enemies taunt him with words like, "Where is your God" (Ps. 42:3, 10)? Their ridicule worsens his agony of spiritual desertion. They speak as those "who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows" (Ps. 64:3; cf. 57:4). They are the one whose "speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Ps. 55:21). These cutting words bring deeper wounds when they come from "my close friend in whom I trusted" and "my companion, my familiar friend" (Ps. 41:9; 55:13). Anyone who has been betrayed feels the edge of these words.

Thankfully such despondency is answered by the assurance of God's promised comfort, whose words are "sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps. 19.10). When we turn to him in our time of need, he invites us to "drink from the river of your [his] delights" (Ps. 36:8). He is the shepherd who is with us, leading us, guiding us, anointing us, and restoring us, so that our cup overflows (Ps. 23). Our troubles fade when we read that our sovereign God "rides in the heavens . . . on the wings of the wind," he "makes the clouds his chariot" (Ps. 68:33; 104:3). The images lift the heart to the heights, where God is.

Moreover, we are assured of comfort when we seek refuge in God's strength and protection. Psalm 18:2 says, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." David produces a cluster of images that highlight the security God

15 Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress, 1975), 47.

16 Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 3

17 Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 170.

provides to all who flee to him. The same word picture appears in Psalm 31. David goes to the rock, because this is what he needs the Lord to be. David once fled from Saul to the stronghold of Adullam and the rock in the Desert of Maon (1 Sam. 22:1; 23:24). But those places of refuge pale in comparison to his true source of security, which is found in the nearness of his God. Like David, our heart finds peace in the Lord's sure protection.

Interestingly, the same metaphor (rock) can have a different nuance. For instance, David asks God, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Ps. 61:2). David seeks something more than bare protection. Safety is more than having solid footing. It also means being lifted to a high vantage point, above the fray of the battle, where no one can reach you. Here is true comfort for the embattled soul. God not only lifts you out of the miry bog, but he has also placed you where you could not be more secure (Ps. 40:2).

The same idea can be conveyed by an alternative metaphor. Often the Psalmist asks God if he can "take refuge in the shadow of your wings" (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4; cf. Ruth 2:12). Here is shelter, but it is of a different kind. Whereas the rock conveys the safety of solid strength, finding shelter under God's wings suggests a safety that is more personal and intimate. It is the difference between what is inanimate and what is alive. One is cold, the other is warm—especially when you consider the maternal insinuation of the metaphor. This seems to be Christ's intent when he tells Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings" (Matt. 23:37). Feeling the safety and comfort that comes from your mother's arms wrapped around you is different than the security of a six-inch concrete slab under the house. There is a peaceful warmth that rises in one's heart with the assurance of being enclosed by the "everlasting arms" of God (Deut. 33:27). This is the Psalms at their best—when they reach into the chest of a believer and bring the assurance of God's enduring peace.

Conclusion

Augustine wrote that "an eloquent man must speak so as to teach, to delight, and to persuade . . . to teach is a necessity, to delight is a beauty, to persuade is a triumph."[18] This is another way of saying that the preacher must appeal to the whole heart—to the right-thinking mind and a "well-directed love" and a right will.[19] The human heart and dynamic rhetoric of biblical poetry is a match made in heaven. The shape, form, and metaphorical language of the psalter run free in the thought of the awakened heart, inflaming its desires and spurring its courage.

Preaching the Psalms to the hearts of God's people does this. It reaches into every corner of their heart—testing their thoughts, confronting their desires, and challenging their wills. Anyone who sits under such expositions will feel the effect of the Word of God as a hammer, sword, or fire and sense its comfort as a salve or taste its sweetness as honey. If preaching confronts all the heart, then its hearers will sometimes feel assured, consoled, and at rest; while at other times they will feel exposed, disrupted, and uncomfortable. Why should faithful preaching from the Psalms accomplish anything less? Yes, it is true that no minister of the Word feels equal to this task. But God has given us every advantage to do it, and to do it well. The variety of forms, devices, echoes, references, images, and symbols provide a plethora of tools that are within reach of the preacher. But more than this, what he handles is the "living and active" word of God, and *it* is able to reach the secret thoughts, the deepest of treasures, and the foundations of determination in every believing heart (Heb. 4:12). No genre can hold it back. Just let the lion loose.

18 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.27, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 (*NPNF*[1]), ed. Philip Schaff (Eerdmans, 1988), 2:583.

19 Augustine, *City of God* 14.7 (*NPNF*[1] 2:267).

A. Craig Troxel *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as professor of homiletics at Westminster Seminary in California, Escondido, California, and is president of the Committee on Christian Education.*

Servant History

Matthew Poole: Exemplar of Traditional Exegesis

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by Harrison N. Perkins

Modern evangelical sentiments often suggest a sharp division between biblical faithfulness and aligning ourselves with history. Outside the church, our culture sneers about being "on the right side of history," suggesting that the things of the past ought to be left behind. Even in the church, the cherished doctrine of *sola Scriptura* has been abused to justify hosts of doctrines that run full force against the ways that God's people have traditionally interpreted God's Word.

Matthew Poole (1624–1679) was an English Presbyterian during the seventeenth century whose work shows how foreign those modern sentiments would be to committed Christians of past generations. Throughout his career, he held thorough exegesis together with a commitment to the historical tradition, as well as a priority on the pastoral value for these studies.

Poole's biography is quickly sketched, since not much scholarship has investigated his life and work beyond what is available in the main reference works and databases. He was born likely in 1624 in York to Francis and Mary Poole, although he was not baptized until December 6, 1626. He began his education at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1645. When he graduated in 1649, he succeeded Anthony Tuckey, one of the Westminster divines, in the rectory of St. Michael-le-Querne. He took an MA from Cambridge in 1652 and was incorporated as an MA at Oxford in 1657—an event overseen by Richard Cromwell, who would become the second Lord Protector in the following year when Oliver Cromwell died. Poole resigned the rectory of St. Michael-le-Querne in 1662 at the passing of the Act of Uniformity and later moved to the Netherlands after working for some time toward the re-inclusion for non-conformists in England. He died October 12, 1679, and was buried in the vault under the church belonging to English merchants in Amsterdam.[2]

Poole's earliest publication tackled the problem of Socinianism,[3] especially concerning the deity of the Holy Spirit.[4] John Biddle (1615–62) was a primary leader of anti-trinitarian thought as it emerged in mid-seventeenth-century England.[5] Although he received a prestigious education and became a schoolmaster, he began espousing unitarian theology that prompted the fierce response of leading clergy in England.[6] Poole was among the Presbyterian respondents.

Poole was heavy on biblical argumentation in the refutation of Biddle's position, foreshadowing

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1139.

2 "Matthew Poole," A *Cambridge Alumni Database* University of Cambridge (accessed on August 23, 2024 at https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2018.pl?sur=&suro=w&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=PL645M&sye=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50); Nicholas Keene, "Poole [Pole], Matthew (1624?–1679)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (accessed on August 23, 2024 at https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-22518?rskey=X5nBPG&result=2).

3 Socinianism was a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century movement that claimed allegiance to Scripture while denying the deity of Christ and consequently the doctrine of the Trinity.

4 Matthew Poole, *Βλασφημοκτονία: The Blasphemer Slaine with the Sword of the Spirit: Or, A Plea for the Godhead of the Holy Ghost. Wherein the Deity of the Spirit of God is Proved in the Demonstration of the Spirit, and vindicated from the Cavils of John Biddle* (John Rothwell, 1653).

5 Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

6 Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 38–68.

his later, more well-known works. He noted how Biddle and other Socinians prioritized human reason over Scripture.[7] Poole added more thorough exegetical discussion in the second edition, for example in his treatment of John 1 as part of his same anti-rationalist argument.[8] Still, even with all his logical and exegetical contentions, Poole ultimately concluded that the dividing line between orthodox trinitarians and anti-trinitarians was in their presuppositions. If they did not want to resort to legislative enforcement against unorthodoxy, he knew that the orthodox had to contend for the value of typological and figurative exegesis over against the rationalist premises of Socinian biblicism.[9]

Poole's efforts at refuting Socinianism with exegetical force were the first public notice of his commitment to stand with holy Scripture and align with the historic Christian tradition. In this instance, he used exegesis to demonstrate that the traditional position on the Spirit's deity was biblically grounded. Further, he also saw this endeavor as part of his pastoral duties, since he explained in the second edition's preface (when his role as the author of this book had become known) that, "I have employed part of that time, which I have spent among you, in endeavouring to establish you in some of those truths, that are most opposed in our dayes."[10] Although he had not taken up the Spirit's deity directly with his congregation of St. Michael-le-Querne, he used this book as an opportunity to compensate for that lack. For Poole, history, exegesis, and pastoral care held together.

Poole's concern for good pastoral care came to the fore in his next publications. In 1658, he published a plan for funding university students who promised to go into the ministry.[11] This plan received commendation from John Worthington and Anthony Tuckney, John Arrowsmith, Ralph Cudworth, William Dillingham, and Benjamin Whichcote.[12] Continuing the trajectory of concern for a credentialed ministry, his next work defended the idea that only ordained ministers should undertake the task of preaching, thus refuting the practice of lay preaching.[13] Even his 1659 letter to Lord Fleetwood seems motivated to protect the Presbyterian cause from government overreach.[14] So his more directly theological efforts did not crowd out Poole's concern for the proper care for the church.

That concern became more explicit in Poole's 1660 sermon before London's mayor where he pled that simplicity of worship would be upheld. Richard Cromwell had resigned as second Lord Protector in 1659. Charles II then returned to London as king in May of 1660, which precipitated the execution of nine of the fifty-nine commissioners who had called for Charles I's execution in 1649. In light of these events, Poole clearly sensed the return of Laudian policies concerning ceremonies in worship, which were contrary to the simplicity the non-conformists believed Scripture warranted. His concerns would come to fruition in the Clarendon Code, which set forth four penal laws to squelch non-conformity. The second of those laws, the 1662 Act of Uniformity, prompted Poole's resignation from St. Michael-le-Querne.

Poole published the sermon in question because he thought that interpreters had misconstrued his original delivery. It seems they took it as a direct attack on the baseline Anglican positions. Poole stated that he "intended not to meddle with Common-Prayer (of which I spake not one word, however I am traduced) nor Ceremonies considered in themselves, but only as some endeavour that they may be pressed with an Aegyptian rigour,

7 Poole, *Βλασφημοκτονία*, 33–36.

8 Poole, *Βλασφημοκτονία*, 40–43; see Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 158.

9 Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 158–59.

10 Poole, *Βλασφημοκτονία* (2nd ed.), sig. A4r.

11 Matthew Poole, *A Model for the Maintaining of Students of Choice Abilities at the University, and Principally in order to the ministry* (Sa. Thomson, 1658).

12 Keene, "Poole [Pole], Matthew (1624?–1679)."

13 Matthew Poole, *Qua Warranto; Or, A Moderate Inquiry into the Warrantablenesse of the Preaching of Gifted and Unordained Persons* (London, 1659).

14 Matthew Poole, *A Letter from a London Minister to Lord Fleetwood* (Sa. Thomson, 1659).

and violently imposed upon the Consciences of their Brethren."[15] This careful parsing, however, still left room for his attacks to apply to exactly what his opponents suspected.

The difference was that Poole saw the bare principle as having far more minimal application than the Laudian Episcopalians. After all, Poole emphasized in expositing John 4 that worship "*In spirit* is opposed unto a bodily or carnall worship of God." The application "respects the subject of worship, and that is opposed unto those who worship God only with their bodies, whose hearts and souls do not concurre with them, who draw nigh to God with their lips, when their hearts are farre from him."[16] Although a seemingly obvious prod against hypocrisy, Poole's prong stabbed at one prevailing sentiment among the High Church ceremonialists. Peter Lake summarizes that the establishment champion Richard Hooker had contended that

> regular, decorous, and fervent participation in the style of public worship laid out in the Book of Common Prayer—centered as it was (at least on Hooker's rendition), on public prayer and the sacraments, rather than on the Word preached—would do nicely. Thus, Hooker concluded, ordinary believers were not wrong if they believed that, having "virtuously . . . behaved themselves" during public worship and been "fervent" both in their "devotion and zeal in prayer" and in "their attention to the word of God" (read as well as preached), "they have performed a good duty."

This focus on what seemed to be simply outward, if happy, conformity to external worship had ired non-conformists since Hooker's day.[17]

Those concerns only increased during the Laudian period. Poole may well have targeted exactly this basic outward participation that had become the point of high contention under Laudianism. Moreover, this sermon revealed that Poole saw English Presbyterians as still part of the establishment and that he perceived that moderate Episcopalians agreed with their concerns about the direction of English worship.[18]

Poole's succeeding publications focused in polemical fashion on these churchly concerns. He published a Latin tract in 1666 that was a scathing critique of the current ecclesiastical landscape.[19] That he wrote this work in Latin, however, shows that he was trying not to stir public unrest as he voiced his concerns, since Latin was the language of the academy rather than the populus. He continued his polemical works in two treatises against Roman Catholicism.[20] His concern for matters of good religion remained, as even his final publication during his lifetime was a defense of right religion, which contained material from two sermons.[21]

The crowning work of Poole's career that most effectively demonstrates our thesis about his effort to hold exegetical, historical, and pastoral concerns together was his four-volume, *Synopsis of Critical and Other Commentators on Sacred Scripture*, published in Latin in 1669.[22] Many notable figures from across the ecclesiastical spectrum—including Thomas Barlow, John Owen, and Westminster divine John Lightfoot—voiced advance support for

15 Matthew Poole, *Evangelical Worship is Spiritual Worship, as it was discussed in a sermon preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Maior, at Pauls Church, Aug. 26. 1660* (Sa. Thomson, 1660), sig. A3v.

16 Poole, *Evangelical Worship is Spiritual Worship*, 6.

17 Peter Lake, "'Puritans' and 'Anglicans' in the History of the Post-Reformation English Church," in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism Volume I: Reformation and Identity, c.1520–1662*, ed. Anthony Milton (Oxford University Press, 2017), 368.

18 Anthony Milton, *England Second Reformation: The Battle for the Church of England 1625–1662* (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History; Cambridge University Press, 2021), 452.

19 Matthew Poole, *Vox Clamantis in Deserto as Ministros Angliae* (1666).

20 Matthew Poole, *The Nullity of the Romish Faith, Or, A Blow at the Root of the Romish Church being an examination of that fundamentall doctrine of the Church of Rome* (Ric. Davis, 1666); Matthew Poole, *A Dialogue between a Popish Priest and an English Protestant wherein the Principal Points and Arguments of both Religions are Truly Proposed and fully Examined* (1667).

21 Matthew Poole, *A Seasonable Apology for Religion Being the subject of two Sermons lately delivered in an Auditory in London* (1673).

22 Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum*, 4 vols. (1669).

this work's publication.[23] This work was a massive scholarly endeavor, collecting a tremendous amount of biblical commentary into a sort of early-modern compilation. Although this work brought together an incredible number of sources, including rabbinic and Roman Catholic commentators, Poole noted his use of Reformed sources.[24] Interestingly, he justified excluding John Calvin's commentaries from this work because Calvin focused on pastoral and theological rather than critical and exegetical matters.[25] This move shows how Poole was stressing a certain academic rigor as he held exegetical and historical trajectories together. Even still, this work made it, in 1693, to the Roman index of banned books.[26]

The more pastoral side of Poole's concerns for the issues that motivated his Latin *Synopsis* showed in how he began to prepare an English-language resource. This oft-reprinted book was a series of annotations on Scripture, seemingly aiming to be a whole-Bible commentary.[27] In composing this work, Poole drew upon his vast historical research of biblical interpretation to produce direct expositions of Scripture. The application of his crowning achievement was then to bring to bear his commitment to exegesis, understood in light of the tradition, so that God's people could appropriate it. Poole reached Isaiah 58 before he died, and other scholars completed and published the work after his death.[28]

Even in his day, Poole's death resounded among his appreciators. One published poem lamented, "Our LAMP is out!" Although his death was mourned, this poem also drew attention to his published work, emphasizing explicit attention on his *Synopsis*. It closed reflecting, "for whither sure, Should Sick Men go, but to the POOL for Cure."[29] In his own day, Poole's work that most forcefully united historical and exegetical labors was his most prominent legacy. That mark is a testament to the Reformed commitment both to the premise of *sola Scriptura* and to reading Scripture in alignment with those who have gone before us. Poole modeled that traditional exegesis as the foundation of pastoral practice. His pattern, at least in this respect, is one worth our reflection today. Ⓢ

Harrison N. Perkins *is pastor of Oakland Hills Community Church (OPC), a Senior Research Fellow at the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards, online faculty in church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, and visiting lecturer in systematic theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.*

23 Matthew Poole, *A Brief Description of a Design concerning a Synopsis of the Critical and Other Commentators* (1667), 3–4. Interestingly, this support was seemingly needed to overcome the perception of what we might consider copyright issues, since Poole's work collated the comments of previous biblical interpreters; John Maynard and William Jones, *A Just Vindication of Mr. Poole's Designe for Printing of his Synopsis of Critical and other Commentators* (1667). Poole himself addressed this criticism from printer Cornelius Bee in his published preface; Poole, *Synopsis*, II.

24 Poole, *Synopsis*, III.

25 Poole, *Synopsis*, III (Calvini commentaria non tam critical sunt…quam Practica; nec tam verba & phrases enucleant… quam materias Theologicas solide tractant).

26 Keene, "Poole [Pole], Matthew (1624?–1679)."

27 Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible wherein the Sacred Text is inserted, and various readings annex'd, together with parallel scriptures, the more difficult terms in each verse are explained, seeming contradictions reconciled, questions and doubts resolved, and the whole text opened* (1683).

28 Keene, "Poole [Pole], Matthew (1624?–1679)."

29 Anonymous, *On the Death of Mr. Matthew Pool. Anagram, Matthew Pool, O the Lamp Out* (1679).

Remembering the Pilgrims

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by Tracy McKenzie

If you were born in the United States, you have probably known the basic outline of the story since grade school: A small band of English Separatists, seeking a better life, cross the storm-tossed Atlantic in the tiny *Mayflower* and arrive at the coast of present-day Massachusetts in late 1620. Having arrived on the eve of a cruel winter, they endure unimaginable hardships over the next few months, and one half of their number die before spring. But with the assistance of their new Indian neighbors, the remainder survive to reap a bountiful harvest in the fall of 1621, at which time they pause to celebrate the goodness of God with a special feast. It is an inspiring story, and it would be good for Christians this Thanksgiving to remember it.

But will we remember it correctly? If most of us have known of the story since grade school, it is also true that few of us have studied it seriously *since* grade school, and our understanding is usually simplistic—or just plain wrong. Among other things, *we tend to misunderstand why these "Pilgrims" came to America in the first place, as well as how they understood the celebration that we—not they—labeled the "First Thanksgiving." This is unfortunate, for the real story is actually more inspiring—and more convicting—than the myths we have created.*

Let us start with the question of why the Pilgrims migrated to New England. The popular answer is that they came "in search of religious freedom," but in the sense that we usually mean it, that is not really true. One of my favorite quotes is from *Democracy in America* where Alexis de Tocqueville observes, "A false but clear and precise idea always has more power in the world than one which is true but complex."[2] The Pilgrims' motives for coming to America is a case in point.

The popular understanding that the Pilgrims came to America in search of religious freedom is *technically* true, but it is also misleading. It is technically true in that the freedom to worship according to the dictates of Scripture was at the very top of their list of priorities. They had already risked everything to escape religious persecution, and the majority never would have knowingly chosen a destination where they would once again wear the "yoke of antichristian bondage," as they described their experience in England.

To say that the Pilgrims came in search of religious freedom is misleading, however, in that it implies that they lacked such liberty in Holland. Remember that the Pilgrims did not come to America directly from England. They had left England in 1608, locating briefly in Amsterdam before settling for more than a decade in Leiden. If a longing for religious freedom alone had compelled them, they might never have left that city. Years later, the Pilgrims' long-time governor, William Bradford, recalled that in Leiden God had allowed them "to come as near the primitive pattern of the first churches as any other church of these later times."[3] As Pilgrim Edward Winslow recalled, God had blessed them with "much peace and liberty" in Holland. They hoped to find "the like liberty" in their new home.[4]

But that is not all they hoped to find. Boiled down, the Pilgrims had two major complaints about their experience in Holland. First, they found it a hard place to raise their children. Dutch culture was too permissive, they believed. Bradford commented on "the great licentiousness of youth" in Holland and lamented the "evil examples" and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1144.

2 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (HarperPerennial, 1969), 187.

3 William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647* (Modern Library, 1981), 19.

4 Edward Winslow, *Hypocrisie Unmasked: A True Relation of the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Company against Samuel Gorton on Rhode Island* (1646), 88, 89.

"manifold temptations of the place."[5] Part of the problem was the Dutch parents. They gave their children too much freedom, Bradford's nephew, Nathaniel Morton, explained, and Separatist parents could not give their own children "due correction without reproof or reproach from their neighbors."[6]

Compounding these challenges was what Bradford called "the hardness of the place."[7] If Holland was a hard place to raise strong families, it was an even harder place to make a living. Leiden was a crowded, rapidly growing city. Most houses were ridiculously small by our standards, often with no more than a couple hundred square feet of floor space. And in contrast to the seasonal rhythms of farm life, the pace of work was long, intense, and unrelenting. Probably half or more of the Separatist families became textile workers. Cloth production in this era was a decentralized, labor-intensive process, with families carding, spinning, or weaving in their homes from dawn to dusk, six days a week, merely to keep body and soul together.

This life of "great labor and hard fare" was a threat to the church, Bradford stressed.[8] It discouraged Separatists in England from joining them, and it tempted those in Leiden to return home. If religious freedom was to be thus linked with poverty, then there were some—too many—who would opt for the religious persecution of England over the religious freedom of Holland. And the challenge would only increase over time. Old age was creeping up on many of the congregation, indeed, was being hastened prematurely by "great and continual labor." While the most resolute could endure such hardships in the prime of life, advancing age and declining strength would cause many either to "sink under their burdens"[9] or reluctantly abandon the community in search of relief.

In explaining the Pilgrims' decision to leave Holland, Bradford stressed the Pilgrims' economic circumstances more than any other factor, but it is important that we hear correctly what he was saying. Bradford was not telling us that the Pilgrims left for America in search of the "American Dream" or primarily to maximize their own individual well-being. According to the governor, it was impossible to separate the Pilgrims' concerns about either the effects of Dutch culture or their economic circumstances from their concerns for *the survival of their church*. The leaders of the Leiden congregation may not have feared religious persecution, but they saw spiritual danger and decline on the horizon.

The solution, the Pilgrim leaders believed, was to "take away these discouragements" by relocating to a place with greater economic opportunity as part of a cooperative mission to preserve their covenant community. If the congregation did not collectively "dislodge . . . to some place of better advantage,"[10] and soon, the church seemed destined to erode like the banks of a stream, as one by one, families and individuals slipped away.

So where does this leave us? Were the Pilgrims coming to America to flee religious persecution? No. Were they motivated by a religious impulse? Absolutely. But why is it important to make these seemingly fine distinctions? Is this just another exercise in academic hair-splitting? I do not think so. In fact, I think that the implications of getting the Pilgrims' motives right are huge.

As I re-read the Pilgrims' words, I find myself meditating on Jesus's parable of the sower. You will recall how the sower casts his seed (the Word of God), and it falls on multiple kinds of ground, not all of which prove fruitful. The seed that lands on stony ground sprouts immediately, but the plant withers under the heat of the noonday sun, while

5 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 25.

6 Nathaniel Morton, *New England's Memorial, or a Brief Relation of the Most Memorable and Remarkable Passages of the Providence of God Manifested to the Planters of New England in America* (1669), 3.

7 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 23.

8 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 23.

9 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 24.

10 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 24, 25.

the seed cast among thorns springs up and then is choked by the surrounding weeds. The former, Jesus explained to his disciples, represents those who receive the word gladly but stumble "when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word" (Mark 4:17). The latter stands for those who allow the Word to be choked by "the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19).

In emphasizing the Pilgrims' "search for religious freedom," we inadvertently make the primary menace in their story the heat of persecution. Persecution led them to leave England for Holland, but it was not the primary reason that they came to America. As the Pilgrim writers saw it, the principal threat to their congregation in Holland was not the scorching sun, but strangling thorns.

The difference matters. It broadens the conversation we can have with the Pilgrims and makes it more relevant. When we hear their resolve in the face of persecution in England, we may nod our heads admiringly and meditate on the courage of their convictions. Perhaps we will even ask ourselves how we would respond if we were to endure the same trial. And yet the danger is still comfortably hypothetical, whatever cultural hostility we may feel in 2024 notwithstanding. Whatever limitations we may chafe against in the public square, as Christians in the United States we do not have to worry that the government will send us to prison—as the English government did to Separatists in the 1600s—unless we worship in the church that it chooses and interpret the Bible in the manner that it dictates.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting that we never ask ourselves how we might respond to such persecution. Posing that question can remind us to be grateful for the freedom we enjoy. It may heighten our concern for Christians around the world who cannot take such freedom for granted. These are good things. But I am suggesting that we not dwell overlong on the question. I am dubious of the value of moral reflection that focuses on hypothetical circumstances. Character is not forged in the abstract, but in the concrete crucible of everyday life, in the myriad mundane decisions that both shape and reveal the heart's deepest loves.

Here the Pilgrims' struggle with "thorns" speaks to us. Compared to the dangers they faced in England, their hardships in Holland were so . . . ordinary. I do not mean to minimize them, but merely to point out that they are difficulties we are more likely to relate to. They worried about their children's future. They feared the effects of a corrupt and permissive culture. They had a hard time making ends meet. They wondered how they would provide for themselves in old age. Does any of this sound familiar?

And in contrast to their success in escaping persecution, they found the cares of the world much more difficult to evade. As it turned out, thorn bushes grew in the New World as well as the Old. In little more than a decade, William Bradford was concerned that economic circumstances were again weakening the fabric of the church.[11] This time, ironically, the culprit was not the pressure of want but the prospect of wealth ("the deceitfulness of riches"?) as faithful members of the congregation moved away from Plymouth in search of larger, more productive farms. A decade after that, Bradford was decrying the presence of gross immorality within the colony. Drunkenness and sexual sin had become so common, he lamented, that it caused him "to fear and tremble at the consideration of our corrupt natures."[12]

When we insist that the Pilgrims came to America "in search of religious freedom," we tell their story in a way that they themselves wouldn't recognize. In the process we can also ignore aspects of the Pilgrims' story that might cast a light into our own hearts. They struggled with fundamental questions relevant to us today: What is the true cost of discipleship? What must we sacrifice in pursuit of the kingdom? How can we "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15) and keep ourselves "unstained from the world" (James 1:27)? What sort of obligation do we owe our local churches,

11 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 281–83.

12 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 351.

and how do we balance that duty with family commitments and individual desires? What does it look like to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33), and can we really trust God to provide for all our other needs?

In the same way that we misunderstand the Pilgrims' motives for coming to America, we are typically confused about the meaning of their 1621 celebration after their first harvest in their new home. Certainly, there is much about it that we should admire. Think again of the context. The previous autumn, 102 men, woman, and children had departed from Holland on the *Mayflower*, taking sixty-five days to cross the stormy Atlantic in a space below deck roughly the size of a city bus. Following that came a bitter New England winter for which they were ill-prepared. Due more to exposure than starvation, their number had dwindled rapidly, so that by the onset of spring some fifty-one members of the party had died. A staggering fourteen of the eighteen wives who had set sail on the *Mayflower* had perished in their new home. Widowers and orphans now abounded. That the Pilgrims could celebrate at all in this setting was a testimony both to human resilience and to heavenly hope.

And yet this episode of the Pilgrims' story that modern-day Americans have chosen to emphasize does not seem to have been that significant to the Pilgrims themselves. More importantly, it fails to capture the heart of the Pilgrims' thinking about God's provision and our proper response. Almost everything we know about the Pilgrims' experience after leaving Holland comes from two Pilgrim writers that I have quoted frequently above: the colony's governor, William Bradford, and his close assistant, Edward Winslow. Bradford never even referred to the Pilgrims' 1621 celebration in his history of the Pilgrims' colony, *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Winslow mentioned it but briefly, devoting five sentences to it in a letter that he wrote to supporters in England. Those five sentences represent the sum total of all that we know about the occasion!

This means that there is a lot that we would like to know about that event that we will never know. It seems likely (although it must be conjecture) that the Pilgrims thought of their autumn celebration that first fall in Plymouth as something akin to the harvest festivals common at that time in England. What is certain is that they did not conceive of the celebration as a Thanksgiving holiday.

When the Pilgrims spoke of holidays, they used the word literally. A holiday was a "holy day," a day specially set apart for worship and communion with God. Their reading of the Scripture convinced them that God had only established one regular holy day under the new covenant, and that was the Lord's Day each Sunday. Beyond that, they did believe that the Scripture allowed the consecration of *occasional* (not annual, scheduled) Days of Fasting and Humiliation to beseech the Lord for deliverance from a particular trial, as well as *occasional* (not annual, scheduled) Days of Thanksgiving to praise the Lord for his extraordinary provision. Both kinds of holy day featured solemn observances characterized by lengthy religious services full of prayer, praise, instruction, and exhortation. The Pilgrims 1621 celebration featured games and feasting and, as far as we know from Winslow's account, no religious service at all.

From the Pilgrims' perspective, their first formal celebration of a Day of Thanksgiving in Plymouth came nearly two years later, in July 1623. We are comparatively unfamiliar with it because, frankly, we get bored with the Pilgrims once they have carved the first turkey. We condense their story to three key events—the Mayflower Compact, their supposed landing at Plymouth Rock (which they never mentioned), and the First Thanksgiving—and quickly lose interest thereafter. In reality, the Pilgrims' struggle for survival continued at least another two years.

This was partly due to the criminal mismanagement of the London financiers who bankrolled the colony. Only weeks after their 1621 harvest celebration, the Pilgrims were surprised by the arrival of the ship *Fortune*. The thirty-five new settlers on board would nearly double their depleted ranks. Unfortunately, they arrived with few clothes, no bedding or pots or pans, and "not so much as

biscuit cake or any other victuals,"[13] as Bradford bitterly recalled. Indeed, the London merchants had not even provisioned the ship's crew with sufficient food for the trip home.

The result was that the Pilgrims had to provide food for the *Fortune*'s return voyage as well as feed an additional thirty-five mouths throughout the winter. Rather than having "good plenty" until the next harvest, as they had anticipated, they once again faced the imminent prospect of starvation.[14] Fearing that the newcomers would "bring famine upon us," the governor immediately reduced the weekly food allowance by half. In the following months hunger "pinch[ed] them sore."[15] By May they were almost completely out of food. It was no longer the season for waterfowl, and if not for the shellfish in the bay, and the little grain they were able to purchase from passing fishing boats, they very well might have starved.

The harvest of 1622 provided a temporary reprieve from hunger, but it fell far short of their needs for the coming year, and by the spring of 1623 the Pilgrims' situation was again dire. As Bradford remembered their trial, it was typical for the colonists to go to bed at night not knowing where the next day's nourishment would come from. For two to three months, they had no bread or beer at all, and "God fed them" almost wholly "out of the sea."[16]

Adding to their plight, the heavens closed up around the third week in May, and for nearly two months it rained hardly at all. The ground became parched, the corn began to wither, and hopes for the future began dying as well. When another boatload of settlers arrived that July, they were "much daunted and dismayed" by their first sight of the Plymouth colonists, many of whom were "ragged in apparel and some little better than half naked."[17] The Pilgrims, for their part, could offer the newcomers nothing more than a piece of fish and a cup of water.

In the depths of this trial the Pilgrims were sure of this much: it was God who had sent this great drought; it was the Lord who was frustrating their "great hopes of a large crop." This was not the caprice of "nature," but the handiwork of the Creator who worked "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11, NKJV). Fearing that he had done this thing for their chastisement, the community agreed to set apart "a solemn day of humiliation, to seek the Lord by humble and fervent prayer, in this great distress."[18]

As Edward Winslow explained, their hope was that God "would be moved hereby in mercy to look down upon us, and grant the request of our dejected souls. . . . But oh the mercy of our God!" Winslow exulted, "who was as ready to hear, as we to ask."[19] The colonists awoke on the appointed day to a cloudless sky, but by the end of the prayer service—which lasted eight to nine hours—it had become overcast, and by morning it had begun to rain, as it would continue to do for the next fourteen days. Bradford marveled at the "sweet and gentle showers . . . which did so apparently revive and quicken the decayed corn."[20] Winslow added, "It was hard to say whether our withered corn or drooping affections were most quickened or revived."[21]

Overwhelmed by God's gracious intervention, the Pilgrims immediately called for another holy day. "We thought it would be great ingratitude," Winslow explained, if we should

> content ourselves with private thanksgiving for that which by private prayer could not be obtained. And therefore another solemn day was set apart and appointed for that end; wherein we returned glory, honor, and praise,

13 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 101.

14 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 100.

15 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 105, 121.

16 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 144.

17 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 143.

18 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 144.

19 Edward Winslow, *Good Newes from New England: or a True Relation of Things Very Remarkable at the Plantation of Plimoth in New England* (Bladen and Bellamie, 1624), 55.

20 Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 145.

21 Winslow, *Good Newes from New England*, 55.

with all thankfulness, to our good God.[22]

This occasion, likely held at the end of July, 1623, perfectly matches the Pilgrims' definition of a thanksgiving holy day. It was a "solemn" observance, as Winslow noted, called to acknowledge a very specific, extraordinary blessing from the Lord. In sum, it was what the Pilgrims themselves would have viewed as their "First Thanksgiving" in America, and we have all but forgotten it.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this November, perhaps we might remember both occasions. The Pilgrims' harvest celebration of 1621 is an important reminder to see God's gracious hand in the bounty of nature. But the Pilgrims' holiday of 1623—what *they* would have called "The First Thanksgiving"—more forthrightly challenges us to look for God's ongoing, supernatural intervention in our lives. ©

Tracy McKenzie *is a professor of history at Wheaton College, where he holds the Arthur Holmes Chair of Faith and Learning, and is a past president of the Conference on Faith and History, a national association of Christian historians. He is the author, among other works, of* The First Thanksgiving: What the Real Story Tells Us about Loving God *and* Learning from History.

22 Winslow, *Good Newes from New England*, 56.

Servant Living

Abuse: No Joke, No Myth

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by Shane Lems

Abuse. It has been a hot topic in our culture for the last fifteen years or more. Various abuse cases have been highlighted by the media more than a few times. To put it in other terms, pointing the spotlight on abuse has been "trending." Reports of abuse often go viral online. Needless to say, many people in our culture know about abuse.

Typically, in Christian circles, cultural hot topics lead to debates. From climate change to women's rights, to immigration policies to political movements, Christians debate and disagree upon various trending topics. However, abuse is not something about which Christians should disagree. Abuse is wrong, and it is detestable. Abuse is nothing to joke about. Whether physical, spiritual, sexual, emotional, or verbal, all forms of abuse are contrary to God's Word (e.g., Jer. 22:3, Ps. 10:7, Prov. 24:1–2, etc.). Although it is unfortunate that false accusations of abuse happen, Christians should despise the very thought of abuse. Abuse is an evil and an injustice that originates from the dark corners of a sinful heart and is instigated by Satan himself.

Most people have heard about abuse cases involving CEOs, coaches, politicians, or people in other positions of authority. Even more discouraging and disheartening are the stories about abuse involving pastors and church leaders. It is not a myth. Some leaders in Christian churches—even conservative Christian churches—have abused God's people. Like the evil, worthless shepherds of God's people in Ezekiel's day, some men today in leadership positions have abused God's people and ruled them with harshness and brutality (Ezek. 34:4). The evil actions of these harsh shepherds cause the sheep to scatter and wander (Ezek. 34:6). The poor sheep are forced to run from the dangerous shepherd into the wilderness, where they face dangerous animals. It happened in Ezekiel's day; it still happens today. Sometimes men in authority simultaneously abuse their authority and the people under their authority, causing unimaginable harm to the flock. No wonder the Lord says *woe* to such wicked men and vows to hold them accountable for their terrible evil (Ezek. 34:2, 10).

On a positive note, and biblically speaking, pastors and elders are called to rule with Christ-like love, tenderness, and care (1 Pet. 4:1–4). Pastors and elders must not rule with a brawny, heavy-handed, tough demeanor. Instead, they must care for sheep in a loving maternal and paternal way (Ezek. 34:3–4; 1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:2). Paul says that overseers in the church must not be violent, but gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). Shepherds are not to be arguers who like to quarrel (1 Tim. 3:3). They must be self-controlled in all areas of life, avoiding both anger and too much alcohol (1 Tim. 3:2–3). Along with all Christians, pastors and elders must cultivate and live out the fruit of the Spirit, including love, kindness, patience, goodness, and gentleness.

Pastors and elders must also lead the way in the blessed task of peacemaking. They do not take up weapons in personal conflicts, but pastors and elders help people lay down their weapons and seek peace. Shepherds are not fighters; they must not fight with the sheep. Pastors and elders must be kind to everyone, correct opponents with gentleness, and let love cover all offenses (2 Tim. 2:24–26; 1 Pet. 4:8). Shepherds must stand firmly on the truth and boldly teach the truth, but when they interact with opponents or objectors, they are to speak the truth in love and correct others with

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1103.

gentleness (Matt. 5:44; Eph. 4:15).

Again, all these characteristics are Christ-like. He is our Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep with tender love. Our dear Savior never harms, manipulates, bullies, lies to, or deceives his sheep. Pastors and elders, by God's grace, are called to be Christ-like in their care for the flock. Thankfully, God is abundantly kind to his people. He has given them many wonderful pastors and elders throughout history, men who have loved the flock so much they not only suffered abuse without retaliating (like Christ) but also even gave their lives out of love for the church (like Christ). Thank God for such wonderful, Christ-like men who have served his church!

But once again, we must not forget that abuse does happen in Christian churches. We must not be ignorant or naive about the reality of abuse in Christian circles. And we must not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear when we hear about or see abuse cases of any kind. The Lord loves justice and calls us to practice justice while we walk humbly with him (Mic. 6:8). This means listening to cries for help, coming to the side of those treated unjustly, and making sure that unfit, evil shepherds are not allowed to rule (Isa. 1:17; Amos 5:15; Jer. 22:3; Jer. 21:12, etc.). Churches—and church leadership—should promote and seek justice in a biblical way, a way that glorifies the Lord and is good for his people. In a word, Christians should, in a just way, oppose abuse in the church. (Christians should justly oppose abuse outside the church as well, but that is a slightly different topic.)

Opposing abuse in the church is easier said than done. However, there are good resources for churches to utilize when seeking help and pursuing biblical justice in abuse situations. In fact, many of these available resources are helpful to study *before* a church faces such difficult circumstances. Knowing the tendencies and tactics of abusers and church bullies will help Christians spot them and, with God's help, prevent abuse before it happens—whether in the home or in the church.

One extremely helpful resource about abuse is *Why Does He Do That?* by Lundy Bancroft.[2] The subtitle gives more information about the book: "Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men." To be sure, this is not a Christian book, and Christians will certainly find areas in it with which they disagree. However, Bancroft has many years of experience counseling, training, and helping women in abusive situations. He writes from a position of much exposure to and knowledge about abuse. We might think of gaining insight from Bancroft's expertise in this area as plundering the Egyptians or going to the ant for wisdom (Exod. 12:35–36; Prov. 6:6; 30:25).

There are four main parts to Bancroft's book: 1) The Nature of Abusive Thinking, 2) The Abusive Man in Relationships, 3) The Abusive Man in the World, and 4) Changing the Abusive Man. *Why Does He Do That?* is a very helpful resource because it gives details about the various mindsets of abusers. For one example, in chapter 3 Bancroft explains the mentality of an abusive man: he is controlling, he feels entitled, he twists things into their opposites, he confuses love and abuse, he strives to have a good public image, he denies and minimizes his abuse, etc. In the next chapter, Bancroft examines the different types of abusive men, and later in the book he addresses how a man becomes abusive and what it is like for a woman to live with an abusive man. The last few chapters are about getting help for abusers and how to work toward an abuse-free world. Whether dealing with an abuse situation in the home or in the church, this book is a very important resource to utilize.

Specifically concerning abuse in the church, Michael Kruger's *Bully Pulpit*[3] is perhaps the best resource for churches that are dealing with bully pastors or elders. In a word, this book explains the problem of abuse in the church and advises Christians on how to biblically navigate abuse situations. In this book, Kruger shares his observations and research about how bully pastors function. From

2 Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (Berkley Books, 2003).

3 Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Zondervan, 2022).

gaslighting to manipulation to narcissistic behavior, Kruger does a fine job explaining the various evil tactics bullies use to dominate the flock.

In *Bully Pulpit*, Kruger also gives insight into spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is something that Christians might not think about too often, but it definitely does happen. Kruger's definition is helpful: "Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals" (24). Chapters 2 and 3 cover the topic of spiritual abuse, and later in the book Kruger also explains some of the damaging effects of spiritual abuse.

Bully Pulpit also gives some insight into why churches fail to stop leaders who bully. This book also helps readers learn how abusive leaders retaliate. The various information about bullies is useful when dealing with such leaders; it helps Christians protect themselves and others against such men. The last chapter contains Kruger's recommendations for creating a local church culture that is resistant to spiritual abuse. Although this book is only around 150 pages long, it is full of extremely important, beneficial, and practical information about abusive leaders in the church. As I have mentioned elsewhere, this book should be read, marked, and studied by all elders and pastors.

There are quite a few other resources on abuse in the church and in the home. Other very good resources include *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church* by Anna Wood and Jeff Crippen, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick, and *Is It Abuse?: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland.[4]

Indeed, more resources could be listed here as well, and interested readers should look for other resources that aid Christians in dealing with abuse in a biblical, wise, and just manner. Abuse does happen in Christian circles. It is not a myth; it is not a joke. Christians should add it to their prayer lists: "Lord, help the victims of abuse, bring abusers to justice as you will, and give your church the resolve to deal with abuse in a biblical way." ©

Shane Lems *serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin.*

4 Anna Wood and Jeff Crippen, *A Cry for Justice: How the Evil of Domestic Abuse Hides in Your Church* (Calvary, 2012); Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope* (WaterBrook, 2013); Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (P&R, 2020).

Reproductive Technologies: Blessing or Curse, Dilemmas for Christians

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by Jan F. Dudt

The pace of new technological developments is staggering. It is difficult to process the potential impact they can have on our lives and culture. It is even hard for those of us who teach and work in technological fields to keep abreast of the trends and to process them with biblical discernment, insight, perception, and wisdom. Thirty years ago, Neil Postman expressed concern in his book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.[2] His assessment was that when a technology is admitted to a culture, it plays out its hand. That is, new technologies end up shaping us in ways we do not often think of or are even aware of as the technology becomes commonly used. In our

1 http://opc.org/os.html?article_id=54.

2 Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (Vintage, 1993).

technology-driven society we tend to assume that the next technological advancement is inherently an improvement over the old. The assumption is not always warranted. We as Christians need to be skeptical. Currently our western cultural context seems to be increasingly willing to distance itself from any informed Christian assessment of the new. Some Christians may think technology is neutral, and whether it is used for good or evil is dependent on the purposes and ethics of its use. However, that claim may be debated. Technology always reflects a practical use of information rooted in God's created world. It is true that it can be used for good or evil. The same can be said of things created good, such as sex, food, drink, words—the list could go on. Ultimately these good creations are either used in the good service of the Creator, or they are used in service of Satan. So, in a way there is no neutrality.

What seems shocking to many is that some of the latest modern technologies appear to be sinister from the start. Indeed, they still reflect the created order or else they would not work. However, the motivation behind them taints the possibility of them ever being used ethically, especially if the culture rejects biblically informed ethical principles.

It becomes the job of Christians to work with these technologies and develop the ethical frameworks for using them, if they can be used at all. Central to biblically informed ethical use are definitions we find in Scripture for humans being in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), the nuclear family as being the only sanctioned way of bringing children into the world (Gen 2:24), and the value of the human body as an essential part of the image-bearing human (1 Cor. 6:19–20, 1 Cor. 15). No other arrangement than the married husband and wife is considered a legitimate means of human reproduction. Behind it all is the Creation Mandate to be fruitful, multiply, have dominion, and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28; Ps. 8).

Being in a fallen world has meant that the situation becomes complicated in the face of these principles. One or both parents may die, leaving a single parent or orphans. In our culture, out-of-wedlock births are endemic. This often creates single parents or opportunities for adoption, a legitimate biblical solution. Infertility has plagued our species from the earliest times. Solutions for infertility are old—for example, Abram, Sarai, and the traditional surrogate, Hagar (Gen.16).

Making this even more complicated is the modern global decline in birthrates. Major portions of global populations are currently significantly below the sustaining birthrate of 2.1 children per woman. Hence, they are at risk of serious population decline. According to World Bank data, the average European births per woman is 1.5, with many European countries being lower. China is at 1.2, Japan is at 1.3, South Korea is at 0.8. In North America the situation is also in decline. The birthrate for the United States is at 1.6, Canada is at 1.4, and Mexico is at 1.8. In all these places, the cultural value of the nuclear family and fertility has been in decline for decades. The long-range prognosis for such trends is not good. In fact, they are extinction trajectories.

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

Yet these countries are often world leaders in developing reproductive technologies. For example, in England, in vitro fertilization (IVF) was first successfully used in 1978 to reproduce a child from a married couple who were struggling with infertility. The embryo was implanted in the mother after in-lab fertilization was accomplished. Louise Joy Brown was born July 25, 1978. It is true that technology like this helps us regain lost dominion that results from the fall. Infertility due to biological impairment would not have been a situation of the pre-fallen economy. We can be thankful for the recovery of fertility for those struggling with the loss.

However, ethical issues remain a concern with IVF. The issue of human embryos being produced in unsuccessful trials is troubling. According to the National Institute of Health (NIH),[3] the

3 Mahvash Zargar, et al., "Pregnancy Outcomes Following *In Vitro* Fertilization Using Fresh or Frozen Embryo Transfer," NIH National Library of Medicine, v.25(4), Oct–Dec 2021, https://

implanted-embryo-to-birth success rate is about 30 percent, compared to 24 percent for natural conception to births.[4] The pre-implantation embryo selection process in the lab may be increasing technological success over natural conception. This practice would be problematic for prolife Christians desiring to give all embryos a chance for development and delivery.

A big problem with IVF is the fact that the technology is not solely used by married couples. It can be used by single women using sperm donors to fertilize their eggs, or lesbians and gay individuals looking to have a child with the help of surrogates or sperm donors. In addition, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2 percent of live births in the US are the result of IVF.[5] Not all of them are children of a married husband and wife. Even married couples may find that excess embryos from IVF procedures are unwanted, relegating these embryos to be stored indefinitely in liquid nitrogen at -320°F. These pre-born humans have a grim future unless their parents give them a chance at life, or a surrogate mother, hopefully married to a husband, steps forward to adopt them. Christians need to be aware of the issues as they make biblically informed choices regarding their families. For example, adopting an embryo from cold storage and navigating the dynamics of relationships with the child's genetic parents can be challenging.

It is conceivable that IVF as a reproductive solution can be helpful for married husbands and wives. However, thinking it through should involve much prayer and seeking wise counsel. This technology should not be used except by those who are husband and wife creating their child together. And all embryos so produced should be given a chance to be brought to term.

Sperm Banks and Cryo-preservation

Sperm banks have been around for decades. Donor men are paid to donate their sperm, retained in liquid-nitrogen cold storage. Sperm can be used sooner or later. Liquid-nitrogen storage is nearly indefinite. The obvious ethical concern in this technology is the payment for sperm donation to fathers who have no intention to raise the children they sire, let alone be married to the mother. Profiled donors, often remaining nameless, are selected by women for artificial insemination or IVF. Some of these women are acting as surrogate mothers for anyone desiring to adopt a baby with traits hopefully mirroring those of the father or mother. In any event, it is thought that 30,000 to 60,000 births a year occur with the use of sperm donors. Many of the women are single or are lesbians who want to have a child. Some of the fathers are seeking contact with the children they anonymously fathered. Some are exploring the parental rights they have as biological fathers. One donor father who knows he fathered ninety-six children went on a 9,000-mile trek through North America to contact the children.[6] There have been cases of half-sibling couples marrying and having children before they realized they had the same father. These obvious ethical concerns mean that sperm banks used this way are not options for Christians.

Yet, this technology can preserve a husband's sperm for married couples that face the potential onset of the husband's infertility due to disease or trauma. In this way, an unfortunate effect of our fallen world can be addressed. Lost dominion can, in part, be regained.

Two Types of Surrogacy

Surrogate motherhood has become increasingly popular in recent decades. Traditional surrogacy—the type used by Abram, Sarai, and Hagar, where the surrogate as biological mother carries the man's offspring—is still around. It is banned in many European countries but is legal in

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8489809/.

4 C. E. Boklage, "Survival Probability of Human Conceptions from Fertilization to Term," NIH National Library of Medicine, v.35(2) Mar–Apr 1990, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1970983/.

5 "ART Success Rates," Center for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/art/artdata/index.html.

6 Amy Dockser Marcus, "A Sperm Donor Chases a Role in the Lives of the 96 Children He Fathered," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 2023.

the United States. The surrogate is the biological mother of the child, and her name is on the child's original birth certificate. How many children are born annually by way of traditional surrogacy is hard to know. Married couples and homosexual couples have used traditional surrogates. And they may pay dearly for it—$120,000 to $200,000. However, the ethical concerns experienced by Abram and Sarai are compounded by our modern cultural turmoil. For example, John Stonestreet and Maria Baer report in *Breakpoint*,[7] produced by the Colson Center, of a gay couple who wanted their surrogate to abort the baby because of fears that a premature baby would be at risk to have certain medical issues. The mother had contracted aggressive breast cancer and was advised to be induced to deliver so she could start cancer treatments. The child, born at twenty-five weeks, could have survived but unfortunately died soon after delivery. Legal issues compound the ethical crisis. In California, parental rights laws would have likely required the mother to abort at the behest of the gay couple who contracted her services.

Gestational surrogacy is also fraught with ethical concerns. In gestational surrogacy, the surrogate mother carries the IVF embryo of a married couple, or an embryo from an unmarried woman and man. The surrogate would not be genetically related to the child. Christian women have been known to carry babies for married couples when the genetic mother could not carry the baby to term. Typically, this surrogacy is considered an act of kindness on the part of the surrogate, whether she is monetarily compensated or not. Risks associated with pregnancy are still a concern. Parental rights issues remain. And abortion may be considered if the developing child does not meet the expectations of the biological parents. Gestational surrogates typically are asked to meet the industry's standards of being healthy women who have had a couple healthy natural pregnancies. However, as altruistic as it may sound, payment for the service is typical and the commodification of physical humanity remains a grave concern. How does one put a price tag on human bodies?

Gestation by Way of Artificial Wombs

Perhaps the most chilling advancement in reproductive technology is the "progress" being made in development of artificial gestation—artificial wombs. The technology is progressing rapidly. Mice can be gestated from conception to 50 percent full term. Sheep can be taken from two-thirds term to delivery in artificial wombs. This technology is being consider for human trials by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA).[8] The initial rationale is to offer treatment to babies that would otherwise face the risks of premature delivery.

Few premature babies survive if born before twenty-two weeks of gestation. Premature babies born after twenty-eight weeks are still at high risk of various medical conditions later in life. Premature babies put into artificial wombs (like those developed for sheep) and allowed to develop closer to the normal forty weeks could be heathier. This assumes that the technology works and does not create more of its own associated problems.

Experimenting with the early stages of the technology is problematic. Prolife concerns would include making sure trials were not conducted on healthy mothers and babies, putting them at unnecessary risk. Trials would defensibly be offered as experimental treatments for otherwise hopeless cases where the baby would die if not gestated artificially. That decision may not always be clear, and parental rights can easily be violated. Yet increasing the likelihood of infant survival would be desirable.

Ethical, lifesaving use of artificial wombs would make the new advancements attractive. However, in our ethically confused culture it is quite possible that there would be many violations of Christian ethics in the development and use

7 John Stonestreet and Maria Baer, "Why There's No Such Thing as 'Surrogacy Gone Wrong,'" *Breakpoint*, Colson Center, August 14, 2023, https://breakpoint.org/why-theres-no-such-thing-as-surrogacy-gone-wrong/.

8 Max Kozlov, "Human Trials of Artificial Wombs Could Happen Soon," *Nature*, September 14, 2023, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02901-1.

of the technology. Developing the technology in today's ethical environment would certainly mean that some level of human embryonic and fetal experimentation would be part of the development plan. If the technology is advanced by means of purposefully experimenting with unborn humans, Christians would have to cry foul. However, in the past, overt human experimentation has been avoided at times by the use of experimental procedures that have given a ray of hope in an otherwise hopelessly desperate situation. I would imagine the first cesarean section on a human was such a case. Eventually the technique was perfected, largely through trial and error.

One can imagine a very sinister use of artificial wombs. In those counties with declining populations due to low birthrates, as seen in Europe and East Asia (North America is not far behind), it is conceivable that the technology could be used to prevent population collapse to avert economic and cultural ruin. In places where the traditional family is in crisis, central authorities may employ artificial wombs to avert demographic disaster. Governments would be engaged in raising and educating the children by means that would entirely circumvent the traditional family, with nightmarish results. Pray that it never comes to this. If it does, Christians will be faced with profound challenges, from evangelism to nearly unimaginable social issues. We can always rely on God's grace to see us through. Opportunities to be salt and light to a desperate people would never be greater.

Humans as GMO

Genetically modifying humans is another deep ethical concern facing us. Presently, the only known genetically modified humans are the three Chinese girls who were genetically modified to be HIV resistant. The idea was to avoid the risk of them contracting HIV from their HIV positive father. Chinese doctor He Jiankul led a team using the gene-editing technology known as CRISPR to edit the genes of the IVF embryos of the genetic parents. Experiments were carried out on human embryos and fetuses carried by surrogate mothers. Dr. He successfully modified three young embryos but was eventually jailed for his efforts. The Chinese authorities took exception to Dr. He's freewheeling pursuit of scientific advancement.[9] It is fair to say that this technology was advanced by human genetic experimentation that resulted in the death of trial embryos and fetuses. In a regime that has little concern for humans as *imago Dei*, the biggest issue was doing the work apart from the approval of the central authorities. For Christians, that is not good enough. The protection of human life from experimental trials and certain death is the bigger issue. Altering human genetics may be acceptable if it corrects a genetic defect and human life is preserved. However, defining what is a genetic defect is not always clear. For example, is lactose tolerance or lactose intolerance a defect? Most would think that hemophilia is a defect worth correcting if the correction could be done without jeopardizing human life, as it is a condition recognizably due to the fall. However, the gain must not come at the price of destroyed human life.

Cloning Humans

Human reproductive cloning is banned internationally. However, cloning human embryos for therapeutic experimentation, for example the development of embryonic stem cells, is acceptable in many countries, including the United States. President George W. Bush issued an executive order in the summer of 2001 that cut off federal funding for many forms of human embryonic stem cell research. However, research could still be conducted with private funds. President Obama rescinded that order in March 2009 to remove politics and ideology from the issue and to let science be science. His explanation was an incredible statement full of politics and ideology.

However, reproductive cloning may well be on the horizon. Artificial wombs, genetic modification, the decay of the nuclear family, the rise of central authorities that have little regard for the

9 Sui-Lee Wee, "Chinese Scientist Who Genetically Edited Babies Gets 3 Years in Prison," *New York Times*, December 30, 2019.

human as the bearer of divine image—all pave the way for the unthinkable. I was at a stem-cell conference in 2007 when a researcher claimed to have cloned himself using somatic cell nuclear transfer, the same technology that produced Dolly the sheep and Barbara Streisand's replacement dogs. The research was done to produce stem-cell lines for regenerative medicine. The work was done in the United Kingdom, where law requires the clone to be terminated at the sixteen-cell stage. However, it is conceivable that the clone could have been implanted into a gestational surrogate mother and brought to term.

Undoubtedly, these reproductive technologies will be used as the future unfolds. Christians who understand the authority of Scriptures will be faced with opportunities for countercultural testimony and practice. We will be called to buck societal trends. Legal battles will occur. These are already realities. However, we will be faced with how we treat humans brought into the world, regardless of the technology used. Christians need to recognize all humans as image bearers of God. We will then need to fashion our cultural response accordingly. It is not a new thing that humans have reproduced by other-than-God-sanctioned means. However, it is biblically clear that all are to be recognized as *imago Dei*.

Technologies are already in motion that assault the image of God. Genetically engineering humans with non-human genes and human-animal chimeras are all possible. We can assume that those unrestrained by God's definitions of the created order are already making "progress" with these. Christians will increasingly be found to be in nearly intractable situations. We need to be praying for godly wisdom, discernment, insight, and perception to remain faithful to our calling to protect the *imago Dei* as we realize our call to take dominion and subdue the earth. Ⓢ

Jan Frederic Dudt *is a professor of biology at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania.*

The Church's Desire toward Christ Her Sin Offering: Irresistible Grace in Genesis 3:16

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by Aaron P. Mize

Geerhardus Vos, speaking of biblical theology and the organic-progressive nature of special revelation, said:

> From the beginning all redeeming acts of God aim at the creation and introduction of this new organic principle, which is none other than Christ. All Old Testament redemption is but the saving activity of God working toward the realization of this goal, the great supernatural prelude to the Incarnation and the Atonement.[2]

The purpose of this article is to follow the biblical, theological thread of Scripture, conveying its progressive and unfolding nature on Christ as its substance and goal, seen primarily in Revelation 12 and its connection to Genesis 3. Put succinctly, Genesis 3:16, in the immediate context of 3:15, with its focus on the promised Messiah, and in the broader context of its interpretation in Revelation 12:2, presents the relation between the promised Last Adam and his church. This reading of the text challenges many traditional readings that reduce the focus of the verse to the marital relation between Adam and Eve.

Revelation 12:2, reflecting on Genesis 3:16 and related texts, describes a woman laboring in the anguish of childbirth as a great red dragon

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1115.

2 Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (P&R, 1980), 12.

stands before her ready to devour the child when he is born. The woman does not represent any single individual; she represents the faithful covenant community of the church. Such a conclusion arises initially from the description and allusions in the Old Testament that conceive of Israel as pregnant.[3]

Revelation 12:1–2 is really the redemptive historical narrative of the people of God awaiting the birth of the promised Messiah. In the trial of waiting for their deliverer, who was promised in Genesis 3:15, they are persecuted by the serpent and his offspring who stand ready to devour the child. Revelation 12:5 then speaks of the male child being born and taken up into heaven to God and his throne, and the dragon who consequently pursues the woman to make war on her and her offspring. Revelation 12:5 then is the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in one verse. So, the woman can be said to represent the one persecuted covenant community of faith from the Old and New Testaments.

Of the many Old Testament allusions present in this section of Revelation, one stands out as the primary focus—Genesis 3:15–16. Here we see that the entire canon of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is framed as a woman, her offspring, and a serpent. Just as we can read of pre-fall Adam as a type of the person and work of Jesus Christ the second Adam, so, too, we can understand more about Eve and how she also represents the cove nant community of faith.[4] So, while holding to the view of the historical Eve who was created supernaturally by the Lord from the side of Adam, and in light of the organic character of progressive revelation, the woman of Revelation 12 can and does help us better understand the narrative regarding the first woman Eve, mother of the living.

In Revelation 12:2 the woman who is symbolically representing the one covenant community from the old and new covenants is described as being "pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth." The Greek word translated here as "agony" is the verb βασανίζω (*basanizō*). It can mean, "to subject to punitive judicial procedure, torture, to subject to severe distress, torment, harass."[5] The verb is used in several places of the New Testament to describe persecution or trial. For example, consider the italics in the following passages:

> And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to *torment* us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29)
>
> And he saw that they were making headway *painfully*, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them . . . (Mark 6:48)
>
> (For as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was *tormenting* his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard) . . . (2 Pet. 2:8)
>
> They were allowed to *torment* them for five months, but not to kill them, and their *torment* was like the *torment* of a scorpion when it stings someone. (Rev. 9:5)
>
> And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been

3 Several biblical texts make clear this leitmotif that sheds light on our understanding of Revelation 12:1–2 along these very lines: Isa. 26:17–18; 66:7–9; Mic. 4:9–10; 5:3.

4 Augustine writes of the symbolic meaning of Genesis 3:16: "There is no question about the punishment of the woman. For she clearly has her pains and sighs multiplied in the woes of this life. Although her bearing her children in pain is fulfilled in this visible woman, our consideration should nevertheless be recalled to that more hidden woman. For even in animals the females bear offspring with pain, and this is in their case the condition of mortality rather than the punishment of sin. Hence, it is possible that this be the condition of mortal bodies even in the female of humans. But this is the great punishment: they have come to the present bodily mortality from their former immortality." Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichaeans*. Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, 84, trans. Ronald J. Teske (Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 123.

5 A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, eds., William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. "βασανίζω."

a *torment* to those who dwell on the earth. (Rev. 11:10)

These birth-pangs are then the persecution caused by the great red dragon, identified in Revelation 12:9 as, "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." Satan stands before the woman ready to devour the Christ-child who is born and "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev. 12:5). The serpent hates this Son of Man because he knows that the person and work of the Son born to the woman guarantees his doom. The dragon knows that this is the one spoken of in the proto-evangelium of Genesis 3:15 who will bruise (crush or strike) his head. The dragon knows that this is the one spoken of in Isaiah 27:1, "In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." And so he rages against God and the divine Son of God. He sweeps a third of the stars from heaven in his malice. Stars here refer to the offspring of Abraham who was promised that his offspring would be multiplied "as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:17).[6]

After the Christ-child is born and is taken up to the throne of God, the woman flees into the desert wilderness, which is the redemptive historical place of testing and trial.[7] She is pursued by the dragon, who in his fury, knowing that his time is short and doom is sure, goes to "make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). The woman then is clearly the persecuted church, representing the prophetic (Old Testament) and apostolic (New Testament) witness to the person and work of Christ and the deeper conflict between the Serpent and his off spring and the righteous offspring of the covenant community.

Understanding the broader meaning of the woman in Revelation 12 helps us to understand the broader symbolism of Eve in Genesis 3. That is not to say that Eve was not a historical person and the first woman of creation. She was supernaturally created out of Adam's side as the first woman. One cannot stress the historicity of both Adam and Eve enough. Without them there cannot be a gospel. However, there is also a deeper structure that needs to be exegeted to shed light on some of the mystery surrounding Eve. This article is seeking to pull out the biblical theological significance on a broader scale. If the woman of Revelation 12 is symbolic of the covenant community, awaiting the promised offspring (also having other offspring), while being tormented by the serpent and his offspring, then the same can be said about Eve in Genesis 3.

Before focusing again on Genesis 3:15–16 in light of what we have seen in Revelation 12, let us consider the overall context. The serpent has entered the temple sanctuary of Eden. His malicious and blasphemous strategy is to undermine God's Word to Adam and Eve, who bear God's image,[8] and to call into question the glory of God's righteous character. The serpent goes to the woman and deceives her while the man stands silently by until he also joins the woman in eating the fruit that the Lord had commanded him not to eat. God then comes to them in judgment. Judgment against the serpent. Judgment against Adam and Eve. He summons them before him as they hide from his face. They hide from the judgment of the Lord like the unbelieving earth dwellers are said to hide in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains in Revelation 6:16–17, pleading in their distress to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on

6 See also Genesis 15:5 and Matthew 13:42. Daniel 8:10 also speaks of stars being cast down by a beast and trampled upon in the last days, while Daniel 12:3 identifies those stars as God's covenant people.

7 See Deuteronomy 8:3, Exodus 16:2–3.

8 "It is self-evident that by 'image of God' is expressed what is characteristic of man and his relation to God. That he is God's image distinguishes him from animals and all other creatures. In the idea that one forms of the image is reflected one's idea of the religious state of man and of the essence of religion itself." Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Lexham Press, 2012–14), 2:12.

us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The Great Day of the Lord has come in the garden temple, and God summons all to stand before him and to give an account. God addresses the serpent first:

> The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:14–15)

It is within this judgment against the serpent that we get the first light of gospel hope. God promises that the enmity that now corrupts his image bearers, which is directed toward him, will be redirected toward the serpent. There will be hostility, or hatred, between the woman and the serpent, and between the woman's offspring and the serpent's offspring. This sounds strikingly similar to Revelation 12.

God then turns to the woman after pronouncing judgment on the serpent and says something that is widely misunderstood:

> To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." (Gen. 3:16)

We can understand the words of the Lord toward the woman by remembering how the woman of Revelation 12 also brought forth children in the pain of persecution. This is the enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman played out. Eve truly experiences the most painful aspect of childbearing when Cain, her oldest son, murders Abel, her youngest son. This is the serpent seed persecuting the seed of the woman, as foretold in Genesis 3:15. This enmity is recapitulated over and over throughout redemptive history. Think of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Shem and Ham, Isaac and Ishmael, David and Saul. Mary, the mother of Jesus, experiences the same pain at the cross. It recalls the words spoken to her by Simeon in Luke 2:35, "a sword will pierce through your own soul also." This is the persecution of the serpent and his seed against the seed of the woman. This is the agony of childbearing that is being described in Genesis 3:16 and Revelation 12:2 as she awaits the coming of a suffering Messiah who will redeem the woman and her offspring by crushing the serpent's head through the bruising of his own heel.

When we come to Genesis 3:16, everything said so far must be kept in mind; we must read it in light of the history of special revelation, which focuses on Christ and his church. The last part of the verse in particular has been interpreted in various ways, many of them problematic and unhelpful because they assume there is conflict between Adam and Eve and miss the redemptive focus between Eve and Christ. The text says, "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." The word translated here as "husband" (ish, אִישׁ) is translated as "man" the majority of the time. In light of the context, it would be better translated as "man," not referring to Adam her husband, but to the Messianic Champion who was just promised in Genesis 3:15.

Moreover, the next time this noun is used is when Eve exclaims in gospel-filled hope that she has "gotten a *man* (ish, אִישׁ) with the help of the Lord" (Gen. 4:1). Eve is expecting the male offspring who will come from her body and crush the head of the serpent. In her heart and mind she presumes that Cain is the one promised. The reality turns out to be more sinister. Cain becomes the first of the serpent's seed, the first antichrist figure who manifests enmity and malice toward righteous Abel "at the altar of worship."[9] Climactically,

9 Meredith Kline writes, "Cain's murder of Abel was not the upshot of a merely social or civil disagreement. It was in the cult, at the altar of worship, that enmity had broken out. Cain's hatred flared when the Lord exposed the hypocrisy of his act of worship.

Cain eventually murders his brother in the field, "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12).

Before Cain murders his brother Abel, and after the brothers present their offerings to the Lord, God speaks to Cain in Genesis 4:7. Understanding this verse correctly sheds light on how to interpret Genesis 3:16, because it is in Genesis 4:7 that we find the parallel verse to 3:16: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." This verse, like its counterpart in Genesis 3:16 has been often misunderstood. If you cannot make sense of one, you will not make sense of the other.

In Hebrew, the word for sin and sin offering חַטָּאת (*chattā't*) are identical. The meaning is determined once again by context, which is the offering of sacrifice at the door of Eden. Moreover, the Hebrew word translated as crouching (*rābatz*, רֹבֵץ) is used of animals lying down in green pastures. Michael Morales writes,

> Conceivably, then, it was to the original sanctuary door, the gate of Eden guarded by cherubim, that Cain and Abel would have brought their offerings. Indeed, an alternative translation of Genesis 4:7, once common, makes this door the probable referent in YHWH's address to Cain, reading 'a sin offering lies at the door/entrance [petaḥ]' (rather than 'sin crouches at the door', as in the door of Cain's heart or tent). In Hebrew both 'sin' and 'sin offering' are rendered by the same word (ḥaṭṭā't), the meaning of which must be determined by context, and the participle rendered 'crouching' or 'lurking' (rōbēṣ) by some translations is, in fact, more commonly used in the Hebrew Bible with reference to an animal lying down tranquilly. Psalm 23, for example, expresses the psalmist's reflection upon YHWH as shepherd with this same word: 'he makes me lie down [rbṣ] in green pastures'. It could be, then, that YHWH had revealed to Cain the means by which he might be restored to divine fellowship, precisely the same means he would later reveal to Israel through Moses in the book of Leviticus: a sin offering at the sanctuary doorway.[10]

So, if one reads "sin offering" in place of "sin"—a viable translation—what we have before us is God graciously revealing to Cain the means by which he himself might be restored. What is offered to Cain is the righteous, sacrificial offering of another at the door of Eden before the flaming sword of judgment. In other words, Genesis 4:7 is the second instance (following Genesis 3:21 and the garments of animal skins made for Adam and Eve) of substitutionary atonement. It is the sin offering of righteous Abel that lies at the door. Its desire is toward Cain, or for Cain, and Cain must rule "with" or "in" it[11] in the way that the saints reign with the Lamb that was slain for their sins (Rev. 5:9–10). The righteous offering of another could restore Cain to divine fellowship and lift his gaze from the cursed earth to the heaven of heavens. Abel and his sacrifice typifies Christ and his high priestly office, Christ the unblemished Lamb of God whose blood "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24) because it says, "it is finished" (John 19:30).

Seeing how the same language is used in Genesis 4:7 and applying what we have discovered to Genesis 3:16, what we have is this: "Your desire will be toward your man [the Messianic-Redeemer-Offspring who will deliver her from her sins as a sin offering and by the bruising of his heel in

It was because he was still in league with the deceitful serpent that he could not be accepted at the sacred place. Cain's quarrel was with the Lord God, and with Abel as the one accepted by the Lord. This violence was an erupting of the predicted conflict between the serpent's seed and the seed of the woman. Ominous indeed that the spiritual source at the origin of the city of man was the spirit of Cain, devilish and antichrist." Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Wipf & Stock, 2006), 182.

10 L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 37. (InterVarsity, 2015), 57.

11 The Hebrew particle בְּ can be translated as "in" or "with."

crushing the serpent's head], and he shall rule with you."

In summary, Genesis 3:16, immediately following Genesis 3:15, is not speaking about an issue between Adam and Eve in their marriage relationship. It is concerned with the church and the Last Adam. It is speaking of the hope of the gospel for the covenant community typified in Eve, a community in a wilderness world persecuted by the dragon and the curse. Living on this side of the cross, we do not have to wonder when our hope will manifest and accomplish our redemption. It has already been accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection has secured the church's salvation and seated us in the heavenly places to reign with the Living One, who died and is "alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18). ⓈⓈ

Aaron P. Mize *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister serving as the pastor of Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Kingwood, Texas.*

Planned Giving as a Christian Duty

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by Alan D. Strange

I have been asked to write on Christian planned giving. This assignment, then, has in view how we as believers use our money, especially when it comes to financial and estate planning that may be part of an established trust or some other arrangement in our wills that makes sure our monies continue to work for kingdom causes, particularly the church and her agencies. I claim no expertise on the mechanics of such. What I write here should not be taken as any specific financial advice but rather as a biblical, theological, and historical look at how and why Christians should give of their resources, especially their financial ones, to the church.

While "planned giving," at least the giving ordinarily indicated by the use of that couplet, is quite appropriate for Christians as they think about how to get the most out of their estate for the sake of the kingdom, it is appropriate for all giving to enjoy a measure of planning. In other words, Christians should determine regular giving patterns, increasing that amount as they have an opportunity, and not allow giving to be a thoughtless, "I'll throw a couple of bucks into the collection plate." I do not believe that the tithe is binding in the New Testament.[2] Still, I think that one's giving in this era ought to be as generous as is reasonable given one's income and worth, and it should include both regular giving and spontane

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1121.

2 Iain Duguid, *Should Christians Tithe? Excelling in the Grace of Giving* (St. Colme's Press, 2018). Duguid helps guide us in the grace of giving in the New Testament era in which the tithe, as such, no longer binds. However, our giving should be no less in the time of gospel fulfillment than it was during the time of gospel foreshadowing.

ous giving, at times, all in keeping with being a "cheerful giver."

The Committee on Coordination has asked Keith LeMahieu to help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with planned giving. Those with specific questions about this and seeking to follow appropriate giving procedures should contact him. He will also help those interested in working with the Christian planned giving organization, the Barnabas Foundation.[3] What I will endeavor to do in this essay is not Keith's work—I lack the competence for that—but to examine the biblical call to stewardship, the challenge that comes to all of us who have received, as we have, all things in Christ, "in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Christ, we all joyfully confess, gave his all, holding back nothing, and we must give our souls, our lives, our all, as stewards of all the good gifts that God has so freely given to us (Rom. 8:32).

When we think about being stewards, we think about properly husbanding and using our resources. And we know from Romans 12:1–2 that our giving is to be unstinting, holding back nothing. As we often say, we are to give ourselves, our very persons, all that we are and have. We often put this in terms like this: we are to give to God, who has given all to us, freely of our time, treasures, and talents. Before unpacking more of this imperative that is ours—to give ourselves entirely to God and our neighbor, as the very expression of love to which we are called—we should first think of the indicative that serves as our motive to do so. In other words, the basis for all *our* giving is what *God* has given to us, particularly what God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Citing Romans 12, as I did above, calls to mind what commentators point out about that great imperative that is ours in that passage, to present even our "bodies as a living sacrifice." If we are to present ourselves to God in this fashion, it means that we are to give ourselves in the totality of our beings to God as our worship of him. On what basis does Paul make this remarkable appeal to give ourselves to our God? He dares to call us to such remarkable sacrifice based on the "mercies of God," all Christ has done for us, as Paul has discussed thus far in the first eleven chapters of Romans.

We might say, in summing up Paul's message in those chapters, that he discourses on how, though we are miserable sinners deserving judgment and death, God was pleased by the active and passive obedience of Christ to renew us, to grant us faith and repentance by the work of the Spirit, and to apply all the merits and mediation of Christ to us so that we are justified, adopted, sanctified, experience perseverance in all trials, and finally, are glorified. The Spirit applies all the merits and mediation of Christ to God's elect, among Israel and the nations, all to the glory of our Triune God.

As noted above, we must give him all our time, treasure, and talent. With respect to our time, we are to labor six days and to remember and sanctify the seventh (now observed on the first day of the week as the Lord's Day), emblematic that all our time is his, in labor, recreation, worship, etc. The older writers used to say that a sabbath well spent is a week well begun, presaging the spending of all our time in joyful service to him. Similarly, all the talents and gifts that he has endowed us with are to be used in his service and for his glory, both in the general office of believer and the special offices of deacon, elder, and minister within the church, as well as in all the particular pursuits and occupations held by believers as they live their lives (in the professions, the guilds, as homemakers, etc.). So, whether we are exercising the gifts that God has given us on the six days in our various vocations or more directly in his service on the Lord's Day, we are to do all for the good of all, especially the household of faith, and the glory of Christ.

And then there is our treasure, the monies and other valuables (lands, businesses, etc.), which the Lord has empowered us to obtain or blessed us to have. Ordinary ways we properly obtain money or

3 For information from Keith LeMahieu or about the Barnabas Foundation, see *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (April 2024), 20, 24. See also https://opc.org/planned_giving.html.

other valuables are by inheritance, gift, or earning it by the sweat of our brow, whether through manual labor, professional work, etc. We are not to steal, Paul says in Ephesians 4:28, which would include all the illegitimate ways to receive money. In other words, we are not to be self-centered takers any longer, as we characteristically are in the flesh, but productive givers who not only refrain from taking what is not ours but also earn enough to care for our families, and even enough to give to others who may be in need. This was so the case in the Jerusalem community that the early church had a communal pot, as it were, in which monies would be put (Acts 2:44–45), supplied by things like selling land, so that all the saints in Jerusalem might share in the good things of the Lord and have no want, with sufficient food, clothing, shelter, etc., for all.

Whether or not we have that sort of common pot—for many reasons, and in most places, God's people have not chosen to live precisely in that fashion—we are to ensure that all in the household of faith have enough (Gal. 6:10). This does not mean that the church should support those in it who are fully capable of providing for themselves and their families (2 Thess. 3:10–12), but that those with genuine needs, whether widows, orphans, disabled, impecunious through persecution, etc., should be cared for (1 Tim. 5). No small part of this caring for all, and we may say a central part, is properly providing for those called to minister among God's people (1 Cor. 9: 7–12).

Paul makes it clear that those who minister should live out of what is provided to them as ministers and have a right to do so. That those who minister should be properly provided for both in their years of active service and thereafter in their retirement (as was the case with the Levites) has come more into view in recent years in the OPC. We have a pension fund to help secure such a system, and the newly minted Committee on Ministerial Care spends the bulk of its time seeking to ensure that ministers receive proper financial and other care both during and after their ministries. Resources like the Obadiah Fund, which is currently being further capitalized, help with ministers whose retirement resources are inadequate. The CMC can be contacted for further information in this respect, as well as other committees like Coordination, as noted above.

It should be noted here, as just intimated, that the imperative to give, particularly for the support of the church's ministers, whether as pastors, teachers, missionaries, etc., is not new, i.e., something peculiar to the New Testament. Of old, God's people were called both to care for each other, especially the most vulnerable and needy, with gleaning laws, a poor tithe, sabbath and jubilee laws, etc.; they were also called to care for the clerical class, the Aaronic priesthood particularly and the Levites more broadly (seen throughout Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). The Levites had no land inheritance, in fact, and did not tithe but lived off the tithe. Ministers are to continue to live off the giving of God's people—the *Westminster Form of Presbyterial Government* notes that evangelical ministers are, in that sense, and other respects, the New Testament version of the Old Testament priesthood. This is why Nehemiah was so exercised upon the return from captivity when, once again, the care of the Levites fell into desuetude, and they suffered neglect and abuse (Neh. 13).

While a committee like Christian Education may use giving to produce hymnals and other Christian materials, no small part of giving to the church, more broadly, including planned giving, should be set aside for personnel, i.e., ministers serving in various ministry settings. Giving to the Committees on Home Missions and Foreign Missions, for example, is about church planting or getting missionaries to the field and supporting them there, all of which involve the support of personnel. We in the OPC do not think that buildings and real property are evil because they are material; rather, they are good gifts of God to be used for the edification of the saints and the glory of the Savior. Yet, nothing is more important than the support of personnel, because nothing is more important here below than people, those made in God's image.

Of all the things the church cares about, she

cares the most for her people: those who are ministers and those who are members. We are thankful for buildings, books, programs, and everything that enables us to serve our Savior. But nothing will ever be more important to us than the church's people. As Paul notes, God's call not to muzzle the ox is not ultimately about oxen (1 Cor. 9:9). Yes, God cares for all the creation, but no part of it more so than for those for whom Jesus lived and died. This is why we must be giving to support ministers, whether in our local churches, in their retirement, in church planting, or on the foreign mission fields. This is one of the most important reasons for our giving.

Truthfully, if Christians gave as they ought to give, we would be able to fully support local ministries (no need for bi-vocational ministry) and have a vigorous program of church planting and supplying our foreign mission fields. With respect to that last point, it is the case that something more is needed, especially these days for the foreign mission fields: we need gifted men willing to answer the call to preach abroad as well as at home. There are doubtless many reasons, fear perhaps serving as no small factor in the 9/11 and post-COVID world, for the reluctance of men to serve as foreign missionaries, including even the misapprehension of the younger generation that such is no longer needed given the digital world. But "virtual" missionaries and AI will not do it; we need men to go to the field. Douglas Clawson can flesh this out for those interested, and I urge readers strongly to consider the call to serve on the foreign mission field. So, we need more than money for the church to do its work. But we never need less than money (or less money).

We often hear the church commended, particularly in the aftermath of what is deemed a good Thank Offering, for its generosity. The giving of some, indeed, is exemplary and should be commended. So, too, with the stewardship of time and gifts for some. But most in the church could, frankly, do better. We need more of Christ's church to give of their time, treasure, and talent, and while some are giving a great deal, many are giving little comparatively (remember, giving is to be in accordance with what we have; hence the extravagance of the "widow's mite," Luke 21:1–4).

I am reminded of a debate in a sister church about establishing a committee to support missions; some had raised the question of whether the church could afford it. A good brother gave a wonderful speech supporting it, noting the sort of cars in the parking lot at church and the sort of homes that parishioners lived in. He affirmed that, indeed, given the wealth that he saw in some of our churches, giving to the church should be far more than it is. He was right then and now. We can do much better in giving and planned giving to the church. We need to encourage one another in our giving.

I would argue, as did Charles Hodge in the nineteenth century, that we need to give to a churchwide fund to ensure that the gospel is preached everywhere: in the urban settings, as well as the suburban and rural ones. Hodge noted that in the Free Church of Scotland, which came into being when a number of churches left the established church because of its corruption (in 1843), one of its noble commitments was the Sustentation Fund for ministers in that church. The problem that the Fund sought to address was a perennial one: ministers in large churches had more than enough, and those in smaller churches often went lacking monetarily. The purpose of the Sustentation Fund was to encourage all the churches to give so that those in smaller churches would have enough.

In other words, the purpose of the fund was, if not to eliminate salary inequity, to at least minimize such, with the ultimate goal of achieving or coming close to salary parity. This concern about ministerial salary inequity was not absent from the American scene. Charles Hodge had such a concern, perhaps fueled partly by his Free Church contacts. It was so important, in fact, to Hodge, that when he preached the opening sermon of the 1847 General Assembly, as was the custom for the moderator of the previous Assembly—he had been the moderator of the 1846 General Assembly—he chose as his text 1 Corinthians 9:14, "Even so hath God ordained that they which preach the gospel

should live of the gospel"[4] (KJV), arguing from the text that, among other things, the whole church ought to support its pastors as it did its missionaries.

Writing twenty years later about this, when his synod (of New Jersey) was addressing the matter, Hodge noted,

> One reason assigned for the fact that so many ministers, well qualified for the sacred office, were destitute of regular employment, was the insufficiency of support. Many of them had been forced to leave their fields of labor because they could not sustain themselves and families upon the salaries which they received.[5]

Hodge argued that leaving the support of churches solely up to particular churches "cripples the energy of the church, and prevents its progress. Churches begun and cherished for a while are abandoned; promising fields are neglected, and to a large extent the poor have not the gospel preached to them."[6]

Have things changed much among us? Hodge continues, "It is the crying sin and reproach of the Presbyterian Church that it does not preach the gospel to the poor. It cannot do so to any great extent or with real efficiency" if the burden for such must fall solely on the local situation in all cases. "What provision," he plaintively asks, "have we for preaching to the destitute? . . . Something must be done to rescue our church from this reproach and to enable her to do her part in preaching the gospel to all people."[7] In Hodge's day, especially those in remote rural areas suffered; in ours, it tends to be the urban poor who lack solid gospel preaching.

At the present time, of course, in our home missions program in the OPC, church planters receive support from both the presbytery and the denomination over the first four years or so of new mission work. There is a decrease each year in the amount of support received. However, there are some works in impoverished areas that cannot support themselves after four years. We could continue to support them (and the OPC has done this in some cases) beyond the four years. In some cases, organized churches remain, or may become, so impoverished that they can never pay a minister a living wage. Should we not be willing as a whole church to help those churches, even stateside, that cannot help their pastors?

Not only does the early Jerusalem church furnish us with a good example of saints making sure that all needs are met, but so does Paul's fervent commitment to the Jerusalem Collection (2 Cor. 9). Paul's zeal for the whole church to give its support to a part, perhaps far removed from those giving support, but in need, moved him to dedicate much energy to the gathering and delivering of a collection to Jerusalem, further evidence that we should be caring for the church universal, not only with our prayers but with our pocketbooks.

What is to be done to bring the gospel to those who cannot afford to support a Reformed minister among them? What about churches, whether OPC or other NAPARC members, established in remote areas with no other Reformed churches around for hours that cannot afford to pay their minister a living wage because they have only thirty or forty members? Such churches cannot combine with another church. Should they simply close? Perhaps we need something like a Sustentation Fund now more than ever. Our resistance to such might reflect a church culturally (and economically) captive to misguided capitalism, in which we figure that churches that cannot support themselves have no right to exist.

I realize that this might be thought in missions (home and foreign) to contravene the three-self principle (Venn's and Nevius's insistence that churches ought to become self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating). But are there no places in the world, including in this country,

4 Reported on by Hodge himself in his article, "The General Assembly," *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19.3 (July 1847), 396. In this same issue of the *BRPR*, Hodge wrote Article 3, "The Support of the Clergy," on Thomas Chalmer's description of and appeal for the Sustentation Fund, 360–78.

5 Charles Hodge, "Sustentation Fund," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 38.1 (January 1866), 1.

6 Hodge, "Sustentation Fund," 4.

7 Hodge, "Sustentation Fund," 4–5.

where the Reformed church needs to go and establish a witness to Christ that may never be able to sustain a minister because of its great poverty? Should we not help? We give diaconal support to needy Christians. However, this is not ultimately a diaconal matter because ministers' salaries are not a matter of benevolence but are owed to them, as the ox that treads the corn is not to be muzzled. We can easily dismiss such concerns if we view the church as a market economy and take a laissez-faire approach. However, we should not view Christ's church under this rubric. Thomas Chalmers in nineteenth-century Scotland did not think so (he was the founder and a champion of the Sustentation Fund) and neither did Hodge in nineteenth-century America. Maybe our model needs further adjustment in twenty-first century America, and we need to be more concerned with supporting the entire church.

The point is that there is a lot to support in our churches, far more than we presently do. And so we should get busy giving more now and engaging in planned giving so that, after we're gone, the church in all her ministries, and particularly her personnel, might continue to receive due support. The concern of Christians in general, and members of the OPC in particular, should be "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, until the end of the world" (WCF 25.3). What does the church need to do this? She needs all the time, treasure, and talents of her members dedicated to the Great Commission. As our culture continues to darken, the church does not need its focus dissipated with the fleshly pursuits of mere Christendom or Christian Nationalism: she needs her members to give regularly, including planned giving, and in all the ways needed for the gospel to go to the whole world with the message of life and hope in Christ alone. Ⓢ

Alan D. Strange *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as professor of church history and theological librarian at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and is associate pastor of First OPC in South Holland, Illinois.*

Hospice and Palliative Care at the End of Life

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by Gordon H. Cook Jr.

Jim, a ruling elder, was assessed for pain in his abdomen. Tests indicated cancer, and he was referred to an oncologist. When the congregation learned the news, they joined together in earnest prayer for their beloved elder. An initial round of chemotherapy resulted in shrinking the tumor, allowing surgical removal. The successful surgery was a great encouragement to all—answered prayer.

Months later a follow-up visit found abnormal bloodwork. Testing and an MRI showed multiple tumors in the abdomen, including his liver. The slightly yellow pallor of Jim's skin now took on a more sinister connotation.

His oncologist ordered a second round of chemotherapy, the same treatment that had been successful before. The church returned to earnest prayer. This time testing indicated the chemo was having little effect on the tumors. The oncologist put Jim into the hospital to administer a much stronger chemotherapy requiring continuous cardiac monitoring. Now oncology and internal medicine were joined by cardiology (the number of Jim's physicians was multiplying).

From the first treatment, the cardiac monitors showed signs of trouble ahead. An irregular pulse and widely varying blood pressures forced this round of chemotherapy to be suspended. Jim began to experience low oxygen levels, so a pulmonologist and supplemental O_2 were ordered. Jim found himself shuffled in and out of the ICU and the OR, where several urgent procedures were undertaken.

Internal medicine sounded the alarm that

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1126.

Jim's liver function was declining. Both oncology and internal medicine urged the immediate resumption of chemotherapy. However, cardiology and pulmonology resisted, cautioning that Jim's heart and lungs could not sustain added stress.

Jim developed a fever. Tests indicated sepsis. High-dose antibiotics were administered. For a couple of days, Jim seemed to improve. Everyone's hopes soared. Then came a bowel infection. Further, the irregular heartbeat was becoming more problematic.

Thus far the family had been doing rather well in supporting Jim. But the barrage of decisions was taking its toll. They watched as common treatments gave way to last ditch efforts. The family was on an emotional rollercoaster that was becoming intolerable, with no exit in sight. The church was informed that things were getting serious for Jim and was asked to pray even more.

Internal medicine, trying to deal with rapidly escalating pain due to liver involvement, asked for a palliative care consult. The palliative care doctor reviewed Jim's case, made some recommendations for pain management, and suggested that the family be given the option of palliative care. The next day, Jim's family sat down with a palliative care nurse, a social worker, and a chaplain to talk about alternatives for his care. Later, that afternoon, they all sat down again in Jim's room and offered to take him onto palliative care. Jim, worn out from too many medical procedures, wholeheartedly agreed. The discussions then turned to various end-of-life decisions.

Have you ever watched a circus performer who spins plates on sticks? Inevitably, one of the dishes will begin to wobble. The performer will then focus all his efforts on bringing that plate back under control. But this will leave another unattended, and more plates will begin to wobble. At some point, all the plates are wobbling, and a terrible crash is just ahead. Now imagine a well-trained team of professionals who can come into the picture and gently take each plate down from its perch. With the last plate, the team may provide lunch for the performer. Welcome to palliative care! In Jim's case, most of the monitors and many of the tubes and hoses were removed, allowing him to move about freely for the first time in several weeks. Only those that were directed toward providing comfort were left in place. The four specialists stepped into the background, still available if needed, but now in a supporting role. In their place was the one palliative care physician, along with a team of professionals accustomed to working together. All of them were working together for a common purpose: to help Jim live as fully as possible, as comfortably as possible, for as long as possible.

The real world is not as idyllic as I am describing. The dying process can be challenging under the best of circumstances. But a good palliative care team can transform a situation, literally overnight, shifting from curative treatment toward comfort care. The patient who just the day before was being whisked from one procedure to another is now sitting on a recliner, uninterrupted, surrounded by his family and friends. Smiles and stories replace worried looks and endless decisions. The noisy alarms are replaced with headphones bringing favored music or a digitalized reading from Scripture. X-rays and CAT scans are now replaced by family selfies. Underlying all this is the acceptance of a shared assumption. Jim is going to die. (To be theologically accurate, I should add, "unless Christ returns first!")

If you are ready to admit it, we are all going to die unless the Lord returns first (Heb. 9:27; cf. Rom. 5:12; Gen. 3:19; Job 14:5; 30:23). This includes you, and the members of your family and of your congregation, your neighbors and friends, the people you are familiar with and those who are total strangers. A person begins to die the moment they are born, because our "first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created" (WSC 15), and so all became sinners. "All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever" (WSC 19). Thanks be to God who "having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate

of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer" (WSC 20).

Reformed theology becomes real life experience in palliative care. What do you expect concerning your death? Do you want to die in a hospital ICU, attached to IVs, O_2 tubes, and monitors? Or would you prefer to be in your own home, comfortable in your own bed, surrounded by loved ones and friends, listening to your favorite music?

Statistically, here in America, you are slightly more likely to die in the hospital than in other settings. The statistics for 2018 in the United States[2] are as follows:

Deaths in a hospital 5.1%
Deaths at a private home 31.4%
Deaths in an extended care facility (e.g., nursing home) 26.8%

The rise in hospice has significantly altered these statistics, allowing more people to die in their own homes.

Hospice is:

a program that gives special care to people who are near the end of life and have stopped treatment to cure or control their disease. Hospice offers physical, emotional, social, and spiritual support for patients and their families. The main goal of hospice care is to control pain and other symptoms of illness so patients can be as comfortable and alert as possible.[3]

Palliative Care is:

care given to improve the quality of life and help reduce pain in people who have a serious or life-threatening disease. . . . The goal of palliative care is to prevent or treat, as early as possible, the symptoms of the disease and the side effects caused by treatment of the disease. It also attends to the psychological, social, and spiritual problems caused by the disease or its treatment. . . . It may also include family and caregiver support. Palliative care may be given with other treatments from the time of diagnosis until the end of life.[4]

Hospice and Palliative Care: A Brief History

Hospice and palliative care are often confused. They share a common history. Hospice can be traced back to the time of the Crusades, when places of respite and healing called "hospices" were established for crusaders traveling to and from the Holy Land. In 1113 AD the hospitallers of St. Johns captured the Island of Rhodes and established a hospice hospital there.[5] The hospice tradition was revived in the seventeenth century when the Sisters of Charity opened a number of houses to care for orphans, the poor, the sick, and the dying. The Irish branch of this order founded Our Lady's Hospice for the care of the dying in Dublin (c. 1880). Later, in 1902, they founded St. Joseph's Hospice for the dying poor in London. In 1967, Dame Cicely Saunders opened St. Christopher's Hospice in southwest London and served as its first medical director, from 1967 to 1985. She based her hospice care upon her idea of "total pain," distress which includes physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.[6]

In 1963, Dame Saunders lectured at Yale University, sharing her ideas of specialized care for the dying in the United States. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, M.D. authored *On Death and Dying*, in 1969, sparking an international discussion of end-of-life issues. In 1974, Florence Wald, along with two physicians and a chaplain, founded the Connecticut Hospice in Branford, the first hospice in the United States.[7]

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2 QuickStats: "Percentage of Deaths, by Place of Death," National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2000–2018. MMWR Morb Motal Wkly Rep 2020;69:6111, http://dx.doi.org/10/15585/mmwr.mm6919a4.

3 "Hospice" National Cancer Institute (NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms), https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/hospice.

4 "Palliative Care" National Cancer Institute (NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms), https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/palliative-care.

5 Stephen R. Connor, *Hospice and Palliative Care*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2009), 3–4.

6 Caroline Richmond, "Dame Cicely Saunders, founder of the modern hospice movement, dies," BMJ, 2005, https://www.bmj.com/content/suppl/2005/07/18/331.7509.DC1.

7 "History of Hospice," National Hospice and Palliative Care

Also in 1974, Dr. Balfour Mount, a surgical oncologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital of McGill University in Montreal, coined the term "palliative care" to avoid the negative connotations of the term "hospice" in French culture. He introduced the innovations of Dr. Saunders into Canadian academic teaching-hospitals, focusing on holistic care for people with chronic or life-limiting diseases and their families.[8]

The National Hospice Organization (NHO) was established in 1978 to promote the concept of hospice care in the United States. The US Congress included a provision to create a Medicare hospice benefit in 1982–83. COBRA (1985) made this benefit permanent, providing Medicare funding for those who choose hospice in their final months of life. The Veterans Administration's offerings for care for veterans was supplemented by a hospice benefit in June of 1995. In 2000, the NHO changed its name to National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).[9] The American Board of Medical Specialties recognized the subspecialty of hospice and palliative medicine in 2006. By this time, hospice and palliative care were well established in the United States and being developed worldwide.

A Comparison of Hospice and Palliative Care

In philosophy and approach to care, hospice and palliative care are very similar:

- Both arise from a concern for compassionate care for the terminally ill.
- Both focus on comfort care, rather than curative care.
- Both place a premium on quality-of-life, rather than longevity, generally involving less aggressive end-of-life treatment.
- Both follow the express desires of patients and families, either directly or through advanced directives.
- Both employ an interdisciplinary team, bringing together a cohesive team of doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, associated medical professionals, and volunteers.
- Both seek to support people, enabling them to live as fully as possible, as comfortably as possible, for as long as possible.
- Both affirm life but do not postpone or prolong death.
- Both enjoy high levels of patient and provider satisfaction.
- Both provide exceptional symptom control.
- Both result in fewer intensive hospital admissions during the final month of life.
- Both have a strong spiritual component, including regular chaplain visits.
- Both show significant cost savings when compared with typical treatment at the end of life.[10] These cost savings have drawn the attention of hospital administrators and insurance companies, helping to explain the rapid growth in both programs.
- People with terminal illness tend to live longer with hospice or palliative care than people with the same condition who opt to continue curative treatments.[11]

The differences between hospice and palliative care include the following:

- All hospice care is palliative, but not all palliative care involves hospice.[12]

Organization, https://www.nhpco.org/hospice-care-overview/history-of-hospice/.

8 Matthew J. Loscalzo, "Pain Management and Supportive Care of Patients with Hematological Disorders," Hematology Am Soc Hematol Educ Program, 2008, 465. https://doi.org/10.1182/asheducation-2008.1.465.

9 "History of Hospice."

10 Robin Bennett Kanarek, *Living Well with a Serious Illness* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023), 43.

11 Kanarek, *Living Well with a Serious Illness*, 25.

12 Connor, *Hospice and Palliative Care*, 6.

- Hospice is funded by Medicare, along with other insurance packages.13 Palliative care does not share this funding source, but its cost benefits have attracted many insurance companies.
- Hospice has strict criteria for admission. The patient must have a terminal illness and a prognosis of six months or less.14 Because palliative care does not have this funding source, it is open to anyone regardless of prognosis. Some people receive palliative care alongside curative care. This allows palliative care to become involved in the patient's journey much earlier. Palliative care teams often provide consults for cases that do not involve terminal illness, for patients who are struggling with comfort care issues, such as pain management.
- Hospice, here in the United States, is primarily home based, including private residences and long-term care facilities. There are some hospice facilities scattered around the nation. In contrast, palliative care is generally provided in hospitals or medical treatment centers.
- Currently, hospice is more readily available throughout the United States. Many areas have two or more hospice agencies, some non-profit, others for-profit, but all Medicare certified. Palliative care is quickly gaining ground.15
- Here in the United States, hospice has a strong volunteer component, required for all Medicare-certified hospice agencies. Some palliative care programs, modeled on hospice, include a volunteer component, but this is optional.

Spirituality and Religion in Hospice and Palliative Care

As religious leaders, we are perhaps most interested in the spirituality and religious services offered by hospice and palliative care. Chaplains distinguish between a person's spirituality and their religious beliefs and affiliations. Spirituality focuses upon meaning in life and meaningful relationships (with God, self, others, and the world around us). Religion denotes an organized system of beliefs and practices.[16] For many within the OPC, our religion expresses our spirituality in concrete form, and our views of meaning and relationships are shaped by our religious beliefs. For others, religion plays a very small part in their lives, or no part at all, yet they are able to articulate a philosophy of life, as well as spiritual needs both met and unmet.

Chaplains, while trained and able to deal with religious issues, tend to focus on spirituality and spiritual needs. A chaplain's assessment of a patient's well-being has less to do with what faith community they attend and more to do with what makes their life worth living, how they understand

13 Medicare funds 100 percent of the costs of hospice care under Title 42 of the Code of Federal Regulations, subpart G, Payment for Hospice Care. The Hospice benefit is available to those enrolled in Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) or in a Medicare Advantage Plan. DHHS, US, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, *Medicare Hospice Benefits*, 2024, https://www.medicare.gov/Pubs/pdf/02154-medicare-hospice-benefits.pdf.

14 Hospice requires that a person must have a terminal illness certified by a hospice physician, meaning that if left untreated, their illness would normally result in death within six months or less. This determination can be quite challenging. While many cancers follow a predictable course, other life-limiting illnesses (e.g., cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disorders, dementia, stroke, etc.) are far less predictable. The patient must also sign a statement opting for hospice care, rather than care directed toward seeking a cure. And they must agree to receive care by a Medicare certified hospice agency.

15 As of 2014, 98 percent of National Cancer Institute cancer centers reported having a palliative care program. David Hui, et al., "Availability and integration of palliative care at US cancer centers," *JAMA*, 17:303 (11) (March 2010): 1054–61, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20233823/#:~:text=National%20Cancer%20Institute%20cancer%20centers,50%20%5B56%25%5D%3B%20P%20%3C%20.

16 A far more precise definition of religion and spirituality can be found in Karen E. Steinhauser, et al., "State of the Science of Spirituality and Palliative Care Research, Part 1: Definitions, Measurement, and Outcomes," *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 54, no. 3 (September 2017), 430. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28733252/, doi: 10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2017.07.028.

their health issues in connection with that sense of meaning, and where they find the personal strength to address health issues.

In contrast, as a minister, ruling elder, or deacon, your focus should be upon supporting your parishioner's faith and relationship with God through Jesus Christ, especially as they approach the end of life. Your task is better defined, but just as challenging. Spiritual concerns such as guilt, fear, isolation, alienation, the inability to participate in religious worship or reading Scripture or praying may result in spiritual distress and should be compassionately addressed.

Concerns for the Christian in Hospice or Palliative Care

The Use of Opiates

The use of opiates (e.g., oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, fentanyl) has become extremely controversial in our society. Today, every prescription for these and similar medications is closely scrutinized, and their use for pain management has been radically reduced.

Scripture raises important concerns about opiate use. It calls us to preserve our ability to think clearly. It does so negatively in its prohibition against drunkenness (e.g., Eph. 5:18) and positively with its call for sober mindedness (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:6), specifically to allow prayer (e.g., 1 Pet. 4:7). When opiates are used wisely for pain management alone, they can be a help to clear-mindedness. But if used excessively or for purposes other than the treatment of physical pain, they are both physically and spiritually dangerous.

Hospice and palliative care make extensive use of opiates. Both programs affirm that patients have a right to be as free of pain as possible.[17] These powerful medications are used by well-trained and experienced medical professionals as important tools to relieve the significant pain sometimes associated with the dying process.

Palliative care and hospice also have other tools for pain relief. For example, pain associated with spiritual distress can be addressed by chaplains with prayer more effectively than medications.

The Use of Cannabis

Along similar lines, as various states have legalized the use of cannabis, this has been included for palliation by some medical professionals. Too often this is employed without supporting research regarding claims of efficacy. While some professionals may advocate for the use of these substances, it is the patient and the patient's family who determine if they are used.

One devoutly religious patient with throat and neck cancer was encouraged to use CBD oils to dry up secretions associated with his condition. This is one area where medical research has demonstrated real benefit.[18] He spent several hours with the chaplain weighing the pros and cons of using these oils. The chaplain asked how he would know if the oils were being effective or not. He answered, "I think I would find myself writing some very funky music." The patient tried the oils but felt that the benefit was not cost effective (he was rather frugal).

Palliative Sedation

A controversial aspect of pain management for hospice and palliative care is the use of "palliative sedation."[19] In palliative sedation, medications are administered to render a patent unconscious and thus free from pain. The purpose of this treatment is purely palliative, seeking to bring comfort for someone when all other options for palliation have

17 "Palliative Care Methods for Controlling Pain," Johns Hopkin's Medicine, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/palliative-care-methods-for-controlling-pain.

18 Kifah Blal, et al., "The Effect of Cannabis Plant Extracts on Head and Neck Squamous Cell Carcinoma and the Quest for Cannabis-Based Personalized Therapy," *PubMed* (NIH), "Cancers," 2023, 497, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36672446/ doi: 10.3390/cancers15020497.

19 The information in this section is drawn from an article by Poonm Bhyan, et al., "Palliative Sedation in Patients with Terminal Illness," *National Center for Biotechnology Information* (January 2024). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470545/. It is also discussed under the expression "terminal sedation" in Connor, *Hospice and Palliative Care*, 157–159, 162–163.

failed. While the goal is not to kill the patient, it comes dangerously close to euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide, raising serious questions regarding the Sixth Commandment. Generally, this is limited to the final hours or days of life and only for a patient experiencing intense suffering. (In my many years of hospice chaplaincy, palliative sedation was only considered once and was then ruled out when the pain was brought under control by pain medications.)

Flirtations with Assisted Suicide

While hospice and palliative care take no side in the current debates about assisted suicide, their focus on quality of life over longevity might lead some to expect that they would favor such an approach. The fact is, when symptoms are well managed and patient dignity maintained, the pressure to end one's own life is significantly reduced.[20] I have never experienced a patient who was assisted in suicide during my years of hospice chaplaincy. However, I did have patients who inquired about the availability of this option. These often led to long discussions as to why the patient might be seeking such an escape.

The Church's Role

Hospice in America has always had a strong volunteer emphasis, providing respite and other personal support for patients and families on hospice. Hospice volunteers are well-trained people who show compassion and kindness regularly. They provide respite for families who provide the bulk of care for hospice patients.

This is an opportunity for members of your congregation, particularly those who are retired, to make a significant contribution in your community. It will allow your members to have meaningful interactions with people who are hurting and will thereby help them grow in their own walk with the Lord. Hospice volunteering is a diaconal type of ministry, not usually involving evangelism. Still, it can provide a major source of outreach into your community.

Palliative care and hospice often change our prayers for those who are dying from desperate pleas for God's healing to a recognition of God's abiding presence. They can foster an awareness that our lives are in God's hands, that he is truly good, and that his steadfast love endures forever. Instead of telling God what to do in our prayers, it allows us to pray "Thy will be done" in a more meaningful way, ready to wait upon the Lord, ready to submit ourselves to Him!

The pastor may feel that his role as a shepherd caring for the flock of God is being supplanted by the palliative care team, and especially the involvement of a board-certified hospice and palliative care chaplain. Often this is the pastor's first time dealing with matters of death and dying within his congregation, while the chaplain has supported hundreds of patients in similar circumstances. As under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, a pastor should be quick to humble himself, desiring the best possible care for the member of his congregation. Do this, and the pastor may find his own unique role in the palliative care of this church member. The chaplain may have more knowledge and skill at assessing and intervening in the spiritual needs of this member. But it is the pastor who has the greater freedom in bringing Christ from a Reformed and biblical perspective—the good news that everyone needs to hear. Allow the chaplain to focus on the existential and emotional work that may need to be done. You focus on the ministry of Christ to the person who is dying. ©

Gordon H. Cook, Jr. *is the pastor of Living Hope (formerly Merrymeeting Bay) Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Brunswick, Maine. He is the retired coordinator of the Pastoral Care (Chaplain) program for Mid Coast Hospital and a retired chaplain for hospice care with CHANS Home Health in Brunswick.*

20 Connor, *Hospice and Palliative Care*, 161.

Servant Work

The Clerk and His Work

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by John W. Mallin

Clerks do *clerical* work. What does that mean for clerks of ecclesiastical judicatories?

Introduction

A. History/Etymology

The word "clerk" was first in use before the twelfth century in the sense of "cleric," "clergy." It was used in the sense of "one employed to keep records" by the middle of the sixteenth century, as its use as a verb is found as early as 1551. Middle English "clerk" is from the Anglo-French "clerk" and Old English "cleric," "clerc," both of which are from the Late Latin "*clericus*," from the Late Greek "*klērikos*, κληρίκος" from the Greek "*klēros*, κλήρος" meaning "lot," "inheritance" (an allusion to Deuteronomy 18:2), strictly "a stick of wood" (as used to cast lots); akin to Greek "*klan*, κλαν" "to break."[2] Chaucer's clerk ("The Clerk's Tale" in *Canterbury Tales*) is a clergyman.

B. Remember:

The clerk is a servant. He serves the Lord, his judicatory, and the whole church. As such, he is clothed with *limited*, *delegated* authority.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1145, https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1153.

2 "Clerk," Merriam Webster, accessed December 22, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clerk.

I. The Clerk

So, who may be the clerk?

A. Who?

The Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (FG) says, "Every judicatory shall choose a clerk from among those who are or those eligible to be its members to serve for such a term as the judicatory may determine."[3] In any judicatory of the OPC, this necessarily means a minister or a ruling elder. Clerks of session are usually ruling elders, but ministers may certainly serve there, even if also moderating (as in the case of a small session). Ministers more commonly serve as stated clerks of presbytery, but ruling elders may also serve there. Both ministers and ruling elders have served as stated clerks of general assemblies.

The question may arise, in light of the qualification, "those eligible to be its members," whether an *inactive* ruling elder may serve as clerk. It appears from FG 25.2 that a ruling elder who is inactive (i.e., one not actively serving on a session) because he has not been reelected to a term of service "may be commissioned to higher judicatories by the session or presbytery," and is thus eligible to serve as clerk of his session or presbytery or of a general assembly (GA).[4] A retired minister or ruling elder might serve as clerk for the session which he had served, or its presbytery, or a GA.[5] A ruling elder who has served another church in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) may be used by the session on committees, but not as a commissioner to presbytery or general assembly nor as clerk of session because he is not eligible until the congregation calls him.[6] It is not clear that a ruling elder who has transferred

3 Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, The Form of Government, in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (FG, The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2020), 19.

4 He would not, however, be entitled to vote or count in achieving a quorum.

5 See Stated Clerk, FG, 26.6–7.

6 NAPARC is an ecumenical organization of which the OPC is a member.

his membership from another congregation of the OPC where he served, but has never been elected to serve in his present congregation, is eligible to be a member of the session or may be commissioned to the presbytery and thus able to serve as clerk.

The clerk should be a competent writer; familiar with the resources listed below at III (Resources); a capable organizer of information, inclined to give attention to detail, and able to keep track of various documents, bits of information, and assorted tasks. Since at least the 1990s, he should be able to use digital technology. It should go without saying that he should be responsible, diligent, discreet, and trustworthy. And he should be able to give time to the tasks when the tasks demand it.

Clerks are officers of the judicatory they serve and are to be chosen by that judicatory, by election or, in small sessions, by *unanimous* (or *general*) consent.[7]

B. Assistants

It has become customary for stated clerks of general assemblies to ask a minister or ruling elder to serve as assistant to the stated clerk. Provision for this is made in the "Standing Rules of the General Assembly" ("Standing Rules"), where the duties of the assistant clerk are enumerated.[8] He is to record the daily minutes of the assembly and prepare them for approval and otherwise assist the stated clerk as determined from time to time.

Some presbyteries have provided for the appointment or election of assistant stated clerks. Generally, where these are found, they assist the stated clerk of the presbytery in recording and, perhaps, preparation of minutes.

Although it is not customary for sessions to have an assistant clerk, there is no reason why they might not do so. Church secretaries may be employed by some sessions to assist in the formal preparation of minutes and, at the direction of the session, in other aspects of the clerk's work that do not require the presence of the secretary at session meetings. Such assistance should, of course, not involve the secretary in matters which call for involvement of ordained officers only.

II. The Work

The work of the clerk is the work of the judicatory he serves.[9] The responsibilities of the clerk are listed in *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (*RONR*), the Book of Church Order (BCO), the "Standing Rules" of the GA of the OPC, and generally in presbytery bylaws and congregational bylaws.[10] Some of these responsibilities are highlighted below.

A. Records

The most obvious task of the clerk is the preparing, presenting, and keeping of records.

It should be remembered that all records kept by clerks are "public," at least in the sense that they may be seen by reviewers in broader judicatories, or by appellate judicatories, and may be requested as testimony or evidence by the civil magistrate (e.g., IRS, civil lawsuit, criminal trial). Additionally, they are historical records. For these reasons, care should be taken that records are orderly, accurate, in accordance with applicable standards, and intelligible to a reader from outside the judicatory or a reader distant in time. They should be complete for the purposes, but discrete, containing no extraneous matter. This last point is a matter

7 The term "common consent," which is commonly used in the sense of "general consent" and "unanimous consent," is not recognized in current editions of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)*.

8 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (SRGA), last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see SRGA, 3.B.3–4.a, and 3.B.6 within the document.

9 The clerk's work is done by him on behalf of the judicatory. Someone must do the work that the clerk does because the judicatory is responsible for the work. Although the clerk does not do all the work of the presbytery, all his work is the presbytery's work. When he acts as clerk, he represents the presbytery. The requirement for a clerk and the qualification of a clerk set forth in FG 19 (see footnote 3), discussed above, are the consequence of this fact.

10 See the index under "secretary" in the current edition of *RONR*; Stated Clerk, FG, 19 and its index under "clerks," https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf, particularly SRGA, 3.B.4–6, within the document.

for the discretion of the judicatory. It should be remembered that the records are not "the clerk's." They belong to the judicatory.

1. Minutes

The minutes of meetings are the most obvious records of those to be kept by the clerk. The bulk of these are generally the minutes of regular, "stated," meetings, but include all other meetings of the judicatory as well. Minutes should be kept in continuously paginated form, kept in permanent binders, signed by the clerk who took the record (i.e., by the clerk *pro tempore*, when the case requires) at the end of the minutes of each meeting.[11] The clerk must provide for the storage of approved minutes in a safe place. Today, minutes are generally kept in electronic form as well; but, while this practice is a safeguard against catastrophic loss, it does not make it unnecessary for the official record to be kept in permanent binders.

Minutes should conform to a standard format. By-laws, "Instruments of the GA," and "the Form of Government" will indicate items that are required to be included in the minutes of every meeting and particular items that must be recorded whenever they occur.[12] Beyond those matters required, nothing should be included in the minutes except by direction of the judicatory, which direction should be recorded in the minutes as an action taken by the judicatory. In addition to relevant portions of other governing documents, the current edition of *RONR* will dictate the language to be used in the minutes (see III.C, Resources: *Robert's Rules of Order*, below).

a. Stated Meetings

Stated meetings are those regularly planned, generally by way of a pattern. A general assembly regularly meets once a year, the dates and place determined at the previous assembly. Presbyteries regularly meet two, three, or four times a year, usually depending on the geographical size of the regional church, smaller presbyteries generally meeting more often. Regular meetings of presbyteries are usually determined for a calendar year in the fall of the previous year. Examples of such patterns are the first Friday and Saturday of March and October; or the third Saturday of January, April, September, and November. Minutes of each regularly scheduled presbytery meeting should indicate that the meeting is "stated." Sessions generally meet monthly or twice monthly and may be scheduled at each meeting. Minutes of congregational meetings (which must occur at least annually) should be kept with minutes of the session, inserted at the chronological point where they occur.[13]

b. Adjourned Meetings

An adjourned meeting is a continuation of another meeting, whether stated, adjourned, or special. It is continued to complete business that was docketed for the meeting from which this meeting is adjourned. It is scheduled at the meeting from which it was adjourned, the minutes of which meeting should indicate that the "meeting was adjourned to meet on [date] at [time] at [place]." The minutes of the subsequent adjourned meeting should indicate that the meeting is an "adjourned" meeting. This is significant because an adjourned meeting is treated as a continuation of the previous meeting, allowing some actions which are not permitted by *RONR* at successive meetings, such as a motion to reconsider an action previously taken.

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11 With the advent of technology that permits document sharing, it is possible for members of a judicatory, particularly a session, to compose and edit minutes during a meeting and approve them at the end of the same meeting. This is *not* recommended for at least two reasons: 1) it is the responsibility of the clerk to prepare the minutes in final form, not the responsibility of the other members of the judicatory; and 2) most, if not all, presbytery bylaws require minutes of session meetings (unlike those of congregational meetings or meetings of General Assembly) to be approved at the next regular meeting. This allows for proper review by the judicatory. Generally, a draft of minutes should be sent to members of the judicatory before the meeting at which they are to be reviewed so that corrections may be made before the meeting at which they are presented for approval. See below at II.B.1 ("Reporting: To Your Judicatory").

12 Regarding recording dissents and protests and answers to protests in minutes, also note Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, BD 8, 118.

13 Stated Clerk, FG 16.1, 26.

c. Special Meetings

A special meeting is called specially; that is, neither a stated meeting nor an adjourned meeting. It may be called and scheduled by the judicatory at a regular or adjourned meeting, or it may be called by the moderator or stated clerk at the request of the number of ministers and ruling elders specified for the relevant judicatory in the "Form of Government" (generally, a quorum of the judicatory).[14] Only business specified in the call to the meeting may be transacted. The minutes of the special meeting should indicate that the meeting is special, include the purpose(s) for which the meeting is called, and record that the call to the meeting is found to be in order by those in attendance.

d. Trials

Meetings of trials are separate and distinct from regular, adjourned, or special meetings, even if they occur within the timeframe of such a meeting. They have their own rules of proceeding and their own requirements for record-keeping. (The Book of Discipline should be consulted for these rules and requirements.)[15] Minutes of meetings of trials should be kept in the book of minutes with the minutes of other meetings and may be incorporated into the minutes of another meeting if the trial occurs within the timeframe of such a meeting, as long as they are distinguishable as minutes of a meeting of trial.

e. Executive Sessions

Executive sessions held during a meeting are essentially a tool for discussion of sensitive matters in secret, excluding non-members (except upon invitation) from the discussion. Actions taken in executive session, which must be public in order to carry them out, including the determination to arise from executive session, should be reported out to open session, in the manner of committee recommendations, for action in open session. Accordingly, minutes taken in executive session should be sealed and not included with regular minutes, except that the actions reported in open session and, at least the action to enter executive session and the fact of the exit from executive session (together with times of entrance and exit) should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting during which executive session was entered.[16]

f. Committee of the Whole

A judicatory may determine in the course of a meeting to go into committee of the whole or in quasi committee of the whole, which allows less formal discussion of a matter. Since, technically, the body in such a case is not the judicatory, but a committee thereof, the committee of the whole or quasi committee may vote on recommendations, which recommendations will be "reported" to the judicatory for final decision and disposition. This will require the clerk to record the determination to go into a committee of the whole or in quasi committee (with the time of entrance), the fact of the rising and report of the committee (with the time of rising), and the text of any recommendation(s) brought by the committee, but otherwise no minutes of the committee should be recorded.[17]

2. Membership Rolls and Directories

The records of the judicatory for which the clerk is responsible include the roll(s) of members of the body over which the judicatory has original or immediate jurisdiction.[18] Membership rolls, directories, and attendance rolls or records are not interchangeable terms, although the clerk will track, create, and keep all three. Each type of judicatory has its distinctive membership.

The membership of a general assembly necessarily changes from year to year as a GA is

14 Stated Clerk, for session, see FG 13.5, 17; for presbytery, see FG 14.7, 21; for General Assembly, see FG 15.5, 24.

15 Stated Clerk, BD 4.A.2, 103.

16 See *RONR 12th Edition* (Hachette Book Group, 2020), §§9:24–9:27, 86–88; or *RONR 11th Edition* (Da Capo Press, 2011), §9, 95–96.

17 See *RONR: 12th Edition*, §52, 503–14; or Henry M. Robert III, et. al. eds., *RONR: 11th Edition*, §52, 529–42.

18 Stated Clerk, FG 13.8, 18; 14. 6, 21; 15.2–3, 23; SRGA (last modified 2021–2022), https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021–2022.pdf; see SRGA 3.B.4.b–c, 4–5 and B.5.n, 5 within that document.

"dissolved" at the end of the assembly's meetings and a new assembly is elected for the next year. The stated clerk of the GA will maintain the attendance at a given assembly, which will include all those commissioned by their presbyteries who actually attend, as well as the moderator and stated clerk of the previous assembly, the stated clerk of the current assembly, and fraternal delegates and representatives of the various committees who are in attendance and seated as corresponding members of that assembly. (The action to seat corresponding members at a meeting of any judicatory should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.) The membership of the assembly is the ministers and elders commissioned by presbyteries and the assembly officers mentioned above. The membership of the assembly (with the presbytery represented by each commissioner) and the attendance at the assembly will be included in the minutes of the assembly. The stated clerk of the GA also publishes and distributes annually a directory, with contact information, of all the ministers and congregations presently in the OPC.

The stated clerk of a presbytery will, at a meeting of the presbytery, keep track of and record in minutes the attendance by ministers and ruling elders commissioned by their sessions, as well as any alternate ruling elder commissioners and fraternal delegates who may be in attendance and seated as corresponding members. All the ministers and all the ruling elders of the congregations of the regional church are members of the presbytery, without respect to attendance.[19] The stated clerk will keep a record of the membership of the presbytery as well as any members at large of the regional church.[20] The stated clerk of the presbytery will also keep a separate list of licentiates and men under care of the presbytery, having recorded in the minutes their reception as men under care, licensure, ordination, and/or dismissal, as would be done with reception and/or dismissal of ministers from/to another presbytery or other denomination. Additionally, the stated clerk of the presbytery may maintain and publish a directory of the ministers and ruling elder members of the presbytery, men under care and licentiates, fraternal contacts, and members at large of the regional church.

The clerk of session may maintain and publish a directory of members of the congregation he serves, and possibly, with permission, regular attenders. He will record in the minutes attendance at session meetings and at meetings of the congregation. He will record in the minutes of session meetings the reception of members (both communicant and non-communicant), with their full names (including maiden names), dates of birth, and the date of actual reception of each. He will also record in minutes the removal from membership of any member together with the reason for removal and the effective date, as well as the movement of any member from the roll of non-communicants to the roll of communicant members together with the effective date of change (the date of public profession). These minutes may form the basis for the formation of the rolls of the congregation, which rolls include the record of past and present members, noting full names, dates of reception, dates of birth, dates of baptism, dates of censures, dates of restoration, dates of death, and dates of removal from membership in the congregation. Members of the congregation worshiping with a mission work shall be included and designated.[21]

3. Statistical Reports

The clerk of session is requested, and the stated clerk of a presbytery is required, to report annually to the general assembly certain statistical data and important changes that have taken place in the past year within the jurisdiction of the judicatory they serve.[22] The information in minutes and rolls described above will be the

19 Stated Clerk, FG 14.2, 20.

20 Stated Clerk, FG 29.A.1, 81; and 4.a, 82.

21 Stated Clerk, FG 13.8, 18.

22 Stated clerk, FG 14.6, 21; SRGA, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see SRGA 3.C.1, 4 within that document.

source for reporting the non-statistical (and some of the statistical) information that is to be reported. The GA's statistician provides a form for reporting this information. Some presbytery bylaws require that a copy of each year's completed form is to be included in the session's minute book at the end of the minutes of the year; some other summary information may also be required by the presbytery for inclusion at the end of the minutes of the year.

4. Other Items

The clerk may be asked to record or keep track of (even temporarily) other matters, as directed by the moderator, the judicatory, or others.[23] Such other matters may or may not be recorded in minutes or otherwise kept permanently.

B. Reporting

It is important for everyone to remember that the records kept by the clerk do not *belong* to the clerk; rather, they belong to the judicatory that he serves. Therefore, it is necessary for the clerk to report regularly on all his work, particularly submitting the records he keeps to his judicatory whenever additions, corrections, or other changes are made to those records. This especially applies to minutes, the subject of the next comments.

1. To Your Judicatory

Minutes of meetings of sessions and presbyteries must be presented to the judicatory to whom they belong at the next regular meeting following the meeting that the minutes record. Minutes of congregational meetings must be read at the end of the meeting they record. Minutes of meetings of a general assembly are read at convenient points throughout the assembly and finally at the end of the assembly. In each case, this will involve the following three phases.

a. Review

The minutes are first presented in draft form for *review* by the judicatory (or congregation) so that corrections can be made. With the exception of minutes of congregational meetings, it is advisable for the clerk to distribute the draft minutes well in advance of the meeting at which they are to be formally reviewed, so that members of the judicatory can review them and suggest corrections to the clerk beforehand, so that the draft as presented at the meeting will be in the best condition for the next phase, thereby saving time at that meeting.

b. Approval

The second phase is *approval*. After the minutes have been reviewed by the judicatory (or congregation), the minutes will be approved "as presented" (that is, in the final draft form) or "as corrected" or "as amended" (at the meeting at which they are presented for approval). The minutes of the meeting must record the action to approve the minutes of the previous meeting (or of the congregational meeting or of the general assembly as a whole), *as presented* or *as corrected* or *as amended*.

c. Response by the Clerk

The third phase is the response to the second phase: that is, any follow-up necessary to ensure the record is in its best possible condition, clear and clean. The clerk will, of course, apply all the corrections made and approved by the judicatory (or congregation or assembly). Before printing the minutes, he should also check them for typos, spelling, punctuation errors, or other minor matters that may have been missed previously. He should not make any substantive changes in wording or content without the approval of the judicatory. He will format the minutes to be consistent with the format previously used, allowing adequate space in margins for binding and, in header or footer, for pagination.

After final formatting and proofreading, the minutes of a general assembly are ready to be sent to the printer and then for distribution; the minutes of a presbytery meeting are ready to be printed

23 For example, see Henry M. Robert III, et al., eds., *RONR: 11th edition*, §61, paragraphs on "'Naming' an Offender," 646, lines 20–25, and 647, lines 28–31; or in Henry M. Robert III, et al., eds., *RONR: 12th edition*, §61, paragraphs on "'Naming' an Offender," 611, paragraph 61:12 and 612, paragraph 61:17.

and inserted in the binder.[24] Session minutes are ready for the next phase, which may vary in its details, as discussed in the next paragraphs.

2. To the Next Higher Judicatory

While the clerk is responsible and accountable to his judicatory, the session and the presbytery are responsible and accountable to their next higher judicatory (the presbytery and the general assembly, respectively).[25] Accordingly, the clerk of session and the stated clerk of the presbytery must report to their next higher judicatory, presenting for review and approval the minutes which have been approved by their own judicatory. If the reviewing judicatory *takes exception* to any portion of the minutes presented for review, the presenting judicatory will be required to *respond* to each exception (see II.B.2.c, below, "Response by Your Judicatory"). Reporting to the next higher judicatory is required of presbyteries annually and of sessions at least annually.[26]

a. Review

As noted above, the stated clerk of a presbytery, after applying the corrections made by the presbytery to the presbytery's minutes, proofreading and making final corrections, formatting and properly paginating the minutes, will print the minutes that have been approved by the presbytery since the presentation of minutes to the most previous general assembly. The minutes should be printed on acid-free paper with pre-punched rectangular holes for the locking posts of the binder, sold with the binder or separately. The minutes of each meeting must be signed by the stated clerk (or clerk *pro-tempore*, for meetings where the stated clerk was absent).[27] After printing the minutes, together with the current bylaws of the presbytery and a copy of the current Rules for Keeping Presbytery Minutes, the pages must be inserted into the binder and carried to the general assembly and presented to the stated clerk of the general assembly for review.[28] Each general assembly erects a temporary committee to review presbytery records and make recommendations for approval.[29]

The clerk of session, after applying the corrections made by the session to the session's minutes, proofreading and making final corrections, formatting and properly paginating the minutes, will have ready for printing a digital copy of the minutes that have been approved by the session since the last presentation of minutes by the session to the presbytery. However, depending upon the process of review used by the presbytery, he may or may not print the pages and insert them in the

24 See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; particularly see "Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," A.1, 18 in that document, which requires that "the minutes of the presbytery shall be kept in lock-type record books with numbered pages." These record books have become very expensive and of limited availability since many companies, law firms, and others who used them in the past have switched to all digital record-keeping. At the time of writing this note, Wilson-Jones appears to be the only remaining producer of such binders and the specialized paper used in them.

25 This is the concept of review and control. See Stated Clerk, FG 12.2, 16: "The lower assemblies are subject to the review and control of higher assemblies, in regular graduation."

26 See Stated Clerk, FG 14.6, 21 and 13.8, 18 respectively. Note that sessions submit for review the minutes of the congregational meetings as well as the minutes of meetings of the session.

27 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see "Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," A.18, 19 in that document.

28 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.19–21, 19; on inclusion of bylaws and Rules for Keeping Presbytery Minutes, see Instrument A; particularly note Instrument A.20–21. On presentation of minutes to the stated clerk of the GA, see Instrument A.19. Rule 19 states that "the Stated Clerk [of the presbytery] shall be responsible for the presentation to the General Assembly for approval of all minutes of the presbytery which have been approved by the presbytery and not previously approved by the General Assembly." This means that if the stated clerk of a presbytery is not a commissioner or otherwise present at the beginning of a general assembly, he must arrange for the delivery of the minutes of the presbytery to the stated clerk of the assembly by a commissioner or other person or other means on time. Presbytery bylaws may provide for similar responsibility of clerks of sessions vis-à-vis presentation of minutes for approval by the presbytery; if not, such responsibility of the clerk of session may be understood *inter alia* in light of Stated Clerk, FG 19.30.

29 See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; particularly see SRGA 10.1, 12, and 4.a.(1), 14 within that document and also Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, B.1, 19 within that document.

binder. Because the session minutes must finally be printed on the same expensive acid-free paper with pre-punched rectangular holes for the locking posts of the binder, which are sold with the binder, some presbyteries provide for review of digital copies of minutes, allowing preliminary comments by reviewers and corrections of typos and some errors that would be exceptions before final presentation of the minutes. Although this requires a few extra steps, it may save time ultimately and certainly can save expensive paper; and furthermore, it results in better, clearer, and cleaner minutes. Other presbyteries may review digital or hard copies before the meeting but not allow corrections before a final report of the reviewers. Some presbyteries may do the review at a meeting that takes place over more than one day. Review may be by a standing committee, by a session assigned by a committee to review the records of another session, or by other reviewers assigned by the committee. In any case, printing, signing, and inserting minutes in the binder will be done before the final report to the presbytery by the committee or assigned reviewers.[30]

b. Approval

The committee of the presbytery or of the general assembly that reviews the records of the session or of the presbytery, after the review is complete, will recommend to the presbytery or to the GA approval of the records that have been reviewed, either with or without exceptions and/or notations. In other words, records that have been reviewed will be approved by the reviewing judicatory. If there are no errors, the records are approved with no exceptions and no notations. If there are violations of the Bible, confessional standards, Book of Church Order (BCO), or Rules for Keeping Presbytery (or Sessional) Records, the records are approved with *exceptions*, which are numbered and listed in the minutes of the reviewing judicatory. If there are typos, spelling errors, grammatical errors, or the like, the records are approved with *notations*, which are numbered for the record and listed for the benefit of the judicatory whose minutes were reviewed, but the individual notations are not recorded in the minutes of either judicatory.[31] In any case, the minutes for the calendar year 20__ (or from page __ to page __) will be approved.[32] The moderator of the reviewing judicatory will sign the minute book at the end of the minutes which have been reviewed, indicating that they are "approved with (or "without") ____ exceptions and/or ____ notations" along with the date of approval.

c. Response by Your Judicatory

If the records of the session or presbytery have been approved by the higher judicatory without exception (whether with or without notations), there is nothing further to be done by the clerk or the judicatory with respect to those minutes that have been reviewed.[33] If the records of a lower judicatory have been approved by the higher judicatory with exceptions, the clerk of the lower judicatory must record the exceptions in the minutes of the meeting of his judicatory following the meeting of the higher judicatory at which the exceptions were found and taken, as those exceptions will have been recorded in the minutes of the higher judicatory. The lower judicatory must then respond to each of the exceptions taken (which responses may be proposed by the clerk for consideration by

30 Clerks of session should consult the bylaws of their presbytery to learn the presbytery's process of review of sessional records and what is thus required of the clerk of session and when it is to be done.

31 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.22–23, 19.

32 So, minutes may be approved "without exception or notation;" or "without exception and with x notations;" or "with x (perhaps 'no') notations and the following x exceptions" (followed by a list of the exceptions, including in each case the rule or provision violated and the page and paragraph at which the exception occurs).

33 Notations are minor matters which need not be corrected or addressed in any way (and generally, are not capable of correction without changing pages that have already been approved, which would corrupt their status as official, certifiable records. The clerk should, however, take note of the kinds of notations made in order to take care not to repeat those kinds of errors in future.

his judicatory), and the clerk must record those responses in the minutes of the meeting at which the responses are adopted by the judicatory.[34]

A response to a given exception may acknowledge the cited error or dispute it. If the exception is disputed, the response as recorded in the minutes will necessarily provide the reasons for reconsideration and removal of the exception. If the exception is acknowledged, the response as recorded in the minutes will state that acknowledgement and provide whatever information is necessary and possible to correct the error, e.g., supplying missing information, clarifying a passage that was unclear, correcting a citation or cross-reference, etc.[35] It is important to note that this information or other correction by way of response should not be inserted in the minutes where the missing information ought to have appeared originally; it should be recorded in the minutes that record the response adopted by the judicatory (minutes that have not yet been reviewed by higher judicatory). The responses to the previous year's exceptions will thus be submitted to the higher judicatory at a following meeting of the higher judicatory *and* in the minutes presented for review and will be explicitly deemed sufficient (or not) together with approval of the minutes of the period under current review.

C. Correspondence

In addition to bearing the responsibility to prepare and maintain records, the clerk is also responsible for correspondence. In judicatories where there are two clerks, their labor may be divided so that one is a recording clerk and the other a corresponding clerk.[36] The "Standing Rules" and the bylaws of some, if not all, presbyteries enumerate in some detail the duties of their respective clerks, many of which will involve various types of correspondence.

1. Regular Correspondence

Regular correspondence includes all correspondence properly addressed to the judicatory or sent on behalf of the judicatory. Correspondence may be regularly transmitted by digital means (that is, by email, or email attachment; generally, not via texts, chats, etc.), by electronic facsimile or by postal service, or hand-delivered; but not by voice, whether in person, telephonically, or over videoconference connection.

a. Received

Correspondence received regularly will include that from members (individuals or judicatories) of, or under the jurisdiction of, the receiving judicatory. For example, a session might receive a request from a member of the congregation for a letter of transfer, or a presbytery might receive correspondence from a session or an individual member of the regional church or from a ministerial member of the presbytery.

Regular correspondence will also include that

34 See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; particularly see Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, A.22–23, 19. The instruments of the GA explicitly require presbyteries to follow the procedures outlined here. Presbytery bylaws may require sessions to follow similar procedures by way of exercising review and control (see Stated Clerk, FG 12.2, 16); if not, some comparable procedure must be adopted in order that the presbytery will be able to exercise its responsibility.

35 Responses will vary according to the nature of the particular exception and the particular circumstances surrounding the record to which the exception was taken. For instance, an exception to a presbytery's minutes might be for failure to record the appointment of a moderator or clerk *pro tempore* in the absence of the previously elected officer; the response might acknowledge the failure and state that Mr. So-and-so was appointed to serve *pro tempore* for the duration of the meeting. An exception to a session's minutes might be for failure to record the full name, including middle name, of a candidate for baptism (required by the rules for keeping sessional records in the presbytery's bylaws), where the minutes provide only "A B Smith;" the response might provide the clarifying information that the "A B" in Mr. Smith's name are not initials but rather his actual name, thus arguing for removal of the exception.

36 The roles of recording and corresponding clerks may be analogous to a recording secretary and corresponding secretary in some organizations. This is not the division of labor among the general assembly's stated clerk and assistant clerk, however, where the assistant clerk's primary responsibility is to assist the stated clerk in preparation of the minutes of the assembly for approval and printing for distribution. See Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; particularly see SRGA 3.B.6, 6 for the duties of the assistant clerk of the general assembly.

from judicatories (or their representatives) under the same jurisdiction. For example, a session might receive correspondence from another session in the same presbytery, or one presbytery might receive correspondence from another presbytery.

Regular correspondence will also include that from higher judicatories or from fraternal bodies. Sessions and presbyteries may receive correspondence from the stated clerk of the general assembly or from a committee of the general assembly; sessions also may receive correspondence from the stated clerk or a committee of their own presbytery. Generally, correspondence from a fraternal body, including formal fraternal greetings, will be from a general assembly or synod or ecumenical organization (i.e., North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches or the International Conference of Reformed Churches) to GA, from a presbytery or classis to a presbytery, or from a session or consistory to a session.

All of these communications will be considered formal correspondence; so will judicial appeals, complaints, protests, information regarding requests that require action such as proposals from a higher judicatory to amend a governing document (i.e., confessional standards, BCO, Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly, or bylaws of a presbytery), requests from a congregation for assistance in some situation of distress or opportunity for ministry, and calls to a minister in the presbytery or from a congregation in the presbytery.

Routine correspondence for information will include distribution of minutes of meetings of a higher judicatory or exchange of minutes from a fraternal body.

Information regarding changes in an officer's status will also be received routinely.[37] Notice of changes in the status of mission works or congregations may also be received.[38] This information, which the stated clerk of the GA requires for directories and databases and the GA statistician requires for his annual report, should be distributed by stated clerks of presbyteries to the stated clerks of all the presbyteries, together with the stated clerk of the GA and his assistants, as well as *New Horizons*.[39]

b. Sent

See the immediately previous paragraphs on correspondence received regularly and the footnote to the last paragraph for the correspondence that must accordingly be sent by the stated clerk of the GA, the stated clerks of presbyteries, and the clerks of sessions.

Note particularly that the "Book of Discipline" requires that when a minister has been indefinitely suspended or deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.[40]

Note also that the "Form of Government" requires that the presbytery "shall also report to the general assembly each year the licensures, ordinations, the receiving or dismissing of members, the removal of members by death, the organization, reception, union, or dissolution of congregations, or the formation of new ones, and in general, all

37 Instances of changes, notice of which should be received by all presbyteries and the stated clerk of the general assembly, include: ordination, installation, transfer in or out (whether from or to another OPC presbytery or to a judicatory in another denomination), dissolution of a called relationship, suspension, erasure, demission, deposition, retirement and/or emeritization of ministers. Similarly, ruling elders' and deacons' ordinations, installations, additions to or removals from active service on the session or board of deacons, etc., would be instances of changes received by the stated clerk of a presbytery from clerks of sessions within the regional church.

38 Organization of a mission work as a particular congregation, realignment of a congregation to or from another denomination, reception of an independent or unorganized group as an organized congregation, closure of a mission work or an established congregation would all be instances of changes that may be received.

39 A recent trend might be observed in an increasing number of stated clerks of presbyteries distributing to other presbyteries and to the stated clerk of the general assembly more than the aforementioned information, such as the bringing of men under care, licensures, and the like. It is generally not necessary to distribute such information, although it should be included in minutes. In some instances, changes in status of a candidate for ministry should be communicated to a GA committee, such as the Committee on Christian Education (e.g., in the case of a funded intern) or the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (e.g., in the case of a man who is prospectively to be called as organizing pastor of a work to be funded by the committee).

40 Stated Clerk, BD 6.B.3.c and sec. 4.d, 113; the stated clerk of the GA should be copied on this notice.

the important changes which have taken place within its bounds in the course of the year."[41]

Stated clerks of presbyteries are required to report annually to the stated clerk of the general assembly the names and contact information of commissioners to the next general assembly. Notification regarding those commissioners shall be given no later than ten weeks prior to the beginning of the next assembly.[42] Changes in commissioners and/or their contact information should be likewise reported.

2. Other Correspondence

Other correspondence may be received or sent.

a. Received

Any correspondence that a judicatory *officially* receives, and especially on which a judicatory takes action, should be noted in minutes as having been received and kept in a separate file (not otherwise recorded in minutes).[43]

b. Sent

Any changes in contact information for ministers or congregations, or changes in moderators or clerks of presbyteries or sessions, should be communicated to the stated clerk of the general assembly as soon as possible.

Clerks should note the requirements of the "Book of Discipline" to submit the entire record of a judicial case on appeal or the papers related to a complaint in an appeal to a higher judicatory, and the reference in the "Form of Government" to extracts of records whenever properly required.[44]

D. Standards (Bylaws)

The clerk of session, the stated clerk of presbytery, or the stated clerk of the general assembly is responsible for keeping and distributing the bylaws of the congregation or presbytery or *Book of Church Order* and the Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, respectively, together with a record of amendments to those standards, which he will generally have some responsibility for editing and formatting, at the direction of and subject to the approval of the judicatory.

E. Dockets

Presbytery and general assembly stated clerks are responsible to prepare a proposed docket or agenda for each meeting of their judicatory. Preparation of proposed dockets for session meetings may be the responsibility of the clerk or moderator of the session. These are generally prepared by using previous and customary dockets and minutes of previous meeting(s), as well as correspondence received since the previous meeting and other items that have come to attention.

F. Directory

The clerk of session may be responsible for compiling, printing, and keeping a directory of the congregation; he will at least contribute the necessary information to the church secretary or other person who compiles and prints it. Likewise, the stated clerk of presbytery and of the general assembly is responsible for producing a directory of their respective body.

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41 Stated Clerk, FG 14.6, 21; this information is included in the annual statistical report to the general assembly's statistician, which should be inserted at the end of the presbytery's minutes for the calendar year. Sessions also provide relevant similar information on their annual statistical report, which is to be included in similar fashion in their minutes. See above, 2.A.4, "Other Items" in "Records." Some of this information from presbyteries should be sent to the stated clerk of the general assembly before the submission of the statistical report, namely information that will be included in denominational records, such as the Directory of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Ministerial Register of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the OPC website, and a current mailing list for churches and mission works. See the previous paragraphs in this section, 2.C.1, "Regular Correspondence."

42 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see Standing Rules of the General Assembly, Chapter 1, rule 8, 3.

43 Not all communications received by the clerk are necessarily *acknowledged* by the judicatory, as some such may be inappropriate for consideration, but the clerk should present all communications for the *judgment* of the judicatory. Communications officially received should be listed with identifying information, such as the date of the communication, the sender, and a brief description of the communication, but the text of the communication is generally not transcribed in the minutes.

44 Stated Clerk, BD 7.5, 116 and 9.4, 119–20; Stated Clerk, FG 19.30.

G. Filing and Reminders

Because the clerk is the custodian of records and correspondence as indicated above, he will need to have a filing system, which enables accessibility to these materials. His system must be usable by others, particularly his successors. This certainly includes a system that retains and organizes hard copies of these materials (filing cabinets and file folders appropriately labeled). Organization should be arranged in a chronological order, storing correspondence, dockets, and minutes pertaining to a given meeting together, so that the order of meetings becomes a key to finding relevant materials. An index of meetings will then be useful in finding particular files.

1. Computer Filing

In addition to hard copies, the clerk today will also have digital copies of much, if not all, the materials that he produces and receives. His computer filing system should be similarly organized with a view to accessibility by himself and others. Digital copies in .pdf format are not subject to change on different computer devices, applications, or systems, so materials in other digital formats should also be saved as .pdf files. This avoids the problems that can arise because of different or obsolete computer hardware and/or software. Digital files should be backed up and stored in multiple locations (e.g., external drives, cloud storage, or sent to multiple members of the judicatory) in case of catastrophic loss. Hardcopies should also be made of digital files and included with other hardcopy materials.

2. Calendar Reminders

In view of the many and varied tasks of the clerk, he will benefit from having reminders in a digital calendar, which can be repeated easily. He will thus avoid failure to do regular or occasional tasks, such as some specific required correspondence.

H. Other

The clerk may be called upon to function in other ways apart from his regular duties because he is the most convenient servant of the judicatory to do so.

1. Parliamentary Assistance

As noted below (III.C. Resources: *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*) (*RONR*), the clerk is often the *de facto* parliamentarian for his judicatory. This is, perhaps, naturally the case, because he must record the motions made and actions taken in a manner that conforms to parliamentary standards. (This is not the place to make the case for having such standards, but the case can certainly be made that without them no actions can have been certainly made with any sure effect.) The clerk is, then, the final gatekeeper for what is parliamentarily admissible before review of records by the next higher judicatory. It will be advantageous to him, to the moderator, and to the judicatory he serves, if he is able to raise or suggest points of order or perfections of language, at the time motions are being made, in order to avoid parliamentary and/or record-keeping problems at a later time.

2. Temporarily Functioning as Other Officers

The Clerk may be requested to serve as acting chair or moderator if circumstances make it impossible or inappropriate for the designated chair or moderator either to remain in the chair or to request another to take the chair at his discretion. Frequently, in our circles, it is customary for a moderator to ask the most immediately previous moderator available to take the chair when the moderator needs to leave the chair to give a report, make a motion, enter debate, or otherwise engage in activity that would be inappropriate while in the chair. However, *RONR* describes a circumstance in which the chair should be turned over to the clerk.[45]

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45 Henry M. Robert III, et al., eds., *RONR: 11th Edition*, §62, "Removal of Presiding Officer from Chair for All or Part of a Session," 651, lines 24–27 through 652, lines 1–2 and footnote*, 652; or Henry M. Robert III, et al., eds., *RONR: 12th Edition*, §62, "Removal of Presiding Officer from Chair for All or Part of a Session," 616–17, paragraph 62:11 and footnote 4, 617.

3. Calling Special Meetings

When an emergency or other occasion arises upon which a request is properly made for a special meeting of the judicatory, it is the responsibility of the stated clerk of the GA or of a presbytery to call the judicatory to meet.[46]

4. Congregational Meetings

The clerk of session serves as clerk at congregational meetings, whether annual or special meetings.[47]

III. Resources

Because the clerk is an ordained officer in the church, it may be presumed that he will be sufficiently familiar with the Bible to enable him to commit himself to submit to it unequivocally. Similarly, it may be presumed that he will be sufficiently familiar with the doctrinal standards of the church (i.e., the *Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*) to enable him to take vows to "receive and adopt" them "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures."[48] Thus, more need not be said here about the significance or imperative necessity of these as resources for the clerk. However, a few remarks may be helpful regarding the following resources.

A. The Book of Church Order

While it may be presumed that the clerk, as an ordained officer in the church, will have read the *Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (comprised of "the Form of Government," the "The Book of Discipline," and the "Directory for the Public Worship of God") in order to affirm his approval of them, real familiarity with the BCO by any ordained officer may not be presumed. The clerk must have, at the least, sufficient familiarity with the BCO to know: a) what it requires of him as clerk and of the judicatory he serves (including what must be recorded in certain circumstances); and b) how and where to find relevant passages of the BCO in order to supply the appropriate citation of the BCO when required.

B. Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly

The clerk of the GA and the clerk of a presbytery (as well as assistant clerks) should be sufficiently familiar with the current Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to know what bearing these will have on their work, including what may be required of them. The clerk of session may benefit from acquaintance with the Standing Rules and Instruments but will not usually need to cite or refer to them.

C. *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*

The "Standing Rules" state that "all cases that may arise which are not provided for in the foregoing Rules shall be governed by *Robert's Rules of Order* [*Newly Revised*]".[49] The bylaws of many, perhaps most—possibly all—presbyteries have a similar provision. Congregational bylaws may have such a provision. (If a presbytery or congregation does not have a similar provision, they should have one, whether the governing document is *RONR* or some other similar comprehensive set of parliamentary rules.) The current edition of *RONR* prescribes language and forms of procedure for making motions and taking actions (and thus recording these). It is thus incumbent upon the clerk to be familiar with *RONR* and any equivalent parliamentary authority serving as a standard for the judicatory he serves or for another judicatory to which his judicatory is subject.

Additionally, because the clerk is often the *de facto* parliamentarian of the judicatory he serves, it will be wise and prudent for a clerk to read the current edition of *RONR* in order to acquaint

46 See Stated Clerk, FG 14.7, 21 and 14.5, 24.

47 Stated Clerk, FG 16.4 and 5, 26–27.

48 Stated Clerk, FG 23.8, question (2), 47 and 25.6.b, question (2), 70.

49 Standing Rules and Instruments of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, last modified 2021–22, https://www.opc.org/GA/StandingRules2021-2022.pdf; see Standing Rules of the General Assembly, 14.1, 16.

himself, if not to familiarize himself, with its contents. It is the only way to know all that might be required, especially in unusual circumstances.

The clerk does not necessarily need to be an "expert in the book" (either BCO or *RONR*), but he ought to know how to find applicable passages of the book in question and, importantly, when he needs to look for them.

D. Presbytery Bylaws (For Stated Clerks of Presbytery and Clerks of Session)

The stated clerks of presbytery and clerks of session should be quite familiar with the bylaws of the presbytery that they serve or that govern the regional church of which their congregation is a member. The presbytery's bylaws will state the duties of the stated clerk of presbytery and provide the rules for keeping sessional records in detail not included in the BCO or *RONR*.

E. Congregational Bylaws (For Clerks of Session)

The clerk of session should be familiar with the bylaws of the congregation he serves, so he will know particular requirements to which the session and congregation are subject, which requirements apply to the congregation, and which may vary somewhat from congregation to congregation. He may thus give some guidance to the session and the congregation in their meetings.

F. Directories

The clerk will need to have directories of the judicatories subordinate to and superior to his own, as well as the directory of his own judicatory (and/or congregation).

G. Minutes (Yours and Those of Higher Judicatories)

Finally, the clerk will benefit from familiarity with the previous minutes of his judicatory and acquaintance with the current and previous minutes of higher judicatories, so he knows what actions have been taken which may bear on his own work and the work of his judicatory.

Conclusion

Presbyterians have a reputation for their desire to adhere in all things to 1 Corinthians 14:40, "But all things should be done decently and in order." The clerk is in a position to help ensure that the work of his judicatory is orderly, and is, of course, responsible to see that his own labor is also done decently and in order. The work of the clerk is varied and sometimes tedious and may sometimes, in meetings, tax the patience of the body he serves. However, it is work done in service to the Lord of the Church. So, he can do it with joy and zeal. ☺

John W. Mallin, *a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is an independent counselor and has served as stated clerk of the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York for more than twenty years.*

How to Prepare a Church for a Pastor's Retirement

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* November 2024[1]

by Ronald E. Pearce

"When and how do you get ready for retirement?" is a question usually asked about the pastor. And yes, the minister should plan about his retirement—for his and his wife's finances, where to live, and what they would like to do after he retires. But that question needs to be asked about preparing *the church*—when and how does a minister prepare *the church* for his retirement?

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1146.

It has been my observation that, generally speaking, that question is not being asked, and it needs to be. We all know situations where a pastor retires without preparing the church, and it results in years of an empty pulpit. The congregation can go through very difficult discouragements while the search lingers on for another pastor. I remember when the Lord took Dr. James Boice to glory. We grieved at our loss that he was gone. But there were other ministers on staff that stepped in, and the congregation was cared for. I know most churches in the OPC are not the size of Tenth Presbyterian and so do not have several pastors. But seeing how the church was cared for at the death of Dr. Boice left me thinking, what can we learn from that to prepare a church for the pastor's retirement so the pulpit is not vacant and the church will receive continuous care?

"When do you get ready for retirement?" I encourage the pastor and elders to begin to ask this question when the minister is about fifty-eight—about eight to ten years before he plans to retire. Why so much time? There is too much to do to transfer pastoral responsibilities and care of the flock. But also, there is the important, maybe more important, spiritual and emotional transition of the congregation from one shepherd to the other. I had been the pastor of the Church of the Covenant (OPC) in Hackettstown, New Jersey, since the church began in 1981, so I was the only pastor many had known all their lives. Having a slow, intentional transition allowed the congregation to get to know and trust a new shepherd. After over forty years of one pastor, the transition had to be done very carefully so the church would have time to embrace another pastor with different gifts and personality.

Then to answer the second part—How do I get ready for retirement?—let me share our story. Every church situation is unique, so these concepts will not all apply to everyone. But I hope they will help each church and session think and prepare for this important stage in the life of the church.

Let me share what we did to prepare our church for my retirement by phases.

Phase One
(eight years before the pastor's retirement)

Start the discussion of what the transition after retirement will look like for the church. Should the church call an associate pastor, so he would be in place when the pastor retires? We decided to have a pastoral intern with the intent that, should he and the congregation agree, he would become an associate pastor while I was still pastor to help with the transition. These years we had to plan the budget for a future intern.

Phase Two
(six years before the pastor's retirement)

Complete the intern process and vet him with the intent that he could become an associate pastor at the conclusion of his internship. We called an intern, Jim Jordan, and during his yearlong internship he came under care of the Presbytery of New Jersey and completed his exams for licensure. At the conclusion of his internship, Jim and the session desired that he stay as an associate pastor, so the congregation voted and called him as associate pastor with the intent that he would be pastor when I retired. The congregation voted to take monies from savings and pay off the mortgage so that we could budget for an associate pastor's salary.

Phase Three
(four years before the pastor's retirement)

Begin the transition of pastoral responsibilities to the associate. This is so the associate has time and help to learn all the areas of pastoral and session oversight of the congregation. Each year we planned to transfer areas of responsibility.

The first year we transferred the oversight of the church secretaries, church office, church annual calendar—to learn all the things that happen in the church throughout the year, all the paperwork and files for the church office, the preparing of bulletins, reports, agendas for meetings, etc. Since he was needing to work with the secretaries, he took the pastor's office at the church, and I moved my office to my home. This same year we also transferred the oversight of follow-up of

church visitors.

The second year we transferred the oversight of the session. He was elected moderator and had the year to learn all that the session addresses throughout a year at their meetings. He had the year to learn the session's policies and procedures. As moderator of session, he would oversee the interview and reception of new members. He would moderate the trustee and congregational meetings.

The third year we transferred all premarital counseling. We continued to share pastoral counseling, funeral services, and weddings.

The fourth year we transferred the teaching of the New Members' Sunday School class, which is required for membership.

Phase Four
(that last year before the pastor's retirement)

All pastoral responsibilities and oversight now have been transferred to the associate pastor. I continued to preach Sunday mornings, and the associate would preach Sunday evenings. My retirement date was announced to the church. Seven months prior to retirement, the congregational meeting had to prepare the motions for presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship effective on the date I retired. The congregation voted its desire that Jim become "senior pastor" when I retired. When we first called Jim as an intern, he was a single man. Over the years, the church saw him mature as a preacher and watched him become engaged, marry, and become a father. There was sufficient time so that when the congregation had to vote for Jim as pastor, it was not a shock. For most people, the transition had already happened mentally and emotionally months before. In other churches, if the retiring pastor has not been pastor for such a long tenure, perhaps the transition could be shorter; but we needed a careful, lengthy time.

Retirement

I preached my last sermon as pastor on Easter Sunday. The following Sunday our new senior pastor began preaching every Sunday morning, and the transition to another pastor was complete. I took several months away so that the church (and I) could "reboot" without me. The session, with Jim's blessing, asked if that fall I would continue as an "assistant pastor" to help carry the load and continue the transition. We agreed that I would preach twice a month, usually on Sunday evenings, and visit the elderly and shut-ins.

We received feedback through the years from the congregation that they were aware of the transition. They expressed their gratitude that there was a plan of transition so pastoral care was not interrupted. The elders were able to continue their care of the congregation without having to be working on pulpit supply and processing candidates to find another pastor.

This was all done out of love for the church. These are precious sheep for whom Christ died. We desired that they be best cared for during one of the most unsettling and difficult experiences a church faces. We give thanks to the Lord for leading us and answering so many prayers through these years. All praise to the Lord. ☺

Ronald E. Pearce *is pastor emeritus of Church of the Covenant (OPC) in Hackettstown, New Jersey.*

Servant

Reading

Book Reviews

How to Read and Understand the Psalms

by Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
February 20241

by Charles M. Wingard

How to Read and Understand the Psalms, by Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel. Crossway, 2023, xviii + 588 pages, $38.39.

The Psalms occupy a prominent place in the pastor's life and work. He uses them to summon his congregation to worship. Their vocabulary and poetry shape the language of his prayers, both public and private. With them he comforts the sick, gives hope to the despairing, and consoles the mourner. They supply cherished words to lead his flock in praises, thanksgivings, and intercessions. No pastor's toolbox is properly furnished without the Psalms.

To be used effectively, any tool must come with instructions for its proper use. Experienced craftsmen must teach their apprentices—which is why pastors will find *How to Read and Understand the Psalms* a valuable resource. Like master craftsmen, Bruce Waltke and Fred Zaspel instruct readers about the structure of individual Psalms, explore their various forms, explain the arrangement of the Psalter's five books, and offer suggestive outlines that will assist pastors and teachers in effectively communicating their message. After reading, pastors will be better prepared to employ the Psalms in their ministerial labors.

The authors share several convictions about the Psalms that readers of *Ordained Servant* will find attractive. They affirm the following:

- *The divine and human authorship of the Psalms*: "To interpret Scripture rightly we must have a sympathetic understanding of God, the divine author, the human authors, and the text itself" (24).
- *The antiquity of the Psalms:* The Davidic authorship of the Psalms attributed to him is affirmed (45).
- *The royal orientation of the Psalms*: "The Psalms are both *by* and *about* the king. The Psalter can be thought of as a royal hymnbook, and its individual psalms have the house of David as its subject matter and point of reference" (73).
- *The Christocentric direction of the psalms*: "The Psalms are ultimately the prayers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He alone is worthy to pray the ideal vision of a king suffering for righteousness and emerging victorious over the hosts of evil" (81).

Early chapters (1–7) explore matters related to interpreting the Psalms, their historical and liturgical settings, Hebrew poetry, and psalm forms. Throughout these chapters, the authors are actively engaged in the interpretation of individual Psalms. For example, in "The Liturgical Settings of the Psalms," several sacred temple activities are identified, including the offering of sacrifices (Psalm 107:21–22), prophetic declarations (Psalm 50:1,7–8), processions (Psalm 68:25–27), and pilgrimages (Psalm 84:1–12). Along with commentary, relevant portions of the text in English

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1106.

translation are printed in their entirety, making for easy use of the book (96–101).

Chapters 8–13 investigate various psalm forms—specifically praise and petition-lament psalms, individual songs of grateful praise, songs of trust, and messianic and didactic psalms. Because some Psalms contain more than one form, precise categorization is inexact (331).

Concluding chapters address "Rhetorical Devices and Structures" and "The Final Arrangement of the Psalter" (chapters 14–15). Helpful appendices review superscripts and postscripts, matters of canonical development, and a summary of psalm forms.

Understanding how to interpret the psalms is critically important, not just to pastors and teachers, but for all believers who prize God's Word. Too readily readers assume that the first-person pronouns they encounter ("I" and "me") refer to individual believers and that the promises of deliverance pertain directly to them in their trials and afflictions (74). But the direct application of the text to believers overlooks the "royal orientation of the psalms." The authors argue instead that these are the psalms of the king that equip God's people to sing about the king (80). For instance, in Psalm 84:9, God's pilgrim people sing, "Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed!" The "shield" is God's king, his Anointed One, and it is in him that God's people take refuge. His setbacks are their setbacks; his victories are theirs too (77).

Indeed, not just the Psalms but the entire Old Testament points us to Jesus. The authors summarize that relationship succinctly when commenting on Psalm 72: "The Old Testament narrative directs us to look for an ideal son of David, and the Psalter presents him in just such idealistic terms" (381).

Waltke and Zaspel conclude that "the Psalms are ultimately the prayers of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He alone is worthy to pray the ideal vision of a king suffering for righteousness and emerging victorious over the hosts of evil" (81; cf. 538).

As an ordained minister, I am especially grateful for the pastoral tone of this book. Truly, the right use of the Psalms binds believers to their Redeemer King. Their hope is bound up in him, their "only comfort in life and death." And now, on this side of the heavenly city, God's people interpret their experiences in the light of his sufferings, death, and resurrection triumph. Knowing that they are God's beloved children, they are firmly persuaded that they are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided [they] suffer with him in order that [they] may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). From one perspective, the Psalms are an invitation to God's pilgrim people to know their King "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10, KJV).

Just as certainly as the Psalms are a hymnbook that directs the praise of God's people, it is also a "missionary hymnbook." The words of the Psalter call "upon all people to know, love, and serve the Lord God of Israel for their own good and for his praise" (207).

The character of those who sing the Psalms counts. They must be sung with integrity. A purpose of the didactic Psalms is instructing God's people in the righteous life that pleases him. "To sing his praise while rebelling against him with a life given to sin is a stench to him. It is an offense." (182)

One would be hard pressed to contend with the authors' claim that the book of Psalms is the most popular book in the Old Testament. Quoted by Jesus, its words are found in all but four of the New Testament books (1). Just as its words saturated the minds of the inspired writers and guided the praises of God's people for generations, so it is our hope today that the language of the Psalter will take its rightful place in the worship of church. That pastors would experience afresh the power of the Psalms to fortify pastoral ministry is no less a hope.

Every pastor should count among his choicest tools the Psalter, the inspired hymnbook—the inspired prayerbook—of the people of God. ⓢ

Charles M. Wingard *is minister of shepherding at the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi (PCA), and professor of pastoral theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.*

Robinson Crusoe
by Daniel Defoe
SERVANT CLASSICS

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe. Charles Scribner's Sons, illustrated by N. C. Wyeth (1719, Scribner, 1920; repr., 1983), 368 pages, $29.00.

Having read this remarkable adventure in a thin Oxford edition many years ago, I am amazed that I had forgotten the power of this high adventure infused with gospel truth and written by a master storyteller. Abridged versions that remove the gospel message are not recommended. Great literature should never be abridged in any case. The N. C. Wyeth illustrations in the nicely published hardback that I recently read made this a very enjoyable read.

This is one of the greatest shipwreck and survival adventures ever told, because it gives the poignant moral lesson of a wealthy young man's rebellion against his father's kindly, Christian advice that ends with God's grace intruding into his life in a dramatic way. Crusoe reminds us of the prodigal in the gospels. I will say no more because I want you to enjoy the many surprises that await you in this tale. ©

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1107.

Natural Law: A Short Companion
by David VanDrunen

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant*
March 2024[1]

by Bruce P. Baugus

Natural Law: A Short Companion, by David VanDrunen. B&H Academic, 2023, xvi + 135 pages, $19.99, paper.

David VanDrunen's *Natural Law: A Short Companion* is just the kind of clear and concise introduction to the topic (from a Reformed perspective) that I believe many readers have been wanting, even if many of those readers will not realize just how much till they read this breezy little volume. VanDrunen has taken seriously the wider evangelical audience assumed by the Essentials in Christian Ethics series, in which this volume appears, and it serves the work very well. The result is a pithy and useful guide that will clear up common confusions and orient readers—students just wading into the topic, friends unsure of the scriptural support for natural law, critics who believe it contradicts Protestant convictions, and so on—to the biblical case for the natural revelation of the moral order.

VanDrunen does not assume his readers are already familiar with the concept or contours of the natural law, much less a decidedly Protestant account of it. On the contrary, he takes the time to straighten the ethical room and set aside some common misconceptions as he begins to build a generously illustrated argument from Scripture. Each of the six chapters is clear, focused, and edifying. While those who have read VanDrunen's other works will find this volume a relatively straightforward review of one of the major themes

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1113.

of his corpus, it is more than a mere recap of what he has already said elsewhere.

VanDrunen achieves something striking in these 120 pages that gives the work an almost unique place within his corpus: he successfully avoids the intramural Reformed debates over covenant theology and two kingdoms that have so often shaped the reception of his previous works. Since 2010, VanDrunen has produced a series of lengthy studies in Reformed moral theology related one way or another to the natural law. The weightiest contributions include *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Eerdmans, 2010), *Divine Covenant and Moral Order* (Eerdmans, 2014), and *Politics after Christendom* (Zondervan Academic, 2020). He has another on the way: *Reformed Moral Theology* (Baker Academic). His shorter practical work, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Crossway, 2010), fits the pattern too.

VanDrunen's *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* together with Stephen Grabill's *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2006) marks something of a turning point in recent Reformed moral theology. Reformed moral theology had grown hostile to its own natural law tradition and nearly lost its way in the twentieth century. What was needed, and what these two authors began to provide, was a recovery of this tradition and revitalization of Reformed moral theology more broadly. Grabill's work was purely historical, demonstrating that Reformed moral theology was, prior to the twentieth century, a natural law tradition in substantial continuity with the medieval tradition and tracing out where it veered off course. VanDrunen went further, however, by developing a fresh exposition of a natural law Reformed moral theology—an exposition that he has continued to build on in each subsequent work and will continue in his forthcoming *Reformed Moral Theology*.

VanDrunen's previous works have attracted devoted fans—no doubt including many readers of *Ordained Servant*—among those who view him as integrating the best strands of Reformed covenant theology with the best strands of Reformed moral theology and social thought. VanDrunen's many and varied detractors, however, seem to think he is doing the tradition a great disservice. Perhaps ironically, the former may find his latest contribution of little interest. The latter, and those like me who fall somewhere in between, would do well to read *Natural Law*. They may discover a new appreciation for his contribution on this significant topic.

VanDrunen has always offered us far more than his opinion on the intramural debates that have sometimes swallowed the reception of his previous works. As he knows, I have welcomed his contributions on natural law and two kingdoms from the start, while finding his integration of covenant theology into moral theology unconvincing in places. (Readers interested in more on that can check out some of our recent collegial conversations hosted by Reformed Forum.) My reading of VanDrunen's previous works have always been a very mixed exercise for me, with points of strong agreement and disagreement alternating throughout, not infrequently within a single sentence. I suspect—I know, actually—that I am not alone in this.

Natural Law is an exception. By largely sidestepping these intramural debates VanDrunen gives his readers a way to admire his significant contribution to recovering the classic Reformed account of the natural law and its abiding usefulness for contemporary Christians without the distraction of areas of potential disagreement or conflicting thoughts. While careful readers will see, for example, the contours of his covenant theology with its emphasis on discontinuity between the Mosaic and New covenants creeping into his illustrations here and there, it is not material to the biblical case for the natural law he is making. In other words, while there is ample evidence he has not changed his views, he has exercised considerable restraint in his determination to give us a clean and clear account of the natural law.

This work now tops my list of recommended primers on the natural law. I will likely require it in my introductory courses in moral theology, and I highly commend it to you. It is a great place to dive into the natural law; it is also a great place to dive into VanDrunen's corpus; and it is just the

right book to put into the hands of anyone you know who would benefit from a fresh and more appreciative reading of his significant contributions to contemporary Reformed moral theology. ©

Bruce P. Baugus *is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and a professor of systematic theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

C. S. Lewis in America

by Mark A. Noll

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* April 2024[1]

by Charles M. Wingard

C. S. Lewis in America: Readings and Reception, 1935–1947, by Mark A. Noll. InterVarsity Press, 2023, xviii + 158 pages, $18.69, paper.

The works of C. S. Lewis have found a home in America for nearly nine decades. His technical studies in literary criticism, imaginative works, and expositions of the Christian faith have been well received by Christians of various denominations. Avid Lewis readers are found among adherents of both Protestant and Catholic traditions. Reviews of Lewis's books were numerous and not limited to Christian publications but also appeared in secular magazines and journals. One would be hard pressed to think of other writers so highly acclaimed by such a diverse readership.

With modest revisions, the book contains three lectures delivered under the auspices of Wheaton College's Marion E. Wade Center at its 2022 Ken and Jean Hansen Lectures.

Noll recounts the reception of Lewis's writing during the pivotal years of 1935–47, a period that included the Great Depression, World War II, and the early years of the Cold War. A helpful table lists his books published in America during that time, from *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1935) to *Miracles* (1947)—seventeen books in all—arranged in three categories: literary scholarship, imaginative writing (including *The Screwtape Letters* and the Ransom Trilogy), and Christian exposition (5).

Each lecture is followed by a response from a member of the Wheaton faculty:

> **Lecture 1:** "'Surprise': Roman Catholics as Lewis's First and Most Appreciative Readers," with a response by historian Karen J. Johnson.
>
> **Lecture 2:** "'Like a Fresh Wind': Reception in Secular and Mainstream Media," with a response by historian Kirk D. Farney.
>
> **Lecture 3:** "'Protestants Also Approve': (But Evangelicals only Slowly)," with a response by political scientist Amy E. Black.

An appendix includes two 1944 articles by Catholic author and Canisius College English professor Charles A. Brady.

Lewis and Roman Catholic Readers

Early Catholic reviews of Lewis's early works were generally favorable and appeared in lay, Jesuit, and scholarly publications (9). Noll observes that

> of Lewis's ten works that were noticed at least twice by Catholic authors, five received positive or even enthusiastically positive notices (with very occasional quibbles): *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Perelandra*, *The Great Divorce*, and *The Abolition of Man*. Three works received mostly positive reviews: *Out of the Silent Planet*, *The Case for Christianity*, and *The Problem of Pain*. For two others, Catholic judgments were mixed: *Beyond Personality* and *That Hideous Strength*. (13–14)

While reviewers could be critical of Lewis's neglect or departure from official Roman Catholic

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1118.

teaching, they affirmed him in his commitment to natural law and objective moral values. The favorable reception to Lewis reflected a diminishment of the insularity that marked American Catholicism prior to the Second Vatican Council (25–6).

Lewis and the Secular and Mainstream Media

The high quality of Lewis's scholarly writings during the period under consideration was recognized by both the secular academy and the mainstream press. Noll reminds us that at this time, before the New Criticism became a formidable force in college and university English departments, there were still many literary critics who shared Lewis's high regard for Western Christian tradition and belief in the existence of universal moral absolutes (61).

Moving from American intellectual life to the mainstream media—think the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*—Noll notes that Lewis's imaginative works found more than a warm reception. The mainstream media "loved these books, even loved them ecstatically" (62), an indication that the "public sphere could still respond positively to Christian writing when it was artfully framed" (67). Examples include favorable comparisons of Lewis to G. K. Chesterton, *That Hideous Strength* to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* to the works of H. G. Wells (69). Even Lewis's expositions of the Christian faith earned more positive than negative reviews (70), although some commentators, like Alistair Cooke, could be sharply critical, as he was in a 1944 piece where he asserted that "Lewis offered only 'fantasies,' 'befuddlement,' and 'a patness that murders the issues it pretends to clarify'" (79–80).

From 1935 to '47, Christian culture was still sufficiently prevalent for Lewis to win the admiration of both literary scholars and popular audiences. In his response, Farney notes that Fulton Sheen's *The Catholic Hour* and Walter Mair's *The Lutheran Hour* reached worldwide audiences as high as 17.5 million and 20 million respectively (86–88). Whatever talents Lewis, Sheen, and Maier possessed, they worked in a time where significant numbers of Americans wanted Christian exposition, a desire that the mainstream media gladly accommodated.

Lewis and Protestants

In his concluding chapter, Noll reviews Lewis's reception among mainline Protestants and those theologically conservative Protestants who eventually came to be known as evangelicals.

Not surprisingly, *The Christian Century*, the mouthpiece of theologically and culturally progressive Protestantism, expressed criticism of Lewis's work. Otherwise, the response of mainline Protestants was "strongly positive" (97). In a 1947 review, Princeton Theological Seminary's *Theology Today* praised Lewis while also responding to the criticisms of Alistair Cook (100–101).

Evangelicals were slower to embrace Lewis. Readers of *Ordained Servant* will be interested especially in Noll's comments on reviews by ministers associated with Westminster Theological Seminary—including Paul Wooley, Cornelius Van Til, and Edmund Clowney (104–14). Wooley was the most appreciative of the Westminster reviewers, going so far as to say the volumes he reviewed were "the 'find' of the year for any literate Christian." At the same time, he pointed out what he considered the weakness of Lewis's apologetic methodology, namely, that "thinking and rational argument that do not begin with God as a premise are useless and prove nothing." Noll says of Wooley's presuppositional apologetic: "The shift in starting point from belief in objective morality to belief in God was the crucial matter" (109). Van Til was blunt, asserting that because Lewis did not sufficiently grasp the Creator-creature distinction, "the main argument of [*Beyond Personality*] is destructive of the evangelical faith" (110).

According to Noll, the Westminster Presbyterians were the only evangelicals in the 1940s providing serious theological engagement with Lewis. The author is certainly correct to say that their criticism "deserves theological reflection in its own right" (113).

Lewis's widespread popularity among evan-

gelicals would come later. But even in the few years preceding 1947, future evangelical missionary and author Elisabeth Howard (later Elliot) and well-known Presbyterian pastor Donald Grey Barnhouse had begun to articulate highly favorable views of Lewis's work.

In his concluding remarks, Noll praises Lewis for his learning, creativity, and wise focus on "emphasizing what the main Christian traditions held in common" while cautioning that today "there is no guarantee that writing oriented toward 'mere Christianity' will gain a hearing. It is, however, almost certain that writing advocating only one variety of Christianity will not gain a wide public hearing" (123–24).

I recommend this book. As the last Christian public intellectual to earn widespread admiration in the United States, the writings of C. S. Lewis are worthy of study. So also is the culture that eagerly purchased and read his works. Noll gives us insight into the relationship between Lewis and his American readers.

I also appreciate the extended treatment Noll gives to the reactions of confessional Presbyterians to Lewis's work. Whatever might be said of their critiques, their desire was to bring Lewis's work to the touchstone of Scripture. They, like Lewis, are worthy of commendation too. Ⓢ

Charles M. Wingard *is minister of shepherding at the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi (PCA), and professor of pastoral theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.*

Spiritual Warfare for the Care of Souls

by Harold Ristau

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by David J. Koenig

Spiritual Warfare for the Care of Souls, by Harold Ristau. Lexham, 2022, xxi + 246 pages, $19.99.

As Christians all of us would believe in the spiritual world or, as some have called it, "the unseen realm." We are not naturalists after all. However, once we have affirmed this we are left with many questions. For instance, how much do we affirm the involvement of that realm in our day-to-day lives and ministries? Speaking especially to the ordained ministry, what does spiritual warfare look like as we seek to care for the flock of God? Almost every group of Christians has a specific answer to this, and not everyone in our own circles would agree as to what that looks like.

Spiritual Warfare is part of the Lexham Ministry Guides series. Some of the other titles in the series include *Stewardship*, *Pastoral Visitation*, and *Funerals*. Lexham Press is a Lutheran Publishing House, undoubtedly one we are familiar with as the publisher of Geerhardus Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics*.[2] Their Ministry Guide series does look at things from a clearly Lutheran perspective. The author of this little book, Harold Ristau, is a theology professor at Concordia Theological Seminary. The series is edited by Harold Senkbeil, who wrote the first volume, *The Care of Souls*.[3]

In this book, Ristau attempts to show the spiritual warfare aspect of pastoral ministry. This is

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1124.

2 Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Lexham, 2012–14.

3 Harold Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*, Lexham, 2019.

a difficult and ambitious topic and seems destined to end up pleasing no one. Part of the difficulty Ristau faces is that though we affirm the spiritual world, it remains largely hidden from us. There are two extremes to be avoided here: that of ignoring the spiritual world completely and that of ascribing everything to it and deemphasizing the physical world. On the one hand, Ristau seems to make more of the overlap with the spiritual world than Scripture does, but at the same time he is to be commended for showing restraint. For instance, he seems to go beyond Scripture in his angelology, and much of his system is dependent on this. Now angelology is a notoriously unclear discipline and one in which it is easy to fill in the blanks with our human imagination. I think Ristau falls into this trap, taking as given some things that are extremely debatable scripturally (such as the idea of guardian angels for individuals). However, he stops short of the extremes and abuses that angelology is prey to in much of popular evangelicalism. Ristau does take Scripture very seriously, and it prevents him from going too far.

This being a practical book for pastors, Ristau has much to say about the overlap between our ministry and that of angels. This leads him into occasional discussions of means that have no scriptural support. Some of what he says reflects his Lutheran background. He discusses things like using the sign of the cross, vestments, and images in worship as helpful tools in spiritual warfare. Other things he says seem more indebted to the charismatic movement, such as the proper disposal of demonic objects and the use of house blessings to exorcise demons from a home. Suffice it to say there is much that a Reformed believer would not find convincing. Most troubling was his frequent discussion of exorcisms. Ristau simply assumes that ministers will be engaged in this sort of work in normal ministry without even interacting with other ideas of demon possession. He never even mentions the belief that a Spirit-filled believer cannot be demon possessed.

Thankfully, extra-biblical means are not the only ones he discusses. As expected, he does speak about prayer a good deal. This is one of the better aspects of the book. Another of the book's strengths is his discussion of the spiritual aspects of the service of worship, and he offers good advice to ministers for encouraging wayward members to attend worship. These nuggets of pastoral wisdom are scattered throughout the book.

Reading this book, I found myself one moment nodding my head in full assent and the next, amazed at how speculative it all was. For OPC officers interested in the subject I believe we can do much better. I recommend giving this one a pass. Ⓢ

David J. Koenig *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as pastor of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Dover, New Hampshire.*

Calls to Worship, Invocations, and Benedictions

by Ryan Kelly

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* June-July 2024[1]

by Stephen A. Migotsky

Calls to Worship, Invocations, and Benedictions, by Ryan Kelly. P&R, 2022, xlix + 223 pages, $19.99.

Dr. Ryan Kelly is associate director of choral activities at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where he directs several choirs and teaches courses in conducting and choral music. Dr. Kelly is director of music and organist at Proclamation Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. He earned his DMA (Doctor

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1151.

of Musical Arts) in choral conducting from Michigan State University; he also has an MM (Master of Music) from the University of Oklahoma and a BM (Bachelor of Music) from Houston Baptist University. He is not seminary trained nor an ordained minister of the Word, but he is well-read in the subject.

His concern is to provide this book for ordained men and others who choose calls to worship, invocations, and benedictions for the Lord's Day worship in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition and to help other traditions "to better understand, implement, and execute these worship elements" (xi).

In his preface, Dr. Kelly explains that his thinking is influenced both by broad study in the 500-year-old Reformed Christian liturgical tradition and the study of other liturgies. He is aware that today "worship styles are strikingly dissimilar among the greater Reformed Church." He argues that there is no "historical and universally accepted" worship style and "that there is no single authoritative Reformed practice" (xii).

However, the author is aware of the regulative principle and the danger of offering "strange fire" to God in worship (xi). "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, *which he had not commanded them*" (Lev. 10:1, emphasis mine). He might have also referenced Jesus's teaching on humanity's desire to worship God with that "which he had not commanded," by considering Jesus's evaluation of worship during his day: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

In twenty-seven pages he gives an overview of the historical function and development of the call to worship, invocation, and benediction, as well as a defense for using them. Volumes could have been written on the topic, and the end of the book has chapters on practical and study resources that are well worth pursuing for anyone interested in more depth on the study of liturgy. Both chapters are full of articles, essays, and books on liturgy.

It might be useful to know that there is a technical language usually used in the discussion of worship—elements, forms, and circumstances of worship. Elements are those parts of worship that make it worship—prayer (sung and spoken), ministry of the Word, sacraments (baptism & Lord's Supper), sharing (*koinōnia* κοινωνία). Recall that the worship "style" of the church in Acts was "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). During the lifetime of the apostles, the church could have done many activities when they gathered for worship, but they committed themselves to worship using these four elements.

Forms are the actual content or words used in each element of worship. The words of a prayer are a form. The words of a hymn are a form. The words of a sermon are a form, etc. Circumstances are the physical environments of worship that are common to any public assembly of people for a religious or non-religious purpose. This book is almost entirely about the forms used in the call to worship, invocation, and benediction. Those forms are listed as such with subheadings not in biblical order, but according to Advent, Christmastide and Epiphany, New Year, Baptism of Our Lord, Transfiguration, Lent, Palm Sunday, Eastertide and Ascension, Pentecost and Holy Trinity, Reformation, All Saints, Thanksgiving, Christ the King, and Ordinary Time. If one does not follow such a calendar, then this organizational structure is less useful.

Dr. Kelly states that the Reformed traditions have lots of freedom due to a variety of differing liturgies from Calvin's to others'. The problem with human traditions is not that it is a tradition or that it is human, but that it should be evaluated as a bad, good, or better tradition than other ideas. We all should be aware of the noetic effect of sin in our thinking about any tradition. When Scripture is used in the call to worship, invocation, or benediction, the choice should be informed by careful biblical and exegetical thinking about what the Scripture meant in its original context, and the change in covenants from Mosaic Law with its worship to the New Covenant worship should be

specifically considered (Heb. 12:18–29).

Before using this book (or any similar book), every pastor should be careful to do his own exegesis on passages Dr. Kelly suggests for these forms and make sure his congregation will not misunderstand a passage to be used. The congregation must be biblically informed, as certain Scripture used for calls to worship, invocations, and benedictions could be misunderstood by the congregation. As one example, there is a reason to be careful when applying Psalm 24:3–4 to a call to worship—"Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully." "Ascending the hill of the Lord" can be rightly understood as an Old Testament typological phrase about sinners reentering God's presence with new covenant realities. If it is understood by members of the congregation as walking into the building on Sunday, it has been misunderstood. Christ is the only human being who had clean hands undirtied by sin and possessed a pure heart. If worshipers think they have to have that quality in them in order to worship, there is a problem. If worshipers think their lives are clean and undirtied by sin, there is a bigger problem. Each pastor must carefully select any biblical texts to be used in worship.

Dr. Kelly has done a great deal of work, and he has carefully referenced others' works in footnotes and in his last chapters. Buy the book, study his suggested forms and their appropriateness for your congregation, and study his footnotes and additional references. Additional resources may be found in *The Directory of Worship* in the *Orthodox Presbyterian Book of Church Order* (2015), two books by Hughes Oliphant Old—*Leading in Prayer* (1995) and *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (1975)—and Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (2022). ☉

Stephen A. Migotsky *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and serves as the pastor of Jaffrey Presbyterian Church in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.*

Questioning Faith: Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt

by Randy Newman

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2024[1]

by Shane Lems

Questioning Faith: Indirect Journeys of Belief through Terrains of Doubt, by Randy Newman. Crossway, 2024, 152 pages, $14.99, paper.

For some Christians, it is easy to forget that not all unbelievers are hostile to Christianity. Many people who are not Christians often have sincere and serious questions about the Christian faith. As Christians, we should, in a loving manner, talk to such people who have questions and do our best to answer them biblically. In other words, we are called to speak the truth in love and give a reason for the hope we have (Eph. 4:15, 1 Pet. 3:15). One good resource for doing so is Randy Newman's book *Questioning Faith*. In this apologetics book, Newman draws on many years of experience as he asks and answers some common questions people have about religion in general and Christianity more specifically.

There are six main questions in this book. Each question makes up one chapter. The questions are as follows: 1) *What if we aren't blank slates?* (the question of motives), 2) *What if faith is inevitable, not optional?* (the question of trust), 3) *What if absolute certainty isn't necessary?* (the question of confidence), 4) *What if our similarities aren't as helpful as we think?* (the question of differences), 5) *What if we need more than reasons?*

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1135.

(the question of pain), and 6) *What if there's more to beauty than meets the eye?* (the question of pleasure). Each of these questions and answers dives into various aspects of topics such as faith, doubt, suffering, beauty, and so on. Each chapter also contains stories about people who moved from unbelief to faith for various reasons and in various ways. Newman included an appendix for readers who want more information about Christianity. There is also a general index and a Scripture index at the back of the book.

Newman's questions and answers are quite relevant to the modern religious landscape of the United States. For example, the first chapter tackles the subject of morality. It gives the story of a man who was fully on board the anti-theist bandwagon of Christopher Hitchens. However, the wagon fell to pieces for this man when he saw glaring moral inconsistencies in Hitchens's views. In the wake of this fallout, the man found Christianity's views on morality to be more consistent, especially in light of the gospel.

Another example of this book's modern relevance is the discussion of desires in chapter 2. In Newman's own experiences, he noticed many unbelievers were simply following their own selfish desires in life. He notes that those desires are related to people's gods and their worship. This chapter is to get people to think about what gods they trust and question whether those gods give stability in life or not.

One other aspect of *Questioning Faith* that I found helpful is the various summary statements Newman gave throughout the book. As mentioned above, every chapter covers different topics. In each chapter, Newman gives a pointed statement to help readers hone their thinking. Here are a few examples: "Amid our doubts, we should seek confidence more than certainty" (55). "Observing the differences between religions may be more helpful than looking for their similarities" (70). "We need perspectives within us that can account for the beauty around us" (114). These statements are meant to help non-Christians think about their own beliefs and ideas in a more critical way. These statements also help open people up to receiving the truths of the gospel—truths that are far more satisfying and fulfilling than alternative beliefs and religious views.

Sometimes Christians can be callous and harsh when explaining or defending the truth. I recently read a book that called unbelievers various names on some pages, but on other pages it had calls to faith. I kept thinking, "If I were not a Christian, this book would *absolutely not* make me want to be a Christian!" Thankfully, Newman's tone in *Questioning Faith* is compassionate and gentle. His goal in this book is not to win a doctrinal argument or throw out quotable, edgy phrases to sound cool. His goal is to persuade readers of Christianity's truths. And he does so with a loving tone and in a kind manner.

This is a book I could comfortably give to a few people I know who are interested in Christianity. *Questioning Faith* will not unnecessarily offend readers who are not Christians. At the same time, this book will poke and prod readers to think about their own views and positions. The book does not avoid the hard topics and exclusive claims of Christianity. If you know someone who is a thinker and, at the same time, curious about Christianity, this might be a good book to read with that person. I even found it helpful for my own Christian walk. *Questioning Faith* helped remind me of the personal reasons for which I am a follower of Christ. ⓢ

Shane Lems *serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin.*

The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation

by J. V. Fesko

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* August-September 2024[1]

by Harrison N. Perkins

The Giver of Life: The Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and Salvation, by J. V. Fesko. Lexham Academic, 2024, xxxvi + 338 pages.

Reformed theology is often known for its understanding of salvation and often critiqued for ignoring the work of the Holy Spirit. Although the Reformed emphasis on salvation is well noted, the criticism that we do not give proper place for the Spirit's activity in the Christian life usually rests on an assumption about what the Spirit's work must look like. J. V. Fesko's new book shows how the Reformed view of salvation is closely tied to a rich understanding of who the Spirit is and how he is still at work among God's people.

The *We Believe* series from Lexham Academic is a new multi-volume project to tackle the main heads of doctrine from a Reformed perspective. Its goal is to look at "the primary doctrines of the Christian faith as confessed in the Nicene Creed and received in the Reformed tradition" (xix). That starting point of Nicene orthodoxy is of course where this book gets its lead to look at the Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life." Although the Nicene Creed is detailed in its description of the person of Christ and aspects of his work, it is more minimal in describing the Spirit's role in salvation, simply stating him as the one who gives life. Fesko's book expands upon exactly that point to show how Reformed theology has received Nicene orthodoxy in elaborating perhaps most extensively upon that very line. Fesko shows how the doctrines for which Reformed theology is most distinctly known are implications of confessing that the Holy Spirit is responsible for conveying life to sinners redeemed by Christ.

As readers of *Ordained Servant* will know, Fesko has been writing on Reformed soteriology for some time, making contributions both to historical theology and constructive systematic theology. This book is arguably the synthesis of that longstanding study, as it presents a survey of Reformed soteriology and reaches new depths by relating it to the Spirit's work both for the individual and the church. It brings together biblical theology, dogmatic construction, and perspectives for application.

One of the crowning features of this book is the chapters in part one that situate the work of the Holy Spirit in the context of redemptive history's full scope from creation to consummation. The Spirit was not absent at creation or from the Garden as humanity began our first moments. Fesko draws upon significant themes from biblical theology to show how the interrelated motifs of temple and sonship are not only imbedded in the creation narratives but also highlight the Spirit's presence and work. The original Garden temple was a place where the Spirit was at work. More than that, he was at work within the covenant that God had made with his people. That principle will resound across redemptive history in each administration of the covenant of grace.

In part two, Fesko turns from an emphasis on biblical theology to dogmatic development. This section weaves together how the classic elements of the Reformed *ordo salutis* are intimately related to the Spirit's ongoing work in and through the church. After a chapter on the person of the Holy Spirit, the remaining chapters in this part outline how the Holy Spirit's role from the covenant of redemption is to apply the completed work of Christ to the elect. His work is to bring the elect

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1136.

to faith and thereby to unite them to Christ so that they may partake of his benefits. In this section, Fesko gives a fresh statement of the classic Reformed understanding of the facets of our salvation.

Although the emphasis in part three is on how the work of the Spirit shows itself in the life of the believer and the life of the church, this theme has really appeared throughout much of the book. Fesko rightly stresses that spiritual gifts have two important features. First, they come from the Spirit. That means that we should not lose focus on the person giving these gifts by getting lost on the gifts themselves. Second, the Spirit gives these gifts so that we might bless others and so that the church might work effectively as believers mutually encourage and benefit one another. This point marks how the Spirit's gifts are to equip us for service and to make a contribution within the life of the covenant community. Everyone has a gift and a way to bless their fellow church members.

While that point might sound rather basic, it truly highlights the profundity of Reformed pneumatology. Rather than limiting our experience of the Spirit to extraordinary and rather visible manifestations, as is the case in alternative paradigms, Fesko shows us how Reformed churches see the Spirit at work in everything we do as a church. Even the seemingly mundane aspects of helping one another in various ways as we walk with Christ are marks of the Holy Spirit empowering, encouraging, and enlivening God's people. We should never feel as though we have gone without a taste of the Spirit's goodness or of the power of the age to come as long as we have sat under faithful preaching of Holy Scripture. The Spirit himself is at work through the ordinary means of grace to bless Christ's people with an experience of grace as we live life together in the church. Fesko's book is an encouraging refresher on the majesty of the Spirit's work in making us partakers of all that Christ has won for us. ©

Harrison N. Perkins *is pastor of Oakland Hills Community Church (OPC), a Senior Research Fellow at the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards, online faculty in church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, and visiting lecturer in systematic theology at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.*

Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe

by Voddie Baucham

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* October 2024[1]

by Darryl G. Hart

Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe, by Voddie T. Baucham Jr. Salem Books, 2021. 251 pages, $24.99.

Voddie T. Baucham Jr.'s book on social justice activism and evangelicals came out when the protests inspired by George Floyd's death in Minneapolis were still fresh in the minds of many. His warning—the very title of the book, *Fault Lines*—that protests over racism and police brutality had revealed a split among evangelicals was plausible in 2021 when the book was published. Baucham's argument remains relevant if you take the case of Wheaton College as a measure.

In 2023, the college's administration determined to remove the name of J. Oliver Buswell from the college's library. The president of Wheaton from 1926 until 1940, Buswell was a

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1143.

prominent figure among conservatives who with J. Gresham Machen contended against theological liberalism in the Presbyterian Church, USA. When the board at Wheaton decided to sever their ties with Buswell in 1940, the reasons were largely theological. Buswell was too Calvinistic for a school that included Arminians and many varieties of Holiness groups. Even so, the college was sufficiently impressed with Buswell's academic stature (he had a BD from McCormick Theological Seminary, an MA from the University of Chicago, and a PhD from New York University). He had increased the enrollment from four hundred to eleven hundred and also oversaw an increase of PhDs among college faculty (from 26 percent to 49 percent) over his tenure.

But in the wake of America's racial reckoning, prominent figures—both public and private—became fair game for activists who wanted to remove any hint of bigotry from the nation's history. Not only were statues of Confederate soldiers removed, but even Presidents of the United States (Thomas Jefferson at the New York City Public Library) needed to come down thanks to either owning slaves or exhibiting forms of racism. At colleges and universities, cancellation on racial grounds saw Woodrow Wilson's name removed from Princeton University's School of Government, Daniel C. Calhoun College (2017) renamed by Yale, and a statue honoring George Whitefield removed by the University of Pennsylvania from its campus.

Wheaton College followed this trend after students complained about parts of the institution's racist past. Administrators responded by forming a committee to study instances of racial prejudice at the college. The major finding was that Buswell had cautioned administrators, applicants, and alumni about admitting black students to the college. Although the detailed report found primarily that Buswell had expressed worry about the signal admitting blacks would send to supporters, along with concern for black students who would have to make their way in an overwhelmingly white institution, the committee found enough dirt to conclude that Buswell was a racist. This prompted the removal of his name from the building opened in 1975. It is now simply called Wheaton College Library.

Readers of *Fault Lines* will not learn about these developments in evangelical higher education, but they will gain a sense of the assumptions that made Wheaton College's decision plausible. Baucham's 2021 book was likely a headache for librarians who catalogue new accessions. It is one part memoir, one part theological assessment, one part history, and one part exhortation. In the memoir section, Baucham describes his conversion while a student athlete who played NCAA Division 1 football for New Mexico State University and Rice University (he eventually graduated from Houston Baptist University). The author also describes briefly his study at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, becoming Calvinistic in theology, and ministering in the Southern Baptist Convention, which eventually took him to Zambia as a missionary where he is dean of the School of Divinity at African Christian University. As much as memoirs may present a flattering image of the author, Baucham's details add a human dimension to what could have been merely an attack on progressive politics (and Christianity).

Baucham's diagnosis of Critical Race Theory (CRT) may seem dated since the Left in Europe and America has moved on to other "current things," such as climate, transgender, and the rights of Palestinians. But without bogging down in intellectual precision—whether over words or authors—Baucham presents a generally fair depiction of CRT according to its chief theories or theology (especially equality and systemic racism), its most influential proponents (he calls them priests), and its most representative texts (Baucham refers to these works as a new canon). In sum, CRT is a new religion that preaches only sin and judgment to the exclusion of forgiveness and grace. As persuasive as Baucham is, his recounting the number of evangelicals (even New Calvinists) who since 2020 have championed CRT is remarkable. These changes among evangelicals, which involve associating CRT with the gospel's call to personal and social sanctity, have created the "fault lines"

of Baucham's book title. CRT has exposed a theological flimsiness among evangelicals that is also responsible for much of the disarray in conservative Protestant institutions.

The book concludes with an exhortation. The book builds to Baucham's plea in the final pages:

> I believe we are being duped by an ideology bent on our demise. This ideology has used our guilt and shame over America's past, our love for the brethren, and our good and godly desire for reconciliation and justice as a means through which to introduce destructive heresies. (204)

Baucham is emphatic that baptizing, modifying, or Christianizing CRT is fatal to the gospel. For that reason, he advocates identifying, resisting, and repudiating CRT. The way to do this is not through politics but through preaching and teaching. If God overcame the barriers between Jews and Gentiles through the gospel, Baucham deduces, the antagonisms in the United States based on race are equally remedied by the good news of Jesus Christ.

Baucham's book is for the church, not for American society writ large. Because of that focus, some may still wonder what is to be done in various institutions where CRT has gained a hold. (By now the common idiom may be DEI rather than CRT—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.) Baucham does not pretend to answer that question. For him the stakes of the church's witness and fellowship are too high to let the discontents in American society and government obscure the truths of the gospel. Ⓢ

Darryl G. Hart *is distinguished associate professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, and serves as an elder at Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan and as a member of the Committee on Christian Education.*

Bones in the Womb: Living by Faith in an Ecclesiastes World

by Susan E. Erikson

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* November 2024[1]

by Gregory E. Reynolds

Bones in the Womb: Living by Faith in an Ecclesiastes World, by Susan E. Erikson. Resource, 2024, x + 154 pages, $17.00, paper.

It is exceptionally enjoyable to be asked to endorse and review Susan Erikson's new book of poetry, since I am working on a commentary on Ecclesiastes with Meredith M. Kline. I normally do not have endorsers review volumes, but I hope readers will pardon this exception.

In her introduction, Susan Erickson best sums up her intentions in writing this poetry:

> I have been intrigued for years by Ecclesiastes; its honesty about human struggles, its frank exposé of the futility our excursions into stuff and experiences for meaning and satisfaction; its persistent reminder that death is on everyone's bucket list; and the correct recourse for human peace in the face of this world, is a relationship with the God of heaven. Nothing sentimental here, but the best place for every believer to start. (x)

Erikson's well-crafted free verse beautifully covers the thematic terrain of the entire book of Ecclesiastes. The oral and mnemonic power of poetry takes center stage in free verse because it resembles ordinary speech but artfully condenses language and seasons it with internal cadence and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1149.

rhyme. This fine poetry should be a significant aid to Bible study and sermon preparation.

Good poetry in whatever form stimulates the imagination to see things from a different perspective. The artistic structure and craftsmanship of Ecclesiastes is perfectly suited to such a linguistic exploration of its meaning and implications.

The writer of Ecclesiastes has some important things to say about the artistry involved in composing the Scriptures:

> Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (Eccl. 12:9–12)

The inspired words of the sage in this text are carefully crafted divine wisdom—"arranging many proverbs with great care." He fashions wisdom especially designed for troubled believers living amidst the injustices, wickedness, and wackiness of a fallen world. We must remember to leave the mystery of God's disposition of our lives in the hands of God, recognizing our mortal and human limits. The beauty of the design of the book of Ecclesiastes is itself a testimony of the perfect control and benevolent purposes of our God in caring for us. God's Word is crafted with the original Designer's care—a care with which he gifts the writers of Scripture—"weighing and studying and arranging."

Erikson divides the book into four parts. Rather than moving seriatim through the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes, she focuses on four essential themes: Chasing after the Wind; A Time to Die; Fear God; and A Pleasing Aroma.

The word *hebel* (הֶבֶל) is used thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. It has a wide semantic range. It can mean frustrating, perplexing, or fleeting, depending on the context. Erikson's poems reflect this range of meaning. The idea of fleeting and weariness is captured in her poem "All Is Vapor" (8–9).

> People come,
> People go,
> From light of dawn
> to glowing dusk,
> The days roll on
> and on and on.
> Whether harmony
> Or wars increase,
> The boy is young,
> The man grows old,
> Yet earth remains,
> Seedtime, harvest,
> Heat and cold,
> Summer and winter,
> Day and night
> shall never cease.

But, like Ecclesiastes, the poetry ends in hope. The concluding poem, "Final Thoughts," nicely gathers the Preacher's conclusions.

> How much do we rely
> upon our dreams,
> And our desire?
> Instead of building up ourselves
> in holy faith,
> Instead of running eager fingers
> over pages of His Word
> (What glorious translation of His truth is
> waiting there!)
> Forgetting how He
> snatched us from the fire?
> There are no deeds
> He has not seen,
> No secret things
> He does not know—
> Our stumbling,
> The weariness of soul in man.
> And yet He loves.
> We would do better fearing God,
> And keeping His commandments.

Indeed, here are "words of truth" crafted as "words of delight" to capture every reader's heart. Ⓢ

Gregory E. Reynolds *is pastor emeritus of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire, and is the editor of* Ordained Servant.

The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

by Jonathan Haidt

Originally published electronically in *Ordained Servant* December 2024[1]

by Shane Lems

The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness, by Jonathan Haidt. Penguin, 2024, 395 pages, $30.00.

I know I am not alone when I think this: there seem to be more people struggling with mental health issues now than there were 25 years ago. When I was a child, I did not know of many other adolescents dealing with severe mental problems. However, today, I know of quite a few young adults and people in their twenties who have mental health complications. Why is this? What is going on?

If you have these same questions and want reasonable, well-researched answers, you need to get Jonathan Haidt's book *The Anxious Generation*. Haidt is an American social psychologist who has extensively studied this recent mental illness crisis among teenagers and twentysomethings. This book summarizes his findings, mainly focusing on people born after 1995. Haidt's central claim in the book is this: "Overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation" (9).

There are three main parts in the book that prove his point. In the first part, Haidt gives some detailed stats and information showing that mental health problems have significantly increased in the last twenty years. The second part of the book explains the decline of play-based childhood. This section describes how children used to play with other kids, go outside, take risks, face some danger, learn to fail, navigate various social situations, and develop their physical and mental skills while playing. However, due to the ubiquity of screens and the modern parenting emphasis on safety and overprotection, children are no longer developing various skills by playing in-person with other children. Haidt argues that the loss of children playing with other children is one reason Gen Z struggles with anxiety, depression, and other mental issues.

The book's third part is called "The Great Rewiring: The Rise of Phone-Based Childhood." Haidt examines and explores the detrimental aspects of a phone-based childhood in this section of the book. Since the arrival of the smartphone around 2007, many children have grown up in front of phones and other screens. Haidt says this screen-filled childhood causes social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction. Haidt summarizes numerous studies and research that show how excessive screen use by children has various adverse effects on their mental health. There are separate chapters on how phone-based childhood differently affects girls (e.g., body image) and boys (e.g., pornography).

The fourth and final section of the book is constructive. It is called "Collective Action for Healthier Childhood." In this part of *The Anxious Generation*, Haidt gives instructions on how schools, parents, technology companies, and

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1155.

government agencies can help remedy the mental health crisis related explicitly to phone-based childhood. There is much practical advice in the last part of this book that is helpful for parents, teachers, and school administrators. Parents who have young children will want to read this book as they think about when—or if!—they let their child get a smartphone.

The Anxious Generation is not a Christian book. However, it is a book that will help Christians navigate one aspect of the mental health crisis on our hands. *The Anxious Generation* does not just answer the question of "why" some younger people struggle with mental issues. It also gives some helpful instructions and wise advice on moving forward to help youth avoid these difficult mental struggles. As a pastor and father, I found this book very worthwhile. It has also helped me think about various counseling issues and sermon application. If you are concerned about excessive phone usage among younger people, or if you want to learn more about it so you can better help youth struggling with mental health issues, *The Anxious Generation* is an excellent book to read. It will even challenge readers to rethink their own screen usage. Ⓢ

Shane Lems *serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Hammond, Wisconsin.*

A Treasury of Nature: Illustrated Poetry, Prose, and Praise

by Leland Ryken

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by Mark A. Green

A Treasury of Nature: Illustrated Poetry, Prose, and Praise, by Leland Ryken. P&R, 2024, 176 pages, $24.99, paper.

In his latest work, *A Treasury of Nature*, Dr. Leland Ryken offers readers a journey through the beauty of nature. Through an exquisite selection of poetry and prose, he highlights God's handiwork in creation. Dr. Ryken, professor emeritus of English at Wheaton College, brings over forty years of expertise in literature and its connections to the Christian faith. A respected scholar, he has written extensively on topics such as the Bible as literature, Puritanism, and the integration of faith and the arts.

Ideal for reflective readers and those who appreciate the intersection of faith and literature, this book provides a sanctuary of meditative readings, offering both beauty and insight. Whether for morning devotionals, study groups, or personal enrichment, it inspires a deeper engagement with God's creation.

In an illuminating introductory essay, Ryken provides a thoughtful framework for exploring each of the forty selected works, explaining a three-part structure: first, the writer sets the scene, drawing readers into a particular place in nature; next, readers delve into "analyzing the meaning of what we [they] observe or experience"; and finally, many selections end with a call to reflect or take

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1158.

action, as in Pierpont's hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" (25–27):

> For each perfect gift of thine
> To our race so freely given,
> Graces human and divine,
> Flowers of earth, and buds of heaven:
> Lord of all, to Thee we raise
> This our hymn of grateful praise.

This careful structure provides a balanced rhythm for the book, blending prose and poetry with reflective commentary to guide readers through an immersive experience. The pacing allows readers to pause, contemplate, and return to each selection with fresh eyes.

After each selection, Ryken offers insightful commentary and background, drawing from decades of teaching and deep appreciation of these works. His guidance here feels akin to a master tutor's, leading readers through some of the Western canon's finest literature on nature. For example, Ryken's commentary on Keats's final poem, "To Autumn" (58–60), reveals the depth and intricacy of Keats's imagery and structure. Ryken observes that Keats layers sensory experiences in each stanza, moving from touch to sight to sound, shifting agents from plant to human to animal, and tracing harvest cycles of fruitfulness, labor, and decline. Each stanza progresses from morning to midday to evening, presenting nature's temporal flow with a remarkable intensity.

P&R has also complemented Ryken's selections with stunning visual artwork carefully chosen to enhance the text. The volume's aesthetic and tactile qualities make it a delight to hold, ideal for reflective reading. I find these selections a fitting complement to morning Bible readings, a reminder that just outside my office lives the glory in "our Father's world."

Ryken's choices are broad and wisely extend beyond strictly Christian authors. Alongside Calvin, Luther, and Herbert, we find superb passages by writers inspired by the beauty of God's creation—whether consciously aware of its divine source or moved by nature's wonder. This inclusive approach allows readers to enjoy nature's majesty as reflected across different perspectives, affirming God's presence and power in all the areas of common grace through "the things that have been made."

One minor critique: In a few instances, overlapping images with text or abbreviating the paintings or photos to fit the page feels limiting. Presenting complete works in unaltered form would better honor the original artists and maintain their intended impact.

In summary, *A Treasury of Nature* is Dr. Ryken's remarkable labor of love, inspiring readers to view creation with renewed wonder and gratitude. This volume elevates our spirits, lifting our eyes to behold and contemplate the Lord's goodness through the art of those who capture nature's beauty with the elegant eloquence of our English language. Ⓢ

Mark A. Green *is a retired minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and is a member of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic and attends Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Vienna, Virginia.*

Servant Reading

Review Articles

Faith Can Flourish in Our Age of Unbelief

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by Andrew S. Wilson

Bulwarks of Unbelief: Atheism and Divine Absence in a Secular Age, by Joseph Minich. Lexham Academic, 2023, xii + 311 pages, $32.99.

Given the extent of our society's moral decay, it is reasonable to have concerns about its future. While civilizational decline cannot prevent Christ from building his church (Matt. 16:18), it should motivate us to be like the men of Issachar, "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32). Joseph Minich's recent book *Bulwarks of Unbelief* contains a number of insights that can help us understand our times and how to navigate them as faithful Christians.

How the Modern Technocultural Order Makes Atheism Much More Plausible Than It Has Been in Previous Eras

Minich contends that, in the modern age, the role technology plays in our engagement with the world creates an environment in which God's existence is no longer felt to be obvious, regardless of what a person believes conceptually about the question of God. This stands in sharp contrast to ancient and medieval times, when the world was understood as a mysterious agent that acted upon man. In the modern era, the world is seen as material that can be manipulated by man, or as a machine whose malfunctions always have some kind of technical solution. It is generally assumed that any problem can be fixed with a pill, procedure, product, policy, or protocol. Anything that does not fit in with this conception is perceived to be nonexistent. In short, when our engagement with the world is so thoroughly mediated by technology, we tend to view reality as consisting only of that which we can control. This makes the notion of a transcendent God both implausible and inconsequential.

Echoing sociologist Peter Berger's notion of "plausibility structures"[2] and philosopher Charles Taylor's idea of the "social imaginary,"[3] *Bulwarks of Unbelief* contends that modernity has created an atmosphere "which does not require constant conscious reference to the divine" (57). As noted above, Minich sees modern technology, in connection with the loss of traditional networks of trust and our increasing insulation from the natural world, as playing a key role in this development. While man has employed technology throughout history, in the modern era technology plays a unique role in our engagement with the world. As Minich explains,

> We experience the world as what is revealed and presented to us in our technologies. . . . Nature, for us, becomes an abstraction. For us, technology is what nature was to many generations of our ancestors. . . . It reveals to us a world full of convenience, a world in which unsavory items can be fixed by an enhanced technical apparatus, a world in which the heavier aspects of suffering and death are sani-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1100.

2 The term "plausibility structures" refers to the standards that a culture implicitly accepts and uses to judge all other proposed belief and action.

3 The term "social imaginary" refers to the way most people in a given society imagine their social surroundings.

> tized and rendered invisible. . . . Against this backdrop, then, what is the initial plausibility of any God (or transcendental reality) who is not suited to our convenience? (124–25, italics original)

Because our technological interface with reality extends even to our relationships, we are trained to view human beings (including ourselves) as manipulable material rather than personal agents. As a result, the world no longer seems to reveal a personal God. While 81 percent of Americans still say they believe in God,[4] many of them live as practical atheists, conducting their day-to-day lives without giving any thought to God. The postliberal, feminist writer Louise Perry has characterized this as a repaganizing of Western culture, noting that the distinguishing feature of pagans is that they "are oriented toward the immanent."[5]

Minich develops his thesis by drawing upon a wide array of sources. He employs Jacques Ellul's thoughts on how technique "strips us of our relationship with the natural world" (107), Martin Heidegger's concept of how the enframing function of technology "shapes the way in which reality automatically appears to us" (113), and, perhaps most surprisingly, Karl Marx's ideas pertaining to "modern labor in its relationship to our perception of reality" (115). On the last point, Minich explains that "the products that populate and mediate our experience do not have the marks of craft" but are mass produced by persons who tend to "lack *investment* and *engagement* in their making" (152, italics original). This shapes us to see reality as impersonal, because "a human's self-conscious sense of agency and self-possession is fundamentally developed in response to the felt active personhood of others" (156, italics original). While our technocultural order compensates us with the conveniences offered by the many tools upon which we are made to depend, this has the effect of muting "those features of the world that reinforced God via the world's own imposition" (177). Consider the similar observations of political philosopher Glenn Ellmers, who notes that we have lost

> the conception of nature: the conviction that there is a fixed and intelligible order in the cosmos, outside our will, that supplies a permanent ground of morality and justice. In the absence of nature, history and science became the authoritative substitutes. History would supply man's purpose by situating him within the course of historical progress. But this historicism teaches that we are not only situated but in fact isolated in our particular historic moment. Science, meanwhile, through its technical methodology, was intended to confirm man's mastery over the raw materials of nature, including human nature. Only that which can be counted and measured is real, and the only real knowledge is the quantifiable. . . . Neither Science nor History, needless to say, has delivered on the promised results. As political scientist John Marini explains: "By recreating man as a historical being, his meaning is established in becoming. . . . That required a rejection of being and truth, or the eternal, as providing the necessary conditions, and limitations, on human understanding derived from philosophy and religion, and undermined the authority of nature, reason, and God. . . . [History] could not establish the meaning of man in terms of the end of History or its rationality. History is irrational and never ending."[6]

To sum up, the rendering of reality as impersonal "stuff" at the mercy of the human will leaves man without a sense of ultimate purpose.

4 "How Many Americans Believe in God?" Lydia Saad and Zach Hrynowski, *Gallup*, June 24, 2022, https://news.gallup.com/poll/268205/americans-believe-god.aspx.

5 Louise Perry, "We Are Repaganizing," *First Things* (Oct. 2023): 35.

6 Glenn Ellmers, *The Narrow Passage: Plato, Foucault, and the Possibility of Political Philosophy* (Encounter, 2023), 48–9. Italics original.

How Orthodox Protestantism Is Well-Suited for an Age Marked by the Felt Absence of God

Minich shows how orthodox Protestantism is especially suited to thrive in this historical moment. While he does not define what he means by "orthodox Protestantism," the term is typically used to refer to the consensus found in the major Protestant confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the heart of this consensus is the notion that Christian faith is shaped not by what can be seen but by what God says in his Word. Martin Luther explained this in his *Heidelberg Disputation* by distinguishing between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. Fallen man is by nature a theologian of glory, relying on his reason to understand God. The only way to become a theologian of the cross is by submitting to what God says in his Word. Through this Word we learn that, in the economy of salvation, outward appearances often look contrary to true spiritual realities. It was the Protestant Reformation's embrace of the theology of the cross that led to the recovery of the definition of the justified Christian as one who is simultaneously righteous and sinful.

The aspect of Luther's thought that Minich explicitly employs in setting forth an orthodox Protestant response to modernity's sense of divine absence is the theory of the two kingdoms. This is refracted through the famous statement from Luther's treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (191). Thus, in Luther's "spiritual kingdom" the believer is bound only to God, and in Luther's "earthly kingdom" people are bound to the duties they owe to their neighbors. Because Christians dwell in both dimensions simultaneously, our involvement in the historical process connects the two realms and points to the ultimate meaning of history.

Christians must be strategic if we are going to preserve orthodoxy in the spiritual dimension while living in an earthly context that fosters unbelief. The first step in Minich's proposed strategy is to engage frequently in four acts of remembrance that can help attune us to reality. First, we need to remember that God is not one being alongside other beings but is the transcendent source and ground of all creation and all the beings that inhabit it. Second, we need to remember that God originally made human beings with freedom "to participate and to be engaged in the unfolding of the historical process via their access to and ability to change the world of which they are stewards" (197). Third, we need to remember that, because man has misused the freedom that he was given at creation, human history is a project that, on its own, has no ultimate purpose. And fourth, we need to remember that God's activity in creation, providence, and the preservation of our rebellious race "provide the grounds for the hope that divine activity can both resolve the problem of our exile and bring the human project to completion" (206).

The second step in Minich's proposed strategy focuses on embodied practices that are vital for realigning "our distorted tacit sensibilities" with "our persuaded convictions concerning the nature of reality" (207). At the individual level, such practices include the following: engaging in activity that involves direct, embodied participation in the world; faithfully practicing the classical Christian disciplines of prayer, Scripture meditation, and worship in the church; living not merely for our own enjoyment but also for the benefit of others; and extending generous hospitality. One practice that I would add to Minich's list is recognizing propaganda and the human impulse toward social conformity.[7] This is necessary because our society's lack of a shared sense of transcendent purpose makes people especially susceptible to an activist, regime-aligned press and a government that eagerly engages in censorship. This added practice

7 The power of propaganda is famously illustrated in George Orwell's novels *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The impulse toward social conformity is a key theme in Terrence Malick's historically based film "A Hidden Life," in which an Austrian farmer's refusal to pledge loyalty to Hitler earns him and his family the disdain of almost everyone in his village.

is all the more important in light of the fact that our primary media of communication are image-based, making it easy to shape people's thoughts and attitudes through the sensory manipulation of emotion.

At the corporate level, one key "earthly kingdom" practice for Christians is to push back against our regime of social manipulation and its disdain for individual freedom and agency. Philosopher Matthew Crawford offers an astute description of this regime when he writes that "under the pretense of their own rationality and benevolence, some men seek to manipulate other men as beings incapable of reason."[8] Retired entrepreneur and present-day book-reviewer Charles Haywood adds that, in the American managerial regime, "putatively private entities are the main actors, using narrative control and manipulation to control the population."[9] According to Minich, mounting a challenge to this established order will require the cultivation of "a positive vision of finitude and of the limits of men with respect to other men" (222). In my opinion, chief among the things that such a vision should stress are the following: (1) our technocratic, managerial regime's invocation of scientific objectivity as the preeminent factor in governance is specious, because moral and political judgments are always guided by scientifically unprovable presuppositions; and (2) ordinary people have the right and responsibility to evaluate expert claims and proposals on the basis of standards of truth and goodness that are intelligible to all people in the light of nature, which serves as the standard of authority for political society. In short, political power is neither absolute nor omnicompetent, and its exercise does not override individual agency. G. K. Chesterton addressed this just over one hundred years ago amid the controversy over eugenics, saying, "There cannot be such a thing as the health advisor of the community, because there cannot be such a thing as one who specializes in the universe."[10] Elsewhere he quipped, "If the ordinary man may not discuss existence, why should he be asked to conduct it?"[11] C.S. Lewis made a similar point in *The Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength*, in which he showed that when a society embraces the illusion of man's mastery over reality, some men end up claiming mastery over other men. In Minich's opinion, any success in pushing back against our manipulative regime and its agenda of dependency will make modern atheism "less and less plausible—because our attunement to reality (and the character of reality itself) will be perceived to have an irreducibly agentic and meaningful character" (224).

While modernity has created conditions that are conducive to unbelief, we should note how this presents orthodox Protestants with an opportunity to mature in faith. Instead of nostalgically longing for days gone by, we should remember that God is the one who has brought us to this historical moment and that he is working through it to further his plan. In Minich's words,

> Rather than seeing the present situation as a bad thing to be overcome by an approximation of the past, . . . it is worth seeing the present as an opportunity to shape a future that could not have been attained without going through this stage of human development in relation to our own religious faith. (179)

Minich adds that a similar point was made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he wrote these words while imprisoned by the Nazis:

> The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on the

8 Matthew B. Crawford, "The Rise of Antihumanism," *First Things*, no. 335 (Aug/Sept 2023): 50.

9 Charles Haywood, "Lyons on the Managerial Regime," *The American Conservative* (Sept. 11, 2023) https://www.theamericanconservative.com/haywood-lyons-managerial-regime/.

10 G. K. Chesterton, "Eugenics and Other Evils," in *Collected Works*, vol. IV (Ignatius, 1987), 332.

11 Cited in Michael D. Aeschliman, The Restoration of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Continuing Case Against Scientism (Discovery Institute, 2019), 29.

> cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which He is with us and helps us (236).

In other words, the theology of the cross is perfectly suited for our historical moment. In an age of unbelief, hope is not to be found in *seeing* God as present, but in *hearing* the Word by which he reveals himself to us. And this does not consign our faith to the private realm, because the Word upon which our faith rests is the same Word that "initiates and drives the history in which human beings are subsequently caught up. . . . The history to which human beings belong, then, is one that groans for the revelation/word that both is its origin and summons it to its end" (240).

Conclusion

The decline of our civilization is put into perspective when we remember that it has historical antecedents. In the fifth century, Augustine saw the fall of Rome as an opportunity to stress that, because the church is the earthly expression of God's eternal kingdom, it exists beyond the rise and fall of empires. Today's believers can do something similar as we reckon with the way our technocultural order leaves modern people without a sense of God or ultimate purpose. Because Christ has set us free from such bondage to vanity, we are well-positioned to hold forth a hopeful vision in this age of unbelief. We know that history is the unfolding of God's plan to establish his eternal kingdom. This enables us to participate in the human historical project while resting "contented within human limits in the expectation that the final hope of history is not dependent upon humanity's hubristic seizure of it (which, in any case, inevitably destroys rather than redeems)" (219). Instead of being seduced by the idea that man can gain control over every aspect of life, Christians should carry out the duties we owe to God and to our fellow men while accepting the reality of human finitude, always remembering that the final hope of history does not rest upon man, but upon God. Ⓢ

Andrew S. Wilson *is the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Laconia, New Hampshire.*

A Humble Minister's Courageous Stand against Ecclesiastical Tyranny

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by Robert T. Holda

Standing Against Tyranny: The Life and Legacy of Arthur Perkins, by Rev. Brian L. De Jong. Independently Published, 2023, 516 pages, hardcover $26.99, paperback, $19.99.

The origin story of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as seen through a study of the life of J. Gresham Machen, is familiar to most *Ordained Servant* readers. We well know about the modernizing restructuring of Princeton Theological Seminary and Machen's subsequent establishment of Westminster Theological Seminary. We know the story of how Dr. Machen's involvement with the Independent Board of Foreign Missions led to his own suspension from his ministry in the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA), his withdrawal from that body, and his participation in the founding of that fellowship that has become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). We have adopted these events as our own history almost as fervently as we have adopted the Westminster Standards.

What our brother, the Rev. Brian L. De Jong, provides us with in *Standing Against Tyranny* is an unfamiliar, but parallel, account of the OPC's origin, through a study of the life of Arthur F.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1199.

Perkins, a founding member of that new church and the first moderator of its Presbytery of Wisconsin. Here we find the concurrence of corroborating testimony about the real issues of the day, particularly as it pertains to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s and 1930s in Presbyterian Wisconsin. Many have already heard the testimony from the Northeast. De Jong has now provided us with a confirming report from the Midwest.

The uniqueness of this work's contribution to our understanding of that era is more than geographical, however. For through the life of Arthur Perkins we have the opportunity to see the spiritual, theological, and ecclesiastical conflict of his day from the perspective of one who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with J. Gresham Machen in his vigorous fight for the faith, while being a very different sort of man, something the author rightly emphasizes:

> Indeed, two more dissimilar men you could not find. One a seminary professor, the other a small-town pastor. The one grew up in Baltimore in comfortable circumstances. The other came from a farm in Wisconsin, living on modest means. One studied at Princeton and was covenantal, the other graduated from the Moody Bible Institute and was a Dispensationalist. One was a lifelong bachelor, the other was married with five children. The one was a scholar with an international reputation, the other was largely unknown outside of Central Wisconsin. One traveled extensively in Europe, the other rarely left his home state. Machen and Perkins were vastly different men, yet a shared faith in Christ united them in deep friendship. The abuse they each suffered for resisting modernism drew them even closer together. (228–29)

Both men also died in unity, not only because they passed into glory three days apart from one another, but because they ended their earthly lives as persecuted soldiers of the cross, bearing the cost of their faith, in part, in bodily weakness and affliction.

This definitive record of the life and legacy of Arthur Franklin Perkins (1887–1936) reveals him to be a humble man of modest means and education, but also one of vibrant Christian faith and of great zeal for the salvation of sinners and the growth of the Presbyterian church in Wisconsin. Having been an unconverted Wisconsin farmer for over ten years, Perkins came to saving faith in Christ around age twenty-eight and the following year sold his two farms so that he might focus on being prepared for labor in full-time Christian service. He was trained at Moody Bible Institute and was ordained as a minister of the gospel in the PCUSA in 1922 at the age of thirty-four. He did not graduate from Moody for another three years but served multiple Presbyterian churches in Wisconsin during that time. After six years of pastoral ministry, Perkins was hired as the Field Director of the Winnebago Presbytery of the PCUSA, a role that was much like that of an OPC Regional Home Missionary.

Although he was not anywhere near as well-trained or as theologically educated as the average minister in our communions today, that didn't stop the Spirit of God from making Perkins into a positive force for the gospel throughout his state. His labors in the area of home missions and church planting are impressive and inspiring. In his first four years as Field Director, Perkins's average month of ministry included "15 sermons . . . 58 pastoral calls . . . 6 baptisms . . . 3 personal spiritual interviews . . . over 5 session meetings . . . 3 congregational meetings . . . 11 new members. . . [and] an average of 644 miles" (34–35) traveled for ministry purposes. After he completed his seven years in that position, he reported, "I have received 764 members into these churches or an average of 108 each year . . . I have seen 1179 profess Christ, have baptized 441 and have traveled 171,839 miles" (34). Surely, in spite of his deficiencies, Arthur Perkins was mightily used by the living God in his day. I personally find Reverend Perkins's testimony to be a great encouragement to my own persistence in gospel ministry, being myself a man with feet of clay and with temptations to insecurity regularly lying close at hand. Every gospel minister needs the exhortation that a testimony like Arthur Perkins's provides in a concrete fashionthat we

might abide contentedly with God's ordinary way of making his power perfect in our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9).

Perhaps it was, in part, this evangelistic power that God displayed through Arthur Perkins, a jar of clay, that occasioned the fire he drew from a number of his fellow presbyters. His enemies, to a man, all embraced the modernism of the day, a movement that Machen condemned as "not only . . . a different religion from Christianity but [one that] belongs in a totally different class of religions."[2]

De Jong helps us see how the conflict between Reverend Perkins and the modernists within the PCUSA was fundamentally over spiritual differences of doctrine, particularly in ecclesiology. However, the official cause of Perkins's persecution and eventual suspension from the ministry centered around Perkins's involvement in the distinctly orthodox ministry of Crescent Lake Bible Camp, which Perkins cofounded. Also included were the baseless allegations that Perkins had used his position as Field Director to create "a Presbytery within the Presbytery, creating a political group within the Presbytery, sowing disunion and division and suspicion toward the other camps" (179). Perkins's persecution over his involvement with the Crescent Lake Bible Camp runs very much in sync with the persecution Machen endured over his involvement with the Independent Board of Foreign Missions, which Perkins and his congregation also gladly preferred to support. Other trying episodes, such as Perkins's lonely opposition to the ordination of a man who denied the virgin birth of Christ (96–7), also lined the path of Perkins's eventual departure from the PCUSA and entrance into the new church, now the OPC.

The author presents well the drama of Perkins's prosecution at trial, exposing the manipulative tactics of those who hijacked and abused the institutional structure of the Presbyterian church for selfish ends. Especially in this portion of the book, De Jong provides us with more than just a biography of a presbyterian pastor. It is a window into the ongoing ecclesiastical conflict within the visible church of Christ on earth. Here we have a cautionary tale that all presbyters ought to heed, with lessons about the tyrannical abuse of church power and the vital importance of safeguarding liberty of conscience for all those within and without the church of Christ.

With its five appendices, which include a timeline of major events in Perkins's life, tributes made to Perkins by his friends, thorough outlines of eighteen of Perkins's sermons, all the extant correspondence between Perkins and Machen, as well as the full text of a number of relevant documents, this biography will serve as a useful repository of historical insights for those who desire to study this era in general, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, the founding of the OPC, the history of Midwest Presbyterianism, or the life of J. Gresham Machen.

Of special interest to some may be the final set of letters between Perkins and Machen, in which they discuss the degree of accommodation that might be made for those holding to premillennial dispensationalism within the new denomination that these men were zealous to establish. Considering the role of premillennial dispensationalism in the OPC's division of 1937, one wonders where Perkins would have affiliated if his life had been extended. Perhaps we should plan to consider such at the centennial of the founding of the Bible Presbyterian Church in 2037.

This year, however, we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of J. Gresham Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*, a book that has been widely read by those inside and outside of the OPC. A good number of us have Machen's other writings on our shelves as well, in addition to various works that have been written about him and his peculiar cause since his death. No doubt, if Machen was still with us today, his own shelves would be lined with many of the theological and historical books that have been published since his passing—volumes on the Reformed faith, on Presbyterians and Presbyterianism in America, and on the errors of theological liberalism within the visible church.

2 J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; repr.; Eerdmans, 2009), 6.

But I have personally become convinced that this most recent publication by our brother, Brian De Jong, would have certainly been on Machen's shelves. And I say that not simply because I know that the author would have gladly shipped a free copy to Dr. Machen if he were still with us, but because Machen himself indicated the value of what is contained within this book. Maybe I'm being overly presumptuous, but I do believe *Standing Against Tyranny* is a book that J. Gresham Machen would have read and encouraged others to read.

I say that because, in the correspondence between Perkins and Machen, which De Jong has provided in full, we find the following statements from Machen, written to Perkins: "Your testimony has been a blessing to very many Christian people," (221) and "you, in particular, have given us all wonderful refreshment. . . . I believe your Christian testimony will sound forth far and near—not only among the people of Wisconsin for whom you labor immediately, but also in every other place" (247).

In this biography, Reverend De Jong has made a thoroughly researched and edifying presentation of Arthur Perkins's testimony of Christian faith under trial, such that the blessing Machen personally received by that same testimony might now indeed be multiplied. By his research and writing, De Jong has taken up the noble task of sounding forth Perkins's Christian testimony, in fulfillment of Machen's expectations. For that reason alone, all those who trust the discerning perspective of J. Gresham Machen ought to seriously consider reading this new book.

The closest I can come to a critique of this work is to acknowledge that some readers may feel the author's pattern of repeatedly quoting the same original source material slows the pacing of the narrative, while a more purely chronological method of including the quoted content might have streamlined his presentation. Others, however, will look at that same use of repetition and appreciate the author's scrupulous commitment to immediately provide his readers with supporting evidence of his interpretive claims, as well as his wise use of both simple chronology and noteworthy themes to organize his writing.

This volume was a delight to read. It fed my soul and provided me with a faithful testimony of a life worth imitating in many ways. I am most thankful for the godly legacy of Arthur F. Perkins and for the way this book has enabled that legacy to be applied to my own heart. I heartily recommend it.

This book is available in multiple formats on Amazon.com, including an audio version, read by the author, on Audible. Also available are a series of seven video lectures on The Life and Legacy of Arthur Perkins as well as the preaching of four of his sermons, all delivered by the author. Those videos can be found on The Perkins Study Center, available at www.graceopcsheboygan.com. ©

Robert T. Holda *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the pastor of Resurrection Presbyterian Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.*

Redemption in Christ

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by Ryan M. McGraw

Theoretical-Practical Theology: Redemption in Christ, by Peter van Mastricht (1630–1706), ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester and Michael T. Spangler, vol. 4, 7 vols. Heritage Books, 2023, 741 pages, $50.00.

Steadily moving toward completion, this fourth of seven projected volumes of Peter van Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology* tips readers past the half-way point of a momentous publishing endeavor. Mastricht gives modern readers a glimpse into another world. His scholastic precision and distinctions, constructive engagement with early church and medieval theology, and extensive practical application have become theological rarities in modern times. Representing some of Mastricht's best material, this volume expounds the person and work of Christ, devoting nearly seven hundred pages to the Savior's glory. Here readers will find a precise, warm-hearted, and engaging treatment of one of the most foundational and central areas of Christian doctrine. Rather than attempting to cover the massive amount of ground traveled here, this review aims to give readers a general feel for the work, highlighting some features illustrating its character.

In eighteen chapters, Mastricht moves through Christ's incarnation, offices, states, and work of redemption. Tracing his covenant theology highlights the foundation on which the rest of the book is built, opening his Christology with a superb treatment of divine covenants. Genesis 3:15 provides the organizing exegetical principles, both for grasping Christ's work in terms of the covenant of grace and for reading the entire Bible coherently. Rather than using standard terminology of the covenants of redemption and of grace, he taught that there was an eternal covenant of grace between the Father and the Son that was the foundation of the historical covenant of grace with the elect in union with Christ, these covenants being both distinct and related. Mastricht furnishes readers with one of the clearest and most thorough treatments of conditionality in the covenants of redemption and of grace. The "eternal covenant of grace" is unconditional respecting the elect because Christ fulfilled all its conditions in their place as their surety. On the other side, while maintaining clearly that the covenant of grace is conditioned on faith supplied by the Spirit, he distinguished elements of the covenant given as means to ends from those that are the ends of the covenant. Thus, the Spirit gives to the elect unconditional calling, regeneration, and faith (implying repentance) through conversion based on the covenant of redemption. Yet justification, adoption, and glorification follow the condition of faith as the ends of the covenant (e.g., 40). Conditionality in the covenant of grace thus prevents both Antinomian and Pelagian ideas that we are saved through our own doing, whether partly or wholly, because the Spirit supplies faith as the pivot of receiving the benefits of union with Christ. Faith is the condition of the covenant of grace, not in that it confers the right to the reward, which rests on Christ alone, but in that it confers the possession of the reward (41). Because this volume is occupied with Christ and his work of redemption, the ensuing material on Christ's incarnation, offices, states, and redemption all fall under the eternal covenant of grace conditioned on Christ, rather than the historical covenant of grace conditioned on faith. The remainder of the volume thus outlines what Christ did in fulfilling the eternal covenant of grace on behalf of God's elect.

Some outstanding chapters and features in the book are worth highlighting. For instance, his reduction of Christ's many names under the heads of "Lord," "Jesus," and "Christ" make his treatment easy to follow and remember without shortchanging the rich treasure trove of Christ's names in Scripture (chapter 3). Also, chapter 11 explores the

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1105.

life of Christ in depth in ways that are both rare in systematic theologies and reminiscent of Thomas Aquinas's extensive treatment of the topic. Though believers cannot imitate Christ in everything he did, his entire life provides both a foundation for the gospel and a moral pattern of Christian living in the Spirit (e.g., 392–94). In an age when Christians often reduce Christology to Jesus dying for our sins, not knowing how every aspect of his humiliation and exaltation are relevant to Christian faith and life, this chapter (particularly the practical section) is indispensable for fleshing out a Christ-oriented view of Christian living and experience. The Reformed church needs a broader view of Christ than we often have to fuel our prayers, devotion, and preaching. Augmenting his dogmatic treatments, the depth of his explanations and expositions in the elenctic parts contribute greatly to the value of the work. Often some of his clearest theological statements and distinctions appear here, contrasting orthodox viewpoints with those of opponents. Moreover, his Trinitarian theology is consistently pervasive, especially in rooting each aspect of Christ's person and work in the inseparable operations of all three divine persons and in the appropriate works of each person. This carries the advantage of teaching readers how to situate Christian doctrine in the Trinity in a way that is simultaneously robustly God-centered and intensely personal, both of which the church today needs.

Other features of the book either reflect historical interest or will surprise modern readers. Reflecting his context in the Dutch Further Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*), Sabbath-keeping appears rhythmically in this volume (e.g., 244, 359, 371, 385, 459, 461–62, 501–02, 505–06, 515–16) in ways found only in England and the Netherlands at the time. While this was more a matter of difference in emphasis than of theological substance, it reminds us that our contexts often shape the questions we ask and the answers we seek.

It will surprise some readers that Mastricht believed that the majority Reformed view about the Decalogue was that it was "the renewal of the covenant of works," though with "an evangelical use" of driving people to Christ (45). Still, he distinguished the law itself as reflecting God's character from its use as a covenant of works, enabling him and other Reformed authors to retain a place for the law as a rule of life for believers. In other words, God presented the covenant of works at Sinai, not as a way of life, but as an evangelical means of driving believers to Christ for salvation, which Reformed authors called the first use of the law. This use of the law was alien to the covenant of works itself, which could not drive people to Christ, let alone offer him to sinners. The Mosaic covenant continued to be an administration of the covenant of grace (46) because God never intended by it to place his people under a works covenant. While this viewpoint of the Mosaic covenant appears similar at first glance to the contemporary take on the republication of the covenant of works, Mastricht actually places a different option on the table for discussion.

Another noteworthy example of an unexpected twist is Mastricht's suggestion that it was possible, if not likely, that Mary remained a virgin perpetually after giving birth to Christ (297; 314). Though shunning Roman Catholic views of Mary's supposed conception without original sin, Mastricht believed that though we do not know whether she always remained a virgin, it would be fitting if she were, because Christ himself had sanctified her womb. Though feeling like a remnant of medieval views of sanctity, this position was common among early modern Protestants.

However, Mastricht's denial that the human nature of Christ subsists personally "by means of the divine personhood" (132) is potentially troubling. Known as *enhypostasia*, this idea affirmed the personal nature of Christ's humanity while denying that Christ assumed a human person. Though some authors did not like enhypostatic language, this became the common way of stating that Christ was a divine person with two natures, making his human nature properly the humanity of the person of God the Son. John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, many Reformed authors, and most Lutherans affirmed this view in contrast to

Mastricht. While retaining the integrity of Christ's two natures in one divine person, he (in my view) weakens the truth of the union of those natures. At the least, his statement that the "orthodox" (i.e., the Reformed) abrogate "all subsistence from the human nature" (148) overreaches. Those affirming the doctrine still taught that Christ was one person and that the human nature had no personal subsistence of its own, but they added that Christ's humanity was nonetheless personal due to hypostatic union with the person of the divine Son. This reviewer finds this more "Thomistic" version of the hypostatic union more satisfying than a completely depersonalized human nature in Christ, because it better accounts for the divine Son working personally through his proper human nature as an instrument of his agency. Mastricht is simply wrong in implying that Lutheran views of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper were the driving force behind enhypostatic accounts of the hypostatic union (151–57), because enhypostasia predated Lutheranism. Overstating "orthodox" unanimity recurs occasionally in Mastricht's work as a whole. Though reliable more often than not, his occasional overstatements should caution readers from taking all such assertions at face value. Reading more broadly in the literature of the time clarifies such points.

Volume four of van Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology* offers a rich feast of Reformed Christology. Though the meat he offers is often a bit tough and hard to digest, all his material is good meat. Prayerfully seeking spiritual nourishment through this book will make us better Christians and better preachers, and better preachers because better Christians. The Trinity, the Bible, and Jesus Christ are the core of biblical Christianity. We need books like Mastricht's to remind us that these are more than fundamentals on which we build everything else; they are the way of life itself. ©

Ryan M. McGraw *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as a professor of systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.*

Reading the Psalms Theologically

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by Andrew J. Miller

Reading the Psalms Theologically (Studies in Scripture and Biblical Theology), edited by David M. Howard Jr. and Andrew J. Schmutzer. Lexham Academic, 2023, 344 pages, $29.99.

Reading most books out of order would be a disaster. Encyclopedias and collections of essays aside, if I were to randomly rearrange the chapters of a story like *Pilgrim's Progress* and have you read it for the first time, you would understandably struggle. The ordering of things communicates something—in the Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, effectual calling (ch. 10) comes before justification (ch. 11), matching and expressing our theological understanding of their logical ordering.

Yet curiously, readers of the Bible often skip over the intentional ordering of certain biblical books—the Psalms being chief among them, perhaps because it seems more to us like an encyclopedia than a narrative. Here the book *Reading the Psalms Theologically* helps readers to see the intentional ordering of the "chapters" of the book of Psalms and its significance. *Reading the Psalms Theologically* introduces readers to "editorial criticism," wherein study of the final form of the psalter reveals the theological intention of the editor(s) (4). "Editorial criticism" could be described as a form of "canonical criticism," associated with Brevard Childs and Christopher Seitz, that evangelicals can embrace to the degree that it reacts against the anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions of much modern biblical criticism by suggesting that we read the biblical books as the sacred Scrip-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1112.

tures of the church.[2]

While Christians today are rightly cautious of anything with the term "criticism" in it, we should remember that this is essentially the same work that O. Palmer Robertson engaged in through his own *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering their Structure and Theology*.[3] In other words, editorial criticism, at its best, is reminding us that someone, by God's inspiration, collected the Psalms (individually inspired at their composition) and put them in an order. *Reading the Psalms Theologically* asks why the Psalms were put in the order they were and what we can learn from that order.

This is a popular new way of looking at God's Word, and thus pastors should be aware of it (if even to reject it). For example, another new Lexham title is *Text and Paratext: Book Order, Title, and Divisions as Keys to Biblical Interpretation*.[4] One more example is Don Collett's intriguing proposal that Hosea has a signal position among the minor prophets ("The Twelve"), wherein

> Hosea's marriage to Gomer is intended to be a living parable of the Lord's covenantal marriage with Israel. . . . Hosea is not only the first prophet through whom the Lord spoke in the Twelve but also . . . the word the Lord speaks to Hosea is the founding agent or agency by which the witness of the Twelve is established.[5]

The first chapter, "Reading the Psalter as a Unified Book: Recent Trends," sets the table nicely, describing the state of Psalms scholarship. Here we are told that notable scholars like Roland Murphy, John Goldingay, Norman Whybray, and Tremper Longman have been skeptical of the editorial criticism approach to the Psalms (24). Nevertheless, lamenting that "traditionally, most readers have approached the Psalter atomistically, looking only at individual psalms, assuming that they are included in the work in random fashion," (31) the authors of the first chapter suggest there is indeed an intentional ordering to the Psalms. Again, this should set theological conservatives at ease: what we are after is the author's intention as presented to us in the words of Scripture and its order. Explicitly we are told (and it is worth quoting at length because of the importance of this point),

> We understand the entire Bible to be "God-breathed" (or "inspired by God"), as Paul puts it in 2 Timothy 3:16, and so another question arises in a collection such as the Psalter as to where, exactly, the locus of inspiration is to be found—in other words, what stage(s) of a text that came together over time is/are inspired? Only the original writing? Only the final form? Something in between? We affirm that the Spirit inspired the writing of the very words of individual psalms when they were originally written. We base this on Jesus' words in Matthew 22:41–45 (NIV), where he states that David, "speaking by the Spirit," uttered the words from Psalm 110:1. That is, when Psalm 110 was first written, this was done through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But we also affirm that the Spirit superintended the process that finally resulted in the collection that we call 'the book of Psalms.' (32)[6]

In other words, at least these contributors (one who is an editor of the book) do not believe that a robust understanding of editing necessarily under-

2 A helpful introduction to canonical criticism and related biblical criticism is Mark S. Gignilliat, *A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism: From Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Zondervan, 2012), particularly 145–68.

3 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering their Structure and Theology* (P&R, 2015). Also see Leslie McFall, "The Evidence for a Logical Arrangement of the Psalter," *WTJ* 62 (2000): 223–56.

4 Gregory Goswell, *Text and Paratext: Book Order, Title, and Divisions as Keys to Biblical Interpretation* (Lexham Academic, 2023).

5 Don Collett, "Jezreel, the Day of Visitation, and Hosea," in *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture*, eds. Don Collett, Mark Gignilliat, and Ephraim Radner (SBL Press, 2020), 180–81.

6 Here, John N. Oswalt's cautions for canonical criticism thirty-five years ago seem to be addressed, whether intentionally or not. See "Canonical Criticism: A Review from a Conservative Viewpoint," *JETS* 30/3 (Sept. 1987): 317–25. On the other hand, some have argued canonical criticism is *too* conservative! See Dale A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs's Canon Criticism: An Example of Post-critical Naiveté" *JETS* 32 (1989): 311–26.

mines Scripture.

I believe that one can be a skeptic toward much of historical-criticism and still recognize the value (however limited) of careful editorial criticism. This is simply what readers do with every book of the Bible: we understand there is an intentional structure, an ordering, which builds upon and is communicated through the very details of the text.[7] We can certainly benefit, for example, from considering how Psalm 126 is almost at the midpoint of the psalms of Ascent, almost at the arrival at Psalm 127, which explicitly speaks of the Lord's house. Perceiving such an order enhances the sense of "already-not-yet" in Psalm 126, and it does not take much imagination to envision Psalms 120–126 as the songs of the journey *to* God's house, and then 128–134 related to the journey back. As Robertson points out, "This arrangement of fifteen individual psalms in a symmetrical form with seven psalms balancing one another on either side of a centralized focal psalm cannot be purely accidental."[8] Or, more obviously, Psalms 22, 23, and 24 have been appropriately dubbed, "the cross, the crook, and the crown," with their proximity helping us to see God's Old Testament promises of Christ. At the same time, we should be careful not to let "paratext" or editorial critical insights overwhelm the words themselves.

We read in chapter 1, "We believe that there is much merit in understanding the book of Psalms not simply as a random collection of unrelated Psalms, but also as an organized, unified 'book' that has an overarching message, to which the individual psalms and smaller psalms collections contribute" (33). What then is the message of the book of Psalms? It points to and shows the need for Christ, the "true David," the Messiah (34). Thus, even though the book is titled *Reading the Psalms Theologically*, it could just as appropriately have been titled "Reading the Psalms Messianically."

The book successfully demonstrates the significance of seeing intentional ordering in the Psalter. *Reading the Psalms Theologically* features various scholars, making some chapters more beneficial than others. Several chapters at the opening reinforce the view that Psalms 1 and 2 should be read together and were intentionally placed there (e.g., 40, 59, 67, 82, 98). Jim Hamilton wrote chapter 2, continuing the emphasis on the human author's conscious intention in typology (which Hamilton wrote about in his 2022 book *Typology*[9]), positing here "that David understood himself as a prefiguring type of the future king God promised to raise up from his line of descent" (64). Hamilton makes the fascinating observation that the call of Psalm 8 to look to the stars recalls God's promise to Abraham (72).

Similarly hitting on Psalm 8, Seth Postell's chapter asserts that given the similarities with Daniel, "the book of Psalms does, in fact, present a divine Messiah" (97). Few issues are more naively treated today as the "creation mandate" and if and how it applies to us today. Thus, Postell's work is helpful as he notes that "the rule of the [Psalter's Messianic] king is portrayed as a fulfillment of the creation mandate (cf. Ps. 8:5–9 with Gen. 1:26–28)" (99). This claim is strengthened by the reference to Solomon with similar language in 1 Kings 5:4 (101). Thus, "The Messiah in the book of Psalms is most clearly, quintessentially, a son of Adam, and a human being in the image of God" (101).

Other chapters are full of notes of interest to students of the Psalms, like Jill Firth's observation that Psalm 144 echoes Psalm 18 but turns indicatives into imperatives, "leading to a different rhetorical strategy" (122). Likewise, Rolf A. Jacobson writes that "the relationship of the theology of the

7 As the book argues, "There is much merit in looking [at a book's] 'literary context'. . . . For example, in the book of Isaiah, we do not simply read each prophetic oracle on its own, but we read them in relation to other oracles, all of them ultimately contributing to the book's overall message. The same is true with the book of Psalms" (33).

8 Robertson, *Flow of the Psalms*, 212. On Psalm 127 as the center of the Psalms of ascent, see Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Scholars Press, 1985), 208.

9 James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology-Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations are Fulfilled in Christ* (Zondervan Academic, 2022).

cross to the Old Testament, however, is a field that has yet to be satisfactorily plowed" (157). C. Hassell Bullock invites doxology, additionally noting how Psalm 23 equates the LORD with a shepherd: "That David, the shepherd of Israel, should himself have a shepherd, and that his shepherd was equivalent to his God, was a dazzling truth. What was more astounding still was that the Lord would stoop so low as to assume one of Israel's most menial roles" (129).

Readers may not agree with all the points made by all the contributors to *Reading the Psalms Theologically*. I take exception, for example, to the claims made in chapter 10 related to death, namely, that "punishment after death is a later development, arguably on the margins of the Old Testament but certainly not present in the Psalms" (177). This is followed by a curious confidence: "The general perspective just outlined is so widely attested as to be incontrovertible and uncontroversial" (177). The author of this chapter must wrestle with Psalms like 1 and 73, which both mention the judgment of the wicked, but the author concludes that these were "relectured" and "later read in eschatological terms. . . . this was more a rereading than the original intent" (181). Thus,

> these psalms can be seen to illustrate *relecture*. While the Old Testament texts generally exhibit no concept of a positive afterlife, hints of this emerged in response mainly to the catastrophe of exile and the political uncertainties of the ensuring centuries. And as this concept developed, older texts were reread and new texts written to reflect it. (182)

Perhaps these comments illustrate why some caution is warranted with editorial criticism—here it seems most like faulty types of biblical criticism. Such comments are far from, for example, what Geerhardus Vos articulates in his "Eschatology of the Psalter," that is, for example, "The Psalter is wide awake to the significance of history as leading up to the eschatological act of God."[10] Thankfully, the New Testament has no problem affirming a clear and original eschatology of personal bodily resurrection in the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 22:29; 1 Cor. 15:3; Acts 2:27).

These concerns aside, *Reading the Psalms Theologically* provides an interesting and encouraging advanced taste of editorial criticism, doing so with vigor and an apparent love for the Psalms. The overall thrust is that the Psalter does point to Christ, which should lead believers to reverence and awe of God. ⓢ

Andrew J. Miller *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and serves as regional home missionary for the Presbytery of Central Pennsylvania.*

10 See Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology of the Psalter," *Princeton Theological Review* 18 (Jan. 1920): 13.

Important Matters of Worship

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by Allen C. Tomlinson

Worship Matters, by Cornelis Van Dam. Reformed Perspective, 2021, xvii + 327 pages, $25.00, paper.

There are minor points I would have stated differently if I had been the author, and at a few places I would have used different arguments for the same teaching. However, such is almost always the case anytime one reads a book written by someone else, no matter how much we appreciate the book. I would recommend this book especially for Christians who have been reared in non-Reformed churches. It is a good introduction to the idea of biblically governed worship versus the "make it up as you go along" kind of worship, which we find in much contemporary worship. I would recom-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1117.

mend it because it does a great job emphasizing the holiness and greatness of God, our creator and redeemer Jesus Christ, and therefore our need to approach Him in our worship with "reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28), as the New Testament affirms is our duty in this New Covenant.

The main divisions of the book have the same emphases that many similar Reformed books have: "General Survey of Key Elements" (of worship), "Administering the Word," "The Glory of Worship," "Singing and Music in Worship," "Some New Challenges," and "Worship in Heaven and on Earth." These six main divisions cover ground that many other books written from a Reformed or Presbyterian perspective cover. Sometimes Van Dam does a great job summarizing those other books on a given point, always giving due credit. Other times he does a great job taking one of the "subpoints" of Reformed worship and expanding on it: e.g., does the Bible teach us to dress up for public worship? Another example: he gives a fairly full argument on the presence of the angels in our worship and how the knowledge of that should affect our approach to worship.

The book is written from a particularly Dutch Reformed background, so "Reformed Worship" includes some of the particularities that we find in Dutch background denominations but not necessarily in Presbyterian background denominations. For example: many begin a service with Psalm 124:8. Those of us from a Presbyterian background do not always begin a service with that particular text. However, many of us Presbyterians have no problem with beginning a service that way and can gladly worship in a church that begins worship with that verse every time. While we do not begin our services with that particular verse, we do open the service with some other statement that makes the same point about approaching together the God of our salvation. At one point Van Dam mentions that there is some minor variation on a given point he makes between those of his Dutch background and Presbyterians. So, he obviously is familiar with these minor differences by Christians who have the same basic interpretation and application of Scripture and the same historical influences from the Reformers and their successors. None of this was a problem for me.

One way in which Van Dam makes a point was a concern for me, but it must be kept in its context so that we appreciate the point being made. In speaking of the use of musical instruments in worship (ch. 15), and particularly of the use of the organ, he mentions that Voetius protested based on the regulative principle of worship, which is our main approach (historically and biblically) to worship as Reformed and Presbyterian believers. Van Dam writes that Voetius's and Calvin's arguments against musical instruments in public worship did not persuade him, because of the silence of the New Testament on the matter with the Old Testament background using instruments. Van Dam then writes, "The regulative principle of worship goes too far by insisting that Scripture is clear on not permitting musical accompaniment in worship" (212). My issue with this statement is this: the regulative principle is the biblical principle and does not go too far being the commanded approach to worship; however, how any one of us makes use of the regulative principle may be faulty. That would not nullify the biblical priority of the principle; it reminds us that not one of us is perfect in our understanding of the Scriptures. I do not believe the regulative principle is contrary to a use of musical instruments in public worship in this New Covenant stage of the church, but some Reformed Christians do believe this. It is a matter for us to lovingly discuss together, being like-minded in our Reformed faith and like-minded in our desire for worship regulated by the Scriptures. Particular applications of the principle we do not always agree upon, though we should try to help one another come to a better understanding and application of the principle when that is possible. If we "go too far," or do not go far enough with the principle, the problem is always with us and not with the biblical or regulative principle. However, I suspect, in the context of the whole book, that is precisely what Van Dam means by his statement.

The book's first part, "General Survey of Key Elements," does a good job summarizing what

biblical worship is, stressing God's presence in our midst in Christian worship, stressing the Lord's Day as a day of rest and worship, and summarizing important biblical elements in approaching God biblically as a congregation.

Part two, "Administering the Word," reminds us that in the Bible and in historical Reformed and Presbyterian worship the Bible is the main emphasis—worshipping as the Bible commands, preaching and hearing the Scriptures expounded, going forth to live in light of what we have heard as those trusting in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Van Dam, true to the historical Dutch Reformed practice, emphasizes our need to read the Ten Commandments, the moral law, to enable us to fully preach the Gospel of salvation by grace. In my forty-four years of full-time pastoral ministry, I did not read the Ten Commandments every service; however, I did preach both the law (as background to the gospel) and the gospel (as the only true fulfillment of the law in our Savior Jesus Christ). There are other texts that emphasis the moral law of God and other ways to keep bringing the congregation back to the moral law as the absolute standard of right and wrong to show us our sin and what a godly life is and ought to be, and so to "drive" us to the Savior and his gospel of grace. I had no problems with this part of the book, even if I try to do the same thing with a little more variation. Most of us in our circles are in perfect agreement with the heart of the point Van Dam makes.

I loved part three: "The Glory of Worship." Van Dam deals with the privilege of worship, a biblical basis for a second service on the Lord's Day, the glory of the gospel of Christ crucified, as well as the glory of the resurrection and the ascension. There is a chapter for each of those points. Very wonderful. This section gave a summary of what other biblical teachers have shown from the Scriptures over the centuries, the presence of the holy angels in our midst and how this should add to our sense of solemnity (seriousness not somberness) and reverence before a holy God. The emphasis on Christ and the glory of Christian worship because of the Savior is superb.

Part four is "Singing and Music in Worship." Here are four chapters that are all very useful and of immediate concern: "Singing to the Lord," "Can we Sing all the Psalms?" "Musical Instruments in Public Worship," and "Dancing for Joy." Apart from our "in-house" debate regarding the use of musical instruments, much of this would be agreed upon by those of us who minister in churches subscribing to the historical Reformed creeds. For the most part, there is some very good argumentation.

The fifth part of the book, "Some New Challenges," deals with the immature nature of most contemporary worship approaches, reminding us that we need to grow up! Hopefully we come to a more mature understanding of the Scriptures and of biblical worship as we grow age-wise and as we study God's Word. Many years ago I briefly connected with an old college chum online; we both had been part of the milder section of the Jesus Movement back in the 1960s and '70s. We both were very thankful we had "grown up" and matured and had soon left behind some of the less thoughtful aspects of that movement. Many of my friends who were in that movement to some degree, have also like me ended up in conservative Lutheran or Reformed or Presbyterian churches, with the "grown up" worship the movement had mocked. Other "challenges" he deals with are "Holy Attire," a contrast between evangelical and historically reformed worship, the de-emphasis on the sacraments (especially baptism with a lopsided view of Scripture that falls short of seeing the place of our children in the covenant), and the desire to make the church "attractive" to unbelievers or to immature Christians. That last chapter in this section about making the church attractive is very much worth reading, as is the entire section of the book.

Van Dam's concern about "dressing down" for worship comes in throughout the book. I might not use some of his argument from certain texts, believing that in the New Covenant those texts would be best understood and applied to us being "dressed" spiritually in the righteousness of Jesus Christ and in those robes that are the "righteous

deeds of the saints" in Revelation 19:8 (which both Van Dam and I believe to be the changing lives of believers in progressive sanctification through the power of Christ's redemptive work). However, his arguments based on the holy character of God and the awesomeness of what we are doing and whom we are approaching in worship, and what it cost Christ for us to be able to worship, were extremely well-argued and deserve full consideration. Once I read or heard a statement by Dr. Gregory Reynolds comparing a casual approach to worship as "everything written in small case letters," so that nothing is seen as really important.[2] Van Dam argues that few of us would not try to look our best for an earthly dignitary of great importance; how much more so as we come before the glorious Triune God!

The last section of the book is comprised of one chapter, "Our Worship and Heaven." We are worshipping this glorious God in the presence of our contemporaries here on earth, in the presence of the holy angels, and of the church triumphant. We are not in heaven physically as we worship in our church assemblies, but we are spiritually in heaven, and heaven is with us! Again, this speaks of Van Dam's constant emphasis: the glory of public worship as the gathered people of Jesus Christ!

One last remark I have is on the title: "Worship Matters." I love puns and double meanings when carefully used. Worship has many elements and circumstances that need to be thought through. These "matters" are important, though some are more critical than others. Worship is very important; worship really "matters." I highly recommend this book. Ⓢ

Allen C. Tomlinson is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and pastor emeritus of the First Church of Merrimack (OPC) in Merrimack, New Hampshire.

2 Gregory E. Reynolds, "Living in a Lowercase World," *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 15–18

Chrysostom on the Ministry

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by D. Scott Meadows

Six Books on the Priesthood, by St. John Chrysostom. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, 160 pages, $20.00, paper.

What is the most difficult and dangerous calling in this world? Climbing Mount Everest? Establishing a base camp on Mars? Hand-to-hand combat on the battlefield? No. Everything else is mere child's play compared to one particular calling, according to John Chrysostom: the priesthood.

John Chrysostom (347–407) authored one of the three best known patristic writings of pastoral theology, entitled *Six Books on the Priesthood*. The other two titles are "De Fuga," also known as Oration 2, by Gregory of Nazianzus (329–90) and "The Book of Pastoral Rule" by Gregory the Great (540–604). The first Gregory's work is the most similar to Chrysostom's, though it is simpler and more sympathetic. John was of the Antiochene school of Bible interpretation that emphasized the literal, plain meaning of biblical texts, unlike Gregory of Nazianzus, of the Cappadocian or Alexandrian school, that favored and emphasized a spiritual sense, indebted to Origen. John's rhetoric was powerful, even if his substance was not so profound as that of Gregory of Nazianzus, who was less eloquent. Gregory the Great's book is a classic on counseling, dealing mostly with how to advise congregants with diverse traits and needs, and so it is not really comparable to John's treatise.

This edition of "Six Books on the Priesthood," is number one of sixty-five so far in the Popular

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1123.

Patristics Series. The translation into English from the original Greek is copyright 1964 by the late Rev. Graham Neville (1922–2009) of the Anglican communion, also contributing the helpful preface and introduction. Chrysostom's work that follows is newly divided into sixteen chapters instead of the original six "books." The original book divisions were somewhat arbitrary. This edition helpfully correlates each page with the original book and paragraph divisions, making easier comparisons to the Greek text or other translations and allowing standardized citations in academic work.

My attention for this book was captivated by a remark of Nick Needham, author of the church history set of five volumes, *2000 Years of Christ's Power* (Christian Focus). Needham wrote,

> In addition to his published sermons, Chrysostom continued to write Christian treatises at Antioch, the most famous of which was *On the Priesthood*, an exposition of the nature and duties of a Christian pastor. This has been reprinted and translated into other languages more often than any of Chrysostom's other works. Another early Church father, Isidore of Pelusium said of this treatise: "*Everyone who reads this book must feel his heart filled with the fire of God's love*. It sets forth the office of presbyter, its dignity so worthy of our esteem, its problems, and how to fulfil its duties in the most effective way."[2] (emphasis added)

Having read and summarized its contents in twenty pages of my personal notes, this older pastor's heart certainly was so filled. While Chrysostom's time, place, culture, and ecclesiastical situation is far removed from mine, passage after passage resonated deeply with my own observations and practical experiences in the pastoral ministry.

One potential hindrance to appreciation of this book is precisely some of those differences, especially when they arise from distinctive doctrines and forms of church government. I would encourage interested parties to adopt to some extent the advice of the late theologian John Webster concerning the will of a person reading Scripture.

> A crucial area for theological reflection is the nature of the reader's will. If sin renders us unwilling to hear and manipulative in our reading, then properly-ordered reading is characterized by a certain passivity, a respect for and receptivity towards the text, by a readiness to be addressed and confronted. Attention, astonishment and repentance, together with the delight and freedom in which they issue, characterize the reader of Holy Scripture when he or she reads well, that is, with courtesy and humility.[3]

While repentance may not be required by something that challenges us in extra-biblical literature like Chrysostom's work, courtesy and humility are still in order. Before we become critics, we must first become learners of any with potential to instruct us. We owe authors a sincere attempt to understand and to sympathize, as far as truth allows, with their written substance. A well-rounded education requires us to read widely, reflect thoughtfully, and think critically.

One example of our potential offense immediately confronts us in Chrysostom's title, *Six Books on the Priesthood*. So deeply are we, as Protestants, committed to the priesthood of the believer, that we can barely suppress our dismay over the term being applied to the church's ordained ministers of the Word. Recall, however, that this title appeared in the fourth century. In his lectures on church history, Dr. Robert Godfrey explained that in this early period, "priest" was merely a synonym for presbyter or elder. It lacked the full-blown connotations of the later Roman Catholic developments of sacer-

2 Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (Newly revised edition, Vol. 1) (Christian Focus, 2016), 255.

3 John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 80.

dotalism. Knowing this assists Reformed readers to appreciate Chrysostom's book.

Other examples might be mentioned. Rather than being limited to ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons, fourth-century churches had ranks of ministers and the potential for promotions. Monks and hermits were respected for their spiritual devotion to Christ. Not only widows but also virgins (young women) were enrolled as a group living together for special care and oversight by the church. A high view of ordained clergy possessing the power of the keys also prevailed. These and other differences with twenty-first century Reformed ministers and churches may be found off-putting. However, it is with good reason that Chrysostom's book has endured sixteen centuries. Most of it transcends its own peculiar setting and is of universal experience and application. These passages are typically golden.

It is well-known that John "Chrysostom" (lit., golden-mouth) was one of the greatest preachers of all time. His second name was given posthumously—a help to his humility no doubt. Eventually he did accept ordination to the pastoral ministry, later becoming, rather against his will, the patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey). He was plain spoken, passionate, fearless, and sometimes tactless, leading to many sufferings as a minister, and he eventually was banished to the eastern shore of the Black Sea, where his health failed, and he died.

Concise Chapter Summary

This very concise summary of the book's chapters is a distillation of the aforementioned twenty pages of my notes.

The entire book is a dialogue between John Chrysostom (hereafter, John) and his bosom friend named Basil. It is not certain which Basil this was, whether Basil the Great of Caesarea (330–79) or, more likely, Basil who attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 as Bishop of Raphanea. These two young men with very similar upbringings, advantages, views, and aspirations had imagined becoming monks together one day. Then things happened they did not anticipate. First, church officials marked John and Basil as good candidates for the priesthood rather than a monastery. John and Basil thought that whatever they chose, they would do it together. Then John's widowed mother made an impassioned plea for him never to leave her until she died. Basil would have none of it. Without quite saying he had changed his mind about ordination, John said the decision was not urgent and should be postponed.

When the day came for their ordination, Basil proceeded, being under the mistaken impression that John, too, was to be ordained. John ran and hid, letting Basil be deceived on purpose. John believed he was far from qualified and that Basil would be a great blessing to Christ's church as a minister.

John's book explains all this and then rehearses the difficulties and dangers of the priesthood, which allegedly excuse John's resistance to it. Basil grows increasingly upset, realizing more and more, as John speaks, the nearly impossible charge he had accepted. At the end, John promises to support Basil with encouragement and entrusts him and his ministry to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note: Remarks in quotation marks below are not direct quotations but summaries and paraphrases of thoughts from John or Basil.

Chapter 1, John's Deceit. John explains the circumstances leading up to Basil's ordination without John. Basil discovers what has happened, comes to John very upset, and John laughs, hugs Basil, and tells him the little trick was all for the best.

Chapter 2, Basil's Reproaches. Basil explains he does not know what to say to people who are judging John harshly for evading ordination this way. Basil's main concern seems to be protecting John's good reputation, though Basil has an underlying angst about being tricked into ordination alone.

Chapter 3, John's Reply. John boldly says he misled Basil for his own good, since he should

be a priest. John also testifies to his own spiritual inferiority as a reason for running from the priestly office. John comes very close to defending "the lie of necessity," but prefers to call it the skillful management of affairs for the best possible outcome.

Chapter 4, The Difficulty of Pastoral Care. John says the pastorate is the best possible way to prove one's love to Christ, as Jesus's counsel to Peter shows. Three times Peter affirmed his love, and Christ said in response, "Feed my sheep." Yet, only the best men, like Basil, can fulfill this calling.

Chapter 5, Love—the Chief Thing. Basil retorts, "You say you love Christ, and yet you are showing your love by not doing the thing that most shows love to Christ. Explain that to me." John replies, "I know I am not qualified, so it would not be the best way for me to show my love." Basil humbly rehearses his own faults. John begins praising Basil's unselfish love demonstrated for others and is about to proceed to illustrate Basil's wisdom, too, when he becomes embarrassed and changes the subject. He says, "Explain how I should answer your critics, John."

Chapter 6, John Continues His Apologia. John: "They have no grounds to accuse me because, being unqualified, it was humble and prudent of me to decline." Basil: "If I tell them this, they will admire you." John: "Right, which only goes to show people find fault without knowing all the facts. We both have acted honorably."

Chapter 7, The Glory of the Priesthood. John: "The priesthood is the highest of all callings, because it is a heavenly one. People should respect ministers far more than they do. I know it is a lofty calling, so no one can accuse me of pride for refusing it."

Chapter 8, The Difficulty of the Priesthood. John: "If even the apostle Paul served with fear and trembling, how much more do we have reason to fear ruining ourselves and others in the priestly office? Disqualified men do disastrous things in other responsibilities like taking the helm of a merchant ship when they really do not know what they are doing. They should refuse the honor. Likewise, most should refuse to be priests, it is so lofty and difficult."

Chapter 9, The Character and Temptations of a Bishop. John rehearses three indispensable traits of the sacred ministry: no ambition to be elevated, exceptional spiritual discernment, and endurance of provocative mistreatment. Basil argues that John has these traits, and John disagrees strongly.

Chapter 10, Particular Duties and Problems. 1) Promotions, where ordinarily men are promoted due to earthly considerations rather than spiritual and moral, and this causes ministers much vexation in those circumstances. 2) Widows and the sick, where ministers have complex and social tasks to perform, which can hardly be done without coming under popular censure. 3) Virgins, where ministers are supposed to protect and guide young women toward holiness, and yet ministers lack important advantages of a girl's own father in securing these aims. 4) Arbitration, visiting, and excommunication, where ministers are hated unless they secure an outcome favorable to the complainant, no matter what other factors may be involved, and unless they have the right expression upon their face at all times, and unless they can rebuke and discipline people with no backlash at all, which is extremely unlikely.

You must train yourself to endure the mischief of the mob.

Chapter 11, The Penalty for Failure. John: "A severe penalty from God for failure attaches whether one grasps for the ministry or enters it reluctantly." Basil: "Now I am really afraid of what I have done." John: "Punishment is not unavoidable by the grace of God for qualified men like you. People have more common sense when choosing a contractor to build a house than a man for the priesthood."

Chapter 12, The Ministry of the Word. John: "There is nothing like the ministry of the Word for the spiritual health of Christ's body, the church. Great knowledge and skill in the Word and theology are needed for pastoral ministry. We must not build up one error by tearing down its opposite, but handle complex matters in a balanced way, like legalism versus antino-

mianism, and insisting on the oneness of God's essence without losing the truth of the three distinct Persons, and vice versa. Paul's denial of excellence of speech is abused by some as an excuse to be careless and lazy preachers, when all he really meant was that he did not adopt the rhetorical standards of the pagans. Paul's true eloquence and doctrinal depth were stellar and continue helping churches everywhere today. Examine his epistles for evidence of this."

Chapter 13, Temptations of the Teacher. John: "A priest must work hard in sermon preparation and use great skill to connect with and persuade a congregation. He must not care too much about their praise or blame, nor disregard it altogether. A thin-skinned pastor is headed for much more vexation than necessary. Expect people to judge you more than your sermon and to discount your whole ministry for one perceived fault. Only experience can fully acquaint you with the greatness of the challenge of disregarding the concern of popularity."

Chapter 14, The Need for Purity. John: "God requires at our hands the blood of those we fail to warn. A minister needs extraordinary Christian virtue, both in public and in fulfilling his private duties like prayer. Some have testified of extraordinary spiritual experiences, sometimes as they are dying, and I believe them. I am not in that category of saintliness."

Chapter 15, The Contrast Between Bishop and Monk. John: "To be a good monk is a lesser challenge than being a good priest. Monks live in private; priests in public. Monks practice ascetic disciplines; priests cannot do that but must eat and drink and talk with others regularly. Monks are not provoked to wrath by social relationships, and priests cannot avoid these provocations. Even though I am not a monk, I manage to keep mostly to myself, which makes it easier for me to manage my spiritual life. Given all these challenges of the priesthood, which are all but impossible to meet, I could not possibly consider that life."

Chapter 16, The Conclusion of John's Apologia. Basil: "Do you mean you have a life free of toil and anxiety?" John: "No, but I sail on a river of trouble while you, now a priest, navigate oceans of trouble." Basil: "So do you hope to be saved while being of no use to others?" John: "I hope I am of a little use to others' salvation, but whatever shortcomings I have will meet with a milder punishment from God. Let me tell you a little secret. Ever since we learned about the potential priesthood for both of us, I have been in deep distress of soul, never letting on to you about this." Basil: "Now you have me all upset because I am terrified I will fail in the priesthood! Please help me, whatever you can do." John: "I promise you I will encourage you whenever you have time to get together with me again. As Basil sobbed, I hugged and kissed him on the head and urged him to bear his pastoral charge bravely. I told him, I am trusting in Christ concerning you. He called you and set you over his own sheep, and he will help you to be faithful. I fully expect that on Judgment Day, you will be there to welcome me into glory."

Concluding Remarks

I must say that only after finishing the entire book did my appreciation for it come to a peak. It held my interest throughout but at times seemed a tad tedious. In his own defense at declining the opportunity to be ordained, John belabors the point, though he says he could go on much more due to the extensive difficulties and dangers of the priesthood, most remaining unmentioned. However, the climax of the book, with his affectionate commitment to Basil in this calling, largely vindicates the whole project, in my judgment.

Without a doubt, men in the pastoral office should read this book. Some will be further equipped to serve well. Others may realize they have intruded where they do not belong and, with good sense, repent and resign their posts.

If this were the only book of pastoral theology read by aspirants to the office, many would likely change their minds and find some other way to invest their lives. In cases of persistent unfitness, that would be a good thing, for them

and for the church. However, we would not discourage qualified candidates. Those who are most spiritually minded would probably be the most reluctant to proceed, and yet, if they have the requisite gifts and graces, they are the most suitable for the noble task with the greatest potential blessing to Christ's church. It still would be great if pastors had a better idea of the occupational hazards of the ministry before their installation. Lest we terrify them too much, however, we ought to recommend to them great books on the topic with a complementary, encouraging message. A modern, commendable example is "Pastoral Theology" by Albert N. Martin, volume 1 of three, entitled "The Man of God: His Calling and Godly Life" (Trinity Pulpit Press, published 2018). He takes a moderate position on the divine call to the pastoral office, straddling the view of Charles Spurgeon, which bordered on the mystical, and the view of Robert Dabney, which was nearly as straightforward as choosing a career in the church. Martin's counsel is wise and practical.

Looking inwardly, I am grateful that the bulk of my own pastoral ministry is now history and, God knows, by his grace alone, I have not disgraced my holy calling. Whatever days Providence yet affords me, however, present a temptation to anxiety, especially after reading Chrysostom's sober analysis. This throws me all the more consciously upon the Lord. "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16). "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:4–5). Christ, have mercy upon me and all his servants. ☉

D. Scott Meadows *is a Reformed Baptist minister serving as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church (Reformed), in Exeter, New Hampshire.*

Christianity and Nationalism

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by Richard M. Gamble

The Case for Christian Nationalism, by Stephen Wolfe. Canon Press, 2022, 488 pages, $24.99.

In 1918, at the height of America's wartime prohibition of alcohol, the liberal *Christian Century* promised its readers that "Christianity plus science will bring in the Kingdom of God." Today, we are as likely to doubt science as to trust it, and such optimism seems naïve and even ludicrous. But that mathematical formula captured the essence of a bygone era's faith in science and progress, a faith celebrated a century and more ago by a cadre of Protestant leaders in the name of advancing God's work in the world.

This was the social gospel at high tide, and this was Christian nationalism. The progressives could have easily substituted "nation" for "science" and proclaimed that "Christianity plus *nationalism* will bring in the Kingdom of God." In the crucible of reform, the phrase "Christian nationalism" was common among the social gospelers, whether in reference to domestic politics, America's role in the World War, or missionary activity in India and China. This was a "national gospel," the phrase some Canadian scholars have adopted to identify the social gospel movement in Canada. Used judiciously, this alternative label minimizes our preconceptions about the relationship between theology and activism and illuminates an aspiration that brought together liberals and conservatives for the sake of saving and sanctifying the nation.

So prevalent was the rhetoric of Christian nationalism and "muscular Christianity" on the theological and political left in the Progressive

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1128.

Era that it can appear in hindsight that the social gospel held a monopoly on these ambitions. I gave that mistaken impression in my own work on the social gospel and World War I more than twenty years ago. But Christian nationalism was not a monopoly of the left wing of the church. It was broadly evangelical, in some cases Reformed.

"National gospel" also helps clarify today's Christian nationalism but for opposite reasons. Our understanding of Christian nationalism does not assume that it is a product of the Left in church and state. Far from it. The dominant narrative blames the Right in church and state, especially MAGA Republicans, when in fact it was manufactured at least as much by the liberals. Critics and promoters alike miss this. The lovers and haters of Christian nationalism, and even more dispassionate observers, miss how strong the movement once was on the Left.

A good history of the origins, public expressions, and purposes of Christian nationalism needs to be written. It will require a careful historian. The trending, academically fashionable field of Christian nationalism, like the older study of civil religion, tends to be dominated by sociologists, political theorists, journalists, and theologians. Historians have had less to say about it, for reasons unclear to me. Historians like to rain on everybody's parade. They resist, or ought to resist, the temptation to use the past to give us more reasons to believe what we already believe. History is messy, contradictory, and filled with surprises. History does not follow human logic; it does not think geometrically or syllogistically. It resists simplification. It does not keep good company with system-builders. Indeed, historical understanding, along with sound theology and ecclesiology, is the best antidote I know of for the dangers of ideology, the taking of one true thing about the world and inflating it into madness, to paraphrase C. S. Lewis.

It is hard to miss the controversy over Christian nationalism that has been brewing in the media, academia, politics, and the pulpit for twenty years at least. A quick search of the phrase on amazon.com shows its prevalence and increasing fashionableness as an academic or pseudo-academic topic. Whether it will grow into something more than a tempest in a Twitter teapot is hard to gauge. But there are reasons to be alert to its claims and potential influence in both church and nation. Many of the opponents of Christian Nationalism are shrill and alarmist. Their books are often hasty and shallow. Defenders, for their part, often pursue their cause with crusading zeal and glib dismissal of objections. Their books, too, can be hasty and shallow. A common tactic on social media is to dismiss critics as "Boomers." Surely we can do better than that.

Wolfe's Case for Christian Nationalism

Judging from the attention given to Stephen Wolfe's *The Case for Christian Nationalism*, one could be excused for thinking it is a significant work of scholarship. But Wolfe's book matters more for the stir it has created than for any weight it carries. One of Wolfe's first reviewers got it right when he said he felt compelled to review it, not because of its merits, but because so many people would take it seriously. That has turned out to be true. We must engage it even at the risk of increasing its significance. Other reviewers have pointed out Wolfe's deficiencies in handling Cicero and the Reformers, for example, so I want to focus on his mishandling of historical and other sources that readers might be less likely to notice. Wolfe says he is not reasoning from Scripture or history, and yet he uses both when it suits his purposes. When he condemns the condition of modern culture, he appeals to experience, which is an appeal to history. Past experience ought to be at least as relevant to judge Christian nationalism.

Wolfe opens his book with a dramatic retelling of the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. He warns that "this day changed everything, and we live in its consequences." I will let the hyperbole of "everything" pass (history is a matter of both continuity and change). The consequences of the Revolution have indeed damaged Europe and America, if not the world at large. He attributes to the Revolution a radically secularized politics, the birth of "political atheism." Ominously, "The children of the French Revolution, both Christian and

non-Christian, are still with us and continue the revolution" (2). (It is not clear who these Christian children of the Revolution are, but it seems likely that they are the advocates of a secular politics that Wolfe opposes, especially the political theology of so-called R2K, Radical Two Kingdom, not to be confused with Reformed Two Kingdom)

Granting for the moment the truth of this claim about the consequences of 1789, what it ignores reveals something important about Wolfe's story. The irony is that nationalism, far from the solution to our present woes, was itself one of the principal consequences of the Revolution. To embrace nationalism is to embrace one of the most destructive ideologies of the last two centuries. To embrace nationalism is to "continue the revolution" just as much, if not more than, as to embrace political atheism. Nationalism is an ersatz religion that fills the void left by the end of Christian political theology that Wolfe laments. This is what it was intended to be. Nationalism endures as the most potent ideological offspring of the French Revolution. It appropriates the language and promises of Christianity and the church, speaking of the nation as if it were the church, heir to the promises of God, and complete with martyrs, prophets, apostles, a canon of sacred scriptures, and holy wars and crusade. It has outlived liberalism, Marxism, and communism. Combined with populism and socialism, it has been particularly destructive, as the history of the twentieth century attests. Nations are old, but nationalism is not. Projecting it back across the centuries to include the sixteenth-century Reformers makes no sense. It is an exercise in what historian David Hackett Fischer called "retrospective symmetry." It is an optical illusion that only confuses the question. To be sure, the Reformers cared about the well-being of their provinces, realms, principalities, and empires, but that concern needs to be kept in proper tension with what they wrote about the mystery of divine providence and their pilgrim identity as strangers and exiles. They knew that, ultimately, they were guests in this world. Many of them lived in a "negative world" far more negative than Aaron Renn's categorization of contemporary America, and yet they held to a profound pilgrim identity at the same time. One need only read East Anglian pastor John Rogers's exegesis of 1 Peter 2:11 (sojourners and exiles) to see this. Rogers helped shape the consciousness of the very Puritans who settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony under John Winthrop, a go-to source for Wolfe for the communal ethics of Christian nationalism.

Do the Reading

A frequent rebuke on X/Twitter of those who criticize Christian Nationalism is "do the reading." That is good advice, for sure. And it applies to the supporters of Christian nationalism as much as to its detractors. Let us do the reading and see what happens. Just the first few pages of the book give us a lot to consider.

Wolfe cites past uses of "Christian nationalism" to show that the phrase is not new and that it has been used in a positive sense. And that is true, as we have seen. But who used these words in a positive sense? For what audience and for what purpose? The answers to these questions are revealing and should make the reader cautious. What Wolfe says about these uses is true but not the whole truth.

In the Introduction, he quotes W. H. Fremantle's *The World as the Subject of Redemption*:

> the whole life of man is essentially religious; and politics, the sphere of just relations between men, especially become religious when conducted in a Christian spirit. Nothing can be more fatal to mankind or to religion itself than to call one set of things or persons religious and another secular, when Christ has redeemed the whole. (7)

These theological arguments were first delivered in England in a series of lectures in 1883 and published in 1885. Wolfe identifies Fremantle as "a well-respected and accomplished Anglican priest." The Canon of Canterbury Cathedral was indeed well-respected and accomplished, but by whom was he well-respected and what exactly did he accomplish? His book is radically liberal in its

theology. It rejects Augustine's *City of God* because the Bishop of Hippo saw the Church as having "no vocation for the redemption of human society." Fremantle's book found a larger audience in the US than in England thanks to its enthusiastic reception in the social gospel movement. Social gospel dynamo and economist Richard T. Ely wrote the introduction to the American edition of the book, praising Fremantle

> for inspir[ing] us with zeal for rendering Christian the whole of the world and the whole of life. He shows Christians that they are fulfilling the purpose of the Founder of their religion in carrying Christianity into every sphere of social life and into every day of the week.[2]

"A high ideal of national righteousness is set before us by Canon Fremantle," he continued. "Not the isolated individual is to be saved but the individual in the nation. . ." Moreover, "In reading this book one thinks of the expression, 'the manliness of Christ,' for it is a manly Christ which is here presented, a Christ strong in action, Christ the Ruler as well as Christ the Consoler" (ii–iii). No wonder *The World as the Subject of Redemption* became a foundational text for the social gospel.

For his second example of the positive use of "Christian nationalism," Wolfe quotes T. C. Chao, identifying him simply as "the Chinese theologian." But this will not do. Chao came under the direct influence of the social gospel through American missionaries and the YMCA. He was a progressive theologian who signed the "Christian Manifesto" backing Mao and the People's Republic of China.

The full text of Chao's essay, reprinted from *Truth & Life* (February 1927) can be found online as "The Chinese Church Realizes Itself" in *The Chinese Recorder* (May-June 1927). The article concerns the emergence of a Chinese "church consciousness" and the need for a Christianity that is non-dogmatic, non-creedal, ecumenical, and social-service oriented. Regarding historic doctrines of the faith, Chao wrote:

> In regard to the doctrines of Christianity, there are indeed some that we [Chinese Christians] have not been able to understand, some that we doubt, and some that we cannot and will not believe. (303)

Among these doctrines were belief in miracles and a literal hell.

Wolfe quotes the following passage from the article (quoted in a history of the YMCA and the social gospel in China):

> Chinese Christians are Christians; but they are also citizens of China. According to them, nationalism and Christianity must agree in many things; for if there are no common points between the two, then how can Chinese Christians perform the duties of citizens? (7 in Wolfe, but 306 in the version I cite above)

The question is why Wolfe is taken in by 1) a seminal influence on the social gospel and 2) by a product of the US export of the social gospel through the YMCA in China? Why did he not identify them for who they were? I am not accusing him of deception. He has been careless and too quick to quote authors out of context. And his readers are not well-served by contextless quotations meant to reassure them that Christian nationalism is nothing to worry about.

Renan

A more serious problem arises with his use of Ernest Renan later in the book, specifically Renan's 1882 lecture "What Is a Nation?"[3] Here again Wolfe seems not to know who Renan was.

The French intellectual Renan was the author of *The Life of Jesus*, the notorious 1863 account of

2 W. H. Fremantle, *The World as the Subject of Redemption*, with an Introduction by Richard T. Ely (Longmans, Green, 1892), i.

3 Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in Ernest Renan and M. F. N. Giglioli, *What Is a Nation? And Other Political Writings*, Columbia Studies in Political Thought / Political History (Columbia University Press, 2018).

Jesus as a purely human great man. He ends the biography with an empty tomb but no resurrection. Wolfe quotes a long section from "What is a Nation?" beginning with the following:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things that, in truth, are but one constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (140)

These are stirring sentiments. Wolfe says, "Renan got it right." But Renan is not as useful to Wolfe's case for nationalism as he thinks. In fact, Renan rejects many of the aspects of the nation that Wolfe depends on in the rest of the book. Let us do more of the reading.

Rather than being organic and natural, Renan argues, nations are the result of force and violence, a brutal past we need to forget or misrepresent in order to carry on as a people:

> The act of forgetting, I would even say, historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings back to light the deeds of violence that took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been the most beneficial. Unity is always achieved brutally. . . (209)

This is not a happy story of social compacts and political consent. Some imagined natural, pre-existing unity did not lead to nation-formation. Quite the contrary. Nations are the last step in a calculated process of imposed conformity that then turns around and pretends that we are all of one race, one language, and one history, and that our geographical boundaries are natural. Indeed, claiming that ethnicity gives a primordial right to the nation, Renan continues, "It is a great error, which, if it were to become dominant, would doom European civilization. The national principle is as just and legitimate as that of the primordial right of races is narrow and full of danger for true progress" (211). "The truth is," he argues, "that there is no pure race and that to base politics upon ethnographic analysis is to base it on a chimera" (212).

But the critical point here is that Renan offers the alternative, inspiring, "spiritual" unity of the nation because, he says, "religion cannot offer an adequate basis for the establishment of a modern nationality. . ." (214–15). Wolfe would say that we need to return to that religious basis. But what Renan proposes as the binding force of modern nations—"the cult of ancestors," "a heroic past, great men, glory," and a glorious past—is in fact a substitute for religion in a world of political atheism (216). "We have driven metaphysical and theological abstractions out of politics. What remains after that? Man, his desires, his needs" (217). What Wolfe endorses is Renan's *replacement* for the theological and metaphysical basis for nations. I do not think Wolfe knows what he is doing by appealing to authorities such as Renan (and Herder and Carlyle). What Wolfe embraces as an accurate expression of Christian nationalism is in fact an ersatz religion of nationalism created to provide the spiritual glue for modern nations.

These are the concerns of a historian and a ruling elder in the OPC who has spent more than thirty years with vulnerable and confused young people, never more so than now. They hear from a certain breed of political theorist and political theologian that the American "regime" has lost all credibility, that America is an occupied country, and that the only solution is a political "strong man" who will rescue them. They hear the words "action," "discipline," "will," and "solidarity." At points, reading Wolfe is like reading Franklin Roosevelt's First Inaugural. This is an authoritarian temptation, even if it comes in the guise of a restoration of freedom. It is the old appeal of populist nationalism. We have been here before.

Let me spell out more clearly what I have been saying. Wolfe and Christian nationalism more broadly promote a national gospel that has more in common with the social gospel than

appears at first sight. Many who advanced an agenda for "Christianizing" America used a modernist theology and an earth-bound ecclesiology to remake their world. They were optimists who believed in inevitable human progress to the reign of Christ on earth. They mobilized pastors and parishioners to that end. Like Wolfe, they spoke the language of power, will, action, and discipline. They wanted to be at home in this world, despite all Christian teaching against such aspirations. Jesus told Pilate, one of those arrayed against the Lord and his Anointed, that his kingdom was not of this world, and if it were, his disciples would fight. He warned his disciples that the world hated them because it first hated him. But Wolfe imagines a world populated by Christian warriors led by Christian Princes with pastors serving as the "chaplains" of Christian nationalism, as he said in a podcast interview. Sounding like Nietzsche, he warns Christians to reject their slave mentality. He feeds on resentment. If the minds and imaginations of young people, especially young men fretful about assaults on their masculinity and the rule of a "gynocracy," are formed by the emerging vision of Christian nationalism, this generation will be disappointed and disaffected by churches committed to Word and sacrament and teaching how to live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2, NIV). The world does not belong to us, and we do not belong to it. It is not ours to "take back." Christianity plus nationalism will only distract us from the genuine gospel, from preparation for a life of suffering for the name of Jesus, and from embracing the scandal of the Cross. The nod to Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* in my title is intentional. Christianity and Christian nationalism are separating as two theologies engaged in heated competition in our world a century after Machen. The stakes may be as high today as they were then. Ⓢ

Richard M. Gamble *is a professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, where he holds the Anna Margaret Ross Alexander Chair of History and Politics. He serves as a ruling elder at Hillsdale OPC.*

Flannery O'Connor Revisited

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by Danny E. Olinger

Flannery O'Connor's Why Do the Heathen Rage? by Jessica Hooten Wilson. Brazos Press, 2024, 191 pages, $24.99, cloth.

In the July 1963 *Esquire*, Flannery O'Connor contributed an excerpt, "Why Do the Heathen Rage?" from the beginning sections of her work on a new novel. She spent the rest of the summer working on the novel "like a squirrel on a treadmill" but was questioning the quality of the material she produced. Afflicted with lupus and struggling to maintain physical strength, she said, "I've reached the point where I can't do again what I know I can do well, and the larger things that I need to do now, I doubt my capacity for doing" (42). She would die the next August at the age of thirty-nine with the book unfinished.

Now, six decades later, Jessica Hooten Wilson has gathered and edited O'Connor's manuscript pages to produce *Flannery O'Connor's Why Do the Heathen Rage: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at a Work in Progress*. Organizing the scenes that O'Connor had written into a proposed order, adding paragraphs and transitions, and hypothesizing about a possible ending, Wilson presents a version of what the book might have been if O'Connor had lived.

Positively, Wilson understands the religious dimension in O'Connor's writings, that O'Connor "created worlds where the invisible was brought high to the surface" (10). Wilson states that when people argue about whether the grandmother was saved at the conclusion of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," they are missing O'Connor's thrust. She writes, "Flannery did not set out to save the grand-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1129.

mother: she wanted to save her readers. Through her fiction, O'Connor vicariously points a gun at her imaginary readers and demands, 'What do you believe?'" (20).

The way that O'Connor sought to solve the challenge of how to write about spiritual realities for readers who believed in nothing was to scandalize them. That is, she dramatizes belief as a stumbling block that prohibits or obstructs a character's way followed by a moment of grace where the character chooses whether or not to believe in God.

But after O'Connor's polished opening chapter, "The Porch Scene," from which the *Esquire* excerpt is taken verbatim, I could not help but to think that with the succeeding selections—some showing the characters with different names, others showing the characters with different traits, others as short as one brief paragraph or less than two pages—O'Connor would have been displeased to have her material prematurely revealed in such a manner.

O'Connor never hid the fact that her writing process involved continual revision. When writing *Wise Blood*, she told a friend, "I don't have my novel outlined and I have to write to discover what I am doing. Like the old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again." But, she continued, the rewriting also reflected her perfectionism: "I can't exhibit such formless stuff."[2]

Wilson anticipates the objection and acknowledges that this element is not present in *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* She writes, "As much as we might wish that O'Connor had finished her third novel, we cannot invent what does not exist—a well-crafted, revised, full-length piece of fiction" (19). But she justifies moving forward with filling out O'Connor's story nonetheless, with the contention that "to be faithful to O'Connor's stories, especially her unfinished one, is to wonder about what happened *after* her last words" (20).

O'Connor's method for writing her novels involved the reworking of a previously published short story as a starting point. For *Wise Blood*, she revised and expanded "The Train" to become the opening chapter. For *The Violent Bear It Away*, she rewrote "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead" to serve as the first chapter. O'Connor turned to adapting "The Enduring Chill" for *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* The "heathen" in view in the "The Enduring Chill" is Asbury Fox, an aspiring New York City writer who returns to his rural Southern home because he believes he is dying. What he has contracted, however, is undulant fever from drinking unpasteurized milk from his family's dairy. His drinking the raw milk and the sickness that followed came about because of an attempt at communion with the two black farmhands. At every turn, however, those he deems unsophisticated when compared to what life in New York offers—the local doctor singing a hymn as he draws blood, the catechizing Catholic priest who tells him his problem is that he does not speak to God, his mother with her declarations that he is not dying, the two farmhands who refuse to drink the milk with him—turn out to be wiser than he is. When it is revealed that he is not dying, he is emptied of his arrogance. The doctor tells him that undulant fever is not so bad, it is the same as Bang in a cow. Everyone leaves the room, and Asbury stares at a water spot on the ceiling, which to him appears as the Holy Ghost descending in piercing icy terror.[3]

O'Connor explained why revisiting the story interested her. She wrote, "I've thought maybe there is enough in these characters to make a novel of them sometime but it would be a novel with this story as the first chapter and the rest of it would be concerned with the boy's efforts to live with the Holy Ghost, which is a subject for a comic novel

2 Robert Giroux, "Introduction," in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* (Noonday Press, 1971), ix.

3 In the *Esquire*-published "Why Do the Heathen Rage?" O'Connor ends the segment with the mother recalling seeing a passage in a book that Walter had been reading and had left open. It concerned a letter that St. Jerome wrote to Heliodorus in AD 370, urging him not to abandon the battle, for the General marches fully armed. In the closing sentence, O'Connor has the mother realize who the General is. "Then it came to her, with an unpleasant jolt, that the General with the sword in his mouth, marching to do violence, was Jesus" (32).

of no mean proportions" (42). The newness for O'Connor would be, in Wilson's words, how to write about a convert.

In the manuscript drafts, Asbury appears in one selection, "Asbury's Childhood," but in the rest the protagonist is typically renamed Walter Tilman. In "The Enduring Chill," Asbury's father died when Asbury was young, but now O'Connor has the father, T. C. Tilman, play a major part. His stroke, from which he is diminished greatly both physically and mentally, provides the main action in "The Front Porch" scene. A repugnant figure, his racism, both past and present, is brought out, as is his poor judgment and lack of grip on reality. He is also the only Christian in the family, a Baptist.

Walter's rebellion is also against his mother and his older sister. O'Connor describes the mother: "She never thought about Jesus himself but her sense of election had never failed her. She thought of others above herself, always did the right thing, without any fuss, and that was that" (33). A further description reveals that she stands in the same line as the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." One thing that Walter's mother "had always prayed was that if her children were religious, they would not be religious in a bad sense, that they would not be too religious" (33). Walter's sister, like Rayber in the *The Violent Bear It Away*, is an atheist whose vocation is that of a schoolteacher.

The new central character that O'Connor introduces is Oona Gibbs, a social rights activist. Walter, who "wrote people he did not know and ignored those he knew" (24), had written Oona after reading her account of "Fellowship, Inc.," a commune where everyone lived together in love. She wrote back, a letter that repulsed and intrigued Walter simultaneously. He responded giving real and imaginary details of his family, but identifying himself as the Tilmans' Negro worker, Roosevelt. When Oona replies that she wants to visit in person, Walter starts to panic.

Wilson sees the Walter and Oona relationship as the opportunity to provide her commentary on what she calls O'Connor's "Epistolary Blackface." She observes that O'Connor believed that the attempts of whites pretending to be black were preposterous and condescending. But Wilson laments that O'Connor stated that she did not feel capable of entering the mind of her black characters and consequently presented them from the outside. She also tries to steer a middle ground on O'Connor's use of the derogatory racial language in the mouths of her older white characters.

Mark Greif in his 2015 book, *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, takes the opposite side of the argument and maintains that O'Connor's posture of portraying her black characters from the outside was one of O'Connor's great strengths. Greif writes,

> O'Connor certainly does not suggest in her mature prose that actual black people are worse than whites or deficient in any way. She is unusual, and more admirable than some "compassionate" white liberal writers, because she goes out of her way *not* to suggest that she has any idea what her black characters' inner lives and interior consciousness are like. She portrays them entirely from the outside, and lets her white characters talk about them without the black characters assenting, and gives her black characters autonomy, while still letting them seem human, not ciphers or symbols.[4]

Why Do the Heathen Rage? from that point on limps to its conclusion. O'Connor searches for how to develop the relationship between Walter and Oona. Wilson speculates increasingly about O'Connor's mindset, forces a fragment from *The Violent Bear It Away* into the narrative, and suggests a possible ending. I found myself in a position that I had never encountered before in reading O'Connor: I was uninterested in how the story ended.

That judgment sounds harsh, but one does not read Flannery O'Connor for a mixed opinion. Wilson herself notes that other scholars over the

4 Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 214.

years have examined the *Why Do the Heathen Rage?* pages and concluded that they were unpublishable, which speaks to the high bar of Wilson's project. What makes O'Connor unparalleled, however, was that she did not give an inch on either craft or substance. Every word was meant to contribute, not just sentences or paragraphs or segments here or there. Every story was meant to be an encounter with Jesus. O'Connor said as a novelist,

> I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means for me the meaning of life is centered in our redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. I don't think that this is a position that can be taken halfway or one that is particularly easy in things to make transparent in fiction.[5] Ⓢ

Danny E. Olinger *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the general secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.*

5 Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in *Mystery and Manners*, selected and edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), 32.

Moving Forward by Stepping Back

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by Ryan M. McGraw

Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Pre-Modern Exegesis, by Craig A. Carter. Baker Academic, 2018, xxiii + 279 pages, $29.00, paper.

This provocative book has gained much traction over the past several years. Hermeneutics, which we know as principles of interpretation, is lately often enveloped in communication theory of how others understand us and how we understand them. As such, it has become a massive area of debate in contemporary philosophy, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Within Christianity, this debate pulls in questions about how one sees Christ in the Old Testament, whether the New Testament use of the Old Testament is a model for biblical interpretation, what the role of church tradition is in interpreting the Bible, whether reading communities transform the meaning of the texts that they read, whether exegeting texts in historical contexts adequately reflects the divine authorship of Scripture, and many more. Hovering around these topics is the question of whether to read the Bible like any other book, or in a special way because it is divine inspiration.

Craig Carter adds his voice to this debate by effectively throwing down the gauntlet, challenging readers not to play by expected rules. His main contention is that premodern exegesis is superior to post-Enlightenment exegesis, because it recognizes divine transcendence, divine authorship, and divine action in the church through biblical texts. While other authors, like his mentor John Webster, have pressed such themes, Carter's no-holds-barred

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1133.

assault on modern academic biblical interpretation draws a line in the sand: either we stand on the side of pre-critical exegesis with what he calls the "Christian Platonism" of the "Great Tradition" or we stand with the atheistic (even Epicurean) rationalism of post-Enlightenment thinking. In doing so he has, as it were, ripped the lid off Pandora's box. Critiquing historical-critical exegesis and its influences on Evangelical grammatical-historical exegesis brings the fear of chaos and disorder. Yet like Pandora's box, hope comes out of the box as well, restoring divine action through biblical texts to its primary place. The main contention of this review is that while Carter places his finger appropriately on a sore spot in modern biblical interpretation, his unusual (though memorable!) catch phrases and concrete examples leave readers with work to do as they hope for a path forward. Following this evaluation, I append some comments targeting ministers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.[2]

Carter's eight chapters follow a broad two-step line of argumentation. First, the church needs to recover a theological hermeneutic, placing divine action through Scripture first in biblical interpretation (chs. 2–4). Second, pre-critical exegesis is the best model for putting theological hermeneutic into practice (chs. 5–7). Bracketing this material, his first and final chapters illustrate his proposed problem and solution by demonstrating the inadequacies of mere grammatical-historical exegesis in preaching through Christ as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53.

The introduction will likely hook readers, especially pastors, who will sympathize with Carter's painful experience of preaching through this text. Christians know, especially in light of apostolic use of this chapter, that they must find Christ there. Yet pastors regularly find that plowing through piles of commentaries on Isaiah, while pulling them well through grammatical and contextual issues, do not adequately prepare them to preach Christ from the text, apply it to their congregations, and present their material in gripping and engaging ways that do not merely feel like a running Bible commentary.

Such a common pastoral trial led Carter to question whether something was wrong with current evangelical assumptions about how to handle biblical exegesis. He could not be more right in recognizing that readers and preachers must respect divine intention through texts, seeking divine action in those who read and hear them. His solution is to approach the Bible starting with a proper theology of Scripture (ch. 2), moving next to a "theological metaphysics" related to the God behind the text and working through it (ch. 3), and then searching through Christian history for alternatives to modern approaches (ch. 4). What he learns from doing so is reading Scripture as a unity centered on Jesus Christ (ch. 5), rooting the "spiritual sense" of Scripture in its literal sense (ch. 5), and learning to see and hear Christ in the Old Testament (ch. 7; "the climax of the book," 191). Challenging the assumptions of most modern evangelical readers, especially the undertext that the church missed the boat for most of its history, is well-placed. We need to read the Bible seeking God, being changed by the Spirit and renewed in Christ's image as we do so, all while listening to voices from the Christian tradition.

One overarching strength of the book is that, unlike his mentor Webster, who often stressed the vital centrality of exegesis in theology without doing much of it, Carter's work is filled with careful reflection of concrete texts of Scripture. This makes his advancement of Webster's otherwise outstanding work a significant move forward, enabling Carter to strike a nerve with Evangelicals more directly.

Despite the great value of Carter's aims, the path still needs some clearing to reach his goals adequately. We can see this best by looking at his eccentric (and eclectic) use of terms, by singling out his reliance on John Calvin as a model for biblical interpretation and teaching, and by evaluating his example of how to preach Isaiah 53.

2 This review is thus a modified version of Ryan M. McGraw, "A Review of Craig A. Carter, Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Pre-Modern Exegesis," in Books at a Glance, 2024.

First, Carter's ultimatum is to recover what he calls "Christian Platonism." Most readers, like myself, might not react favorably to this term initially. Yet Carter envelops five main ideas under "Christian Platonism": anti-materialism, anti-mechanism, anti-nominalism, anti-relativism, and anti-skepticism (79–80). One overarching concern here is to maintain divine transcendence (46–48), wedded to divine providence governing and working through all things, including God's work through biblical texts. However, Carter makes too much hinge on his peculiar terminology—for instance, when he asserts that opposing Christian Platonism is "to oppose philosophy itself" (82). This is theological and philosophical overreaching (82).

Referring to "Thomas Aquinas' Christian Platonism" (65, fn., 6) illustrates well my reservations about the term "Christian Platonism." Aquinas wove together elements of Aristotelian and neo-Platonic thought (especially, but not only, via Pseudo-Dionysius), which served as vehicles to carry his Christian philosophy and theology. Like Aquinas, most medieval and post-Reformation scholastics were too eclectic to meaningfully label them "Christian Platonist." Carter's ascription of Christian Platonism to C. S. Lewis is closer to the mark (89, fn., 59), since Lewis would have owned up to the title.

What Carter is getting at is valuable, in that he seeks to demonstrate that the Triune God is ontologically transcendent, working imminently in creation and providence. However, Christian Platonism is an unfortunate way of summarizing the "Great Tradition." Traditional Platonism, as he notes at points, has liabilities. Relegating ideal forms to a mental world potentially subjected "god" himself to these ideal forms. Alternatively, by placing forms in real things, Aristotle had the advantage of enabling people to study individual things (like human beings) as having their own forms, making them distinct and individual rather than mere shadowy reflections of a world of perfect ideas. Arguably, this latter option proved to be an easier path for late medieval and early modern Reformed theologians to place God in his own category, giving form, material, efficient causation, and purpose to all created things. Of course, Carter solves this dilemma by encompassing Aristotle under Platonism (78–79). It seems, however, that the answer to Carter's concern is not ultimately Christian Platonism as much as it is his dogged assertion of the Creator/creature distinction and relationship.

Carter fills his book with other subordinate, semi-ambiguous catch phrases as well. For instance, he presses Hans Boersma's language of "sacramental ontology" (57). What he means is that Scripture mediates Christ to us (59). However, while sacramental language aims to incorporate divine presence and action in everything, many have questioned whether this is the right way to put things. If everything is a sacrament, then effectively nothing is a sacrament. Yet Carter moves towards equating "Christian Platonism" with Boersma's "sacramental ontology" and Webster's "domain of the Word" (59). Though he later notes Kevin Vanhoozer's reservations about such terminology, preferring "covenantal ontology" instead (248), Carter pulls him too under the shield of Christian Platonism. It is questionable as well whether his appeal to *sensus plenior* really conveys the idea of divine intent behind biblical texts. *Sensus plenior* is elastic and ill-defined, though Carter seems to mean that the divine author intended more than the human authors of the text. If we tether this notion to the actual words of the text, reading passages in light of the completed canon, then it admits a good sense, but *sensus plenior* sometimes transgresses these bounds.

What he is really defending is multiple meanings or "senses" of Scripture (e.g., 183). However, he seems in the end to want only two senses: the literal meaning of the text and its Christological "spiritual sense" (98, 164, 176, 181, and the appendix). We will see below that this is what he does in practice by way of illustration. While such catchphrases and others like them are memorable, they do not reflect the diversity of thought in Christian history well, which Carter presents as mostly monolithic before the Enlightenment (e. g., 85). However, as he concedes near the end, "As we have seen throughout this book, terminology is

extremely varied and difficult to pin down" (222).

Second, perhaps the most implausible move, stretching the bounds of credulity, lies in chapter 6. Carter strangely associates authors from Origen up through John Calvin as all belonging to the same Great Tradition. Particularly, he says things like, "Calvin was aware of the truth contained in the medieval fourfold sense of Scripture" (183) and that his "ritual castigation" of Origen (184) was not meant to rule out allegorical exegesis. Calvin did not press a spiritual sense rooted in the literal sense, as Carter argues. Instead, Carter's so-called spiritual sense was merely the proper application of the text. Moreover, using Calvin's exegesis of Galatians 4:24 is a dubious example (184), due to the unique nature of the passage as a rare reference to "allegory." Carter's wildest assertion is that Calvin "shows no interest whatsoever in arguing for a single-meaning theory as the Enlightenment does" (186). This is hard to fathom given Calvin's context, assertions, and actual exegetical practices. Calvin adhered so strictly to the literal-historical sense of Scripture that, during and after his lifetime, Lutherans were even accused of "Judaizing" by not finding Christ and the Trinity often enough in his commentaries. Even Carter later acknowledges that Calvin "makes little use of the spiritual sense (or allegory)" (222). Yet he concludes, "I have made Calvin the hero of my narrative of the development of the Great Tradition" (250). Later Reformed and Lutheran controversies over Calvin's exegetical methods introduce a significant complication with Carter's approach. Again, he presents a rather naively monolithic view of the Great Tradition, using divine transcendence as its common thread ("Christian Platonism") while flattening out the vast diversity present in the pre-critical Christian tradition. This is revisionist history at best, failing to allow historical figures to speak with their own voices in their own contexts. Yet how can we listen to them if we cannot hear them clearly first?

Third, his model for drawing from the Great Tradition, a sample sermon on Isaiah 53, lacks many key characteristics of historical Christian exegesis and preaching. In the end, I am not convinced that Carter fully puts preachers in a better position to preach Isaiah 53 like he depicts in his introductory chapter. Though he gives readers a written summary of his sermon on the text (239–44), his example neither matches historical-critical exegesis nor the Great Tradition. After his iconoclastic attack on modern exegetical methodology, one would expect a clear use of allegory and application, for instance. He instead gives a didactic summary of how the passage is a prophecy of Christ's death and resurrection as our high priest. Absent is the doxological rhetorical flair and searching questions of Gregory, Augustine, Aquinas, and even Calvin. The intro is purely contextual and canonical, and non-experimental in tone. There is also no application within the points, with only implicit application at the end. He does not really illustrate how to use the primary tools of the Great Tradition, especially the four senses of the quadriga. Doing so would have told us what the text said and pointed us to Christ, both of which he does, while also engaging the hearts of believers in the church with application (tropology) and directing them to the beatific vision (anagogy). His note that his sermon is "not loaded with illustrations or stories" (244) certainly stands in contrast to authors like Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, to name two only. Readers are left with a dry, hollowed-out exegesis that looks neither like the Great Tradition nor like post-Enlightenment hermeneutics. Despite his salutary challenges to contemporary hermeneutics, marked by some rhetorical eccentricities, he leaves readers a bit rudderless in the end.

What lessons then can we gather from the above? There is no golden age in church history. The Spirit used flawed people like us to fumble through preserving the truth, employing more or less successful methods. Radical differences exist between pre- and post-Enlightenment exegesis, yet there is no monolithic Great Tradition. There is a broad Christian tradition, always obsessed with the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and the Bible, which, by God's grace, continues into the modern period. Many in the Great Tradition got to the right ideas in the wrong ways, while many in the modern

(and post-modern) period stress right ways, though often built on wrong ideas. Eclipsing the Trinity and Jesus Christ in favor of an objective, historically contextualized text is bad (even devastatingly terrible), but leading us to grasp the thought of biblical books in their own grammar, contexts, and thought processes is good. Yet the wild allegorizing of some in the Great Tradition is less than helpful in understanding Scripture, though the Trinitarian and Christological ideas conveyed through these allegories are often true, breathtaking, and soul-enrapturing. The Spirit preserves the church's text-centered Trinitarian and Christological tradition through flawed people influenced both by pre- and post-Enlightenment exegesis. Thankfully, the Spirit is raising people today aiming to place the Triune God back at the heart of theology, with the Christ-glorifying Spirit becoming once again front and center in hermeneutics.

In short, we have something to take and something to ditch from every century of church history, including both the Great Tradition and our own. The sobering fact, however, is that it is far easier to pull exegetical specks out of our brother's eyes than it is to see the logs in our own. We are too close to our times to have proper perspective, but we should be chastened, humbled listeners, attending both to the Spirit's voice in Scripture and to his continued work through the Great Tradition, of which we hope we remain a part. Carter's challenge is well placed, generating conversations that the church needs to have as she looks back while searching for a path ahead.

More pointedly, what benefits does Carter's material offer ministers in the OPC? We should remember that preaching is more than exegesis and biblical theological technique. Colossians 1:28–29 gives us an agenda for preaching, which aspects of Carter's Great Tradition can help us pursue: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." While our Confession of Faith well states that "the full sense of any Scripture . . . is not manifold but one" (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.9), preaching entails more than merely presenting what the Bible means. We must preach Christ, applying him to everyone's consciences, preparing them to meet Christ in glory. The medieval quadriga, or fourfold sense, may be off base in terms of seeking multiple senses in a given text, yet something true remains. What if our goals in preaching were to tell people what the text says, how it directs them to Christ, what the church should do in light of it, and how it directs them to see Christ in glory? Retaining the single sense of Scripture makes our exegesis better, but shifting the quadriga into goals would likely make our preaching even better. Whether or not Carter achieves his aims adequately in challenging modern hermeneutics and promoting the Great Tradition, he reminds us of something important. Even where the Christian tradition has been flawed, the Spirit often instilled a good instinct in his people. This book usefully spurs us toward reflecting on ways that he has done so. ©

Ryan M. McGraw *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as a professor of systematic theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.*

Who Are the Nonverts?

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by Darryl G. Hart

Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America, by Stephen Bullivant. Oxford University Press, 2022, xi + 272 pages, $27.99.

Almost every assertion about the recent past needs to be qualified by "once upon a time." That seems to be especially true for the claims in 1955 that Will Herberg, a theologian-turned-sociologist and editor at *National Review*, made about religion in the United States. Because survey data showed that 68 percent of Americans were Protestant, 23 Roman Catholic, and 4 Jewish, Herberg concluded that "to be an American today means to be either a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew, because all other forms of self-identification and social location" are "peripheral," "obsolescent," or merely parts of a larger "religious community." He added that "not to be a Catholic, a Protestant, or a Jew today is, for increasing numbers of American people, not to be anything."

Within a decade many scholars of religion were already questioning Herberg, but today the idea that the major Western religions could give a measure of meaning to the American people seems preposterous. The recent rise of people who do not identify with any religion, so-called "nones," makes Herberg's America look like a vintage postcard. Explanations for the increase of "nones" are varied and many—most having some affinity to theories of secularization—but atheists, agnostics, and others, those who describe their religion as "nothing in particular," are increasingly the object of scholars who study American society. According to recent data from the Pew Research Center, "about 28% of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, describing themselves as atheists, agnostics or 'nothing in particular' when asked about their religion." For scholars who correlate religion to civic responsibilities, these results are noteworthy. The Pew study notes that "'Nones' tend to vote less often, do less volunteer work in their communities and follow public affairs at lower rates than religiously affiliated people do."[2]

"Nonverts" is a descriptor that adds a further layer to this trend of no religious identity. In his new book, Stephen Bullivant, a British academic with doctorates in both theology and sociology, uses polling data and interviews to describe people who have switched from religious somethings to religious nothings. These Americans do not merely choose "none" in social surveys about religion but do so after having grown up with some religious beliefs—hence "nonvert." Bullivant estimates that forty-one million Americans fall into the category of "nonvert." Roman Catholics account for the most—sixteen million, followed by seven and a half million ex-Baptists, two million ex-Methodists, two million ex-Lutherans, one million ex-Episcopalians, and one million ex-Presbyterians. These numbers indicate that of all the "nones" in the United States, only 30 percent grew up *without* religion. For those doing the math, that means that 70 percent of those who no longer affirm a religious identity came from identifiable religious backgrounds (9).

To the author's great credit, these statistics, which could be alarming on several levels, do not become fodder for predicting the end of civilization. Bullivant is cautious about the data, because he knows how unreliable polling surveys can be. For instance, he cleverly describes how thick religious ties may be in comparison to what social survey instruments measure. One interview with an American Roman Catholic revealed a person of Irish descent, baptized and confirmed in the church, who does not observe the faith, attends family weddings and funerals, admits to praying

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1134.

2 "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," Pew Research Center, January 20, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/.

"a Hail Mary" when her child was hospitalized, makes a big deal of St. Patrick's Day—drinking Guinness, and "dyeing the Chicago River green." Bullivant then asks, "how do you distill all that down to a single tick-box in reply to 'What's your religion?'" (51). Depending on the question or even the time of day, a person might respond one way on one day and a different way a week later. In sum, social surveys reveal numbers that appear to be precise but that are influenced by a host of factors that make them highly impressionistic. A survey is "the combined product of both an actual empirical reality *and* the precise methods used to try and measure it." This means "no Platonic Form of the Ideally Worded question" exists *and* that "better and worse methods" do exist for attempting to measure certain social trends (53).

With that glance at the way the sausage is made, Bullivant is still emphatic that "nonvert" is an important development in America. For those with the eyes of ecclesiology to see, the question is one of membership or belonging. How much do American believers identify with religious institutions, how do they pass on such patterns of belonging to children, and to what degree has religion become either a highly personal affair (without requirements for membership) or so much part of an individual's experience that people leave faith and recover it the way customers change Internet Service Providers?

However imprecise the seemingly scientific measurements of the American people, the demographics of "nonverts" suggest important changes within the last thirty-five years. The largest group of nones fall in the ages of twenty-five to thirty-four (39 percent of the total). Among this group, almost two-thirds are "nonverts," the highest of any age group. The second-highest number registers in the ages thirty-five to forty-four, where 75 percent grew up in religious homes (20 percent of the total). On descriptors of race, sex, education, and politics, "nonverts" do not deviate significantly from the rest of the population, though Bullivant does remark that "nones" are "predominantly White, affluent, and well educated" (71). What is striking among "nonverts" is the ongoing affirmation of religious belief. Thirty-five percent of "nonverts" believe in a higher power, and roughly 20 percent "know" God exists, "no doubt about it" (65). When it comes to beliefs about life after death, 55 percent of "nonverts" believe life does not end with death, over 45 percent believe in heaven, close to 40 percent in hell, and over 40 percent in miracles (69). These statistics show the effects of growing up religious.

For all the curious features of the data, the statistics about age are striking and lead the author to venture into the lane of historical explanations. Why have younger generations left religion? For instance, Baby Boomers make up only 16 percent of the total "nonverts," not exactly the expected number for Americans with a reputation for opposing the Vietnam War, experimenting with drugs and sex, and distrusting anyone over thirty years old. Here, Bullivant notices changes in American nationalism, foreign policy, and the Cold War. During its forty-five year struggle with Soviet Communism, going to church or synagogue was easy and expected. Indeed, part of America's boasted superiority was its religious character. Being a good American went hand in hand with being a believer—especially a Protestant one. "Cold War oppositions between 'godless communism' and 'Christian America,'" Bullivant observers, "engendered a Pavlovian association between being unreligious and being un-American" (124).

Even after Protestants and Roman Catholics began to adjust to the cultural "revolution" of the 1960s, their members and children were used to thinking of themselves as Christian, even if not as narrowly as before. Once the Cold War ended, the cultural affinities between being Christian and being a good American weakened dramatically. With this situation came a growing number of people who were dissatisfied with the religion of their youths and found (courtesy of social media) that other people also looked at faith skeptically and were willing to drop religion. Cultural conditions post–Cold War made it easier to become irreligious than it had during the earlier era.

As simplistic as this summary of Bullivant's explanation (based on data) may sound, the book

makes a bigger and important point about the importance of belonging to a group and how membership sustains conviction. For some, this observation falls in the domain of social psychology. Christians might object because such analysis neglects the mysterious and supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. But the Christian equivalents to social psychology are ecclesiology, biblical teaching about the body of Christ, and the importance of being a member (arm, eye, foot) in the body of Christ (with Christ as head). Whether we consult social scientists or practical theologians, both are noticing how group dynamics reinforce belief.

Where Bullivant goes beyond either social psychology or ecclesiology is American history. For much of the twentieth century, mainline Protestantism "was the religious equivalent of an IBM." Bullivant writes, "You knew what you were getting, and you didn't need to have a special reason, whether of ethnicity or religious conviction, for getting it." He adds that the "mainline's power came from its close cultural, political, and moral fit with the *mores* of America" (86–87).

Of course, as critics of and exiles from mainline Protestantism, Orthodox Presbyterians were never comfortable with the cultural Christianity that dominated the mainline denominations. At the same time, as Christians living in the United States where generic Christian moral norms prevailed, Orthodox Presbyterians benefitted from the mainline's influence on American institutions. Those benefits are even more obvious now that many serious Christians and Jews not only are unsupported but also find open hostility to their convictions from public institutions.

Nonverts is a thoughtful book that should provoke readers to ponder the way churches and denominations encourage members to be faithful. Perhaps even more importantly, Bullivant's book will prod church officers and members alike to consider where the younger generations of Orthodox Presbyterians are landing in their own spiritual quests. ©

Darryl G. Hart *is distinguished associate professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, and serves as an elder at Hillsdale Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan.*

The Church: Not Politicized nor Ghettoized, but Spiritual

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by Bryan D. Estelle

Empowered Witness: Politics, Culture, and the Spiritual Mission of the Church, by Alan D. Strange. Crossway, 2024. xvi + 149 pages, $16.99, paper.

This excellent new book on the spirituality of the church (hence SOTC), and the relationship of the church to the civil government and culture, is very timely. Why? Because currently there are pressures in the world against the church asking it to comment on all matters of social malaise in our culture and time. Amid such pressure (and confusion), Professor Strange, a friend and ministerial colleague, has given us a summary of a very important ecclesiastical doctrine: the spiritual mission of the church. He situates most of his discussion during a defining moment in American history (the Civil War). Strange, to his credit, is against the ghettoizing of the church's mission. He has written elsewhere that he desires all Reformed parties at the table, even ones disagreeing with each other on the relationship of the Christian faith to the world, so that they may agree on what the role of the institutional church primarily is and what constitutes true spirituality. This irenic tone permeates his new book.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1140.

The book is a kind of abridged edition of his dissertation. Therefore, anyone who wants to follow up on a topic for more detail may consult his dissertation, which was published in 2017 by Presbyterian and Reformed.[2] Not surprisingly, it was leading up to and during the Civil War (1861–65), and immediately afterwards, that the church was faced with clarifying and maintaining the SOTC. Early in the book, the author explains that

> the task of the church is not to transform the world at large or any society in it. The task of the church is to transform lives: to proclaim the gospel as the person and work of Christ applied by the power of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace so that men and women come to Christ by faith and are justified, adopted, and sanctified—all a gift of God's grace. (3)

This thesis permeates each section of the book: chapter 1 describes the doctrine of the SOTC; chapter 2 delves into the delicate issue of slavery and the SOTC; chapter 3 discusses the SOTC just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War and during the war itself, including the very important debate over the Gardiner Spring Resolutions of 1861, which Hodge opposed; chapter 4 discusses how the SOTC doctrine was handled in Presbyterian General Assemblies between 1862 and '65; chapter 5 discusses Hodge's desire to reunite the Southern and Northern churches after the war. Finally, chapter 6 breaks new ground as Professor Strange applies the teaching on the SOTC to the modern church, suggesting that she not ghettoize the gospel and not show apathy to the world and its needs. Meanwhile, she should not allow herself and her mission to be politicized.

The book demonstrates that the SOTC doctrine was part and parcel of the church's confession long before the American Civil War. This book is accessible, well organized, and lucidly written. It would make an excellent textbook for a Sunday school class on the subject, whether young or old. On the other hand, some minor criticisms—or, desire for more clarity, nuance, and full description—are in order, even though I suspect that Professor Strange's desire was to produce a book that avoided getting in the weeds of the minutiae of historical detail. Even so, disagreement can be a great achievement, even among friends. At issue in the criticisms of his new book in this review are not what individual Christians may do, or collectives of individual Christians; rather, the specific issue is what is the role of the institutional and corporate mission of the church?

Strange emphasizes two leitmotifs evident from his study of Hodge, even as he had in his published dissertation: first, we must not muzzle the "prophetic" voice of the church but let her speak in a manner that has potential political implications as it speaks to the outside world. Secondly, for Hodge, when the church speaks to that which is "purely political," she violates the principles of the SOTC. In Hodge's view, according to Strange, the church may still engage in actions that might have some political *consequences*. This is why Hodge opposed the "Gardiner" resolutions introduced at the General Assembly in 1861, which sought to have the Assembly show some expression of devotion to the Union and loyalty to the Federal Government of the United States. For Hodge, this violated the earlier stated principle, i.e., such an action by the General Assembly would be purely political, and therefore the church should not bind the conscience of her ministers in the way proposed. Hodge did not win the day on that vote in the church's highest court (156 *ayes*, 66 *nays*).

In Strange's new book, the reader will find plenty of discussion about the differences between the Old School titans of the period: especially southerner James Henry Thornwell, border-state minister Stuart Robinson, and northern moderate Charles Hodge. The former two figures Strange considers as "radical" in their teaching on the SOTC. Hodge he considers to be the quintessential moderate. It is true that Thornwell was restrictive in what he saw as the role of the minister in the institutional church; he said:

2 Alan D. Strange, *The Doctrine of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge* (P & R, 2017).

> The object of Christian ministry, the ministry that belongs to the church, is not to reform society or fix the many ills that are common among men in a fallen, yet temporal world. Rather, a minister of the church exists 'to persuade men to be reconciled to God through Christ, to persuade them to accept of the blessed Saviour in all His offices, and to rest upon Him and Him alone for 'wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.'[3]

This sounds, not surprisingly, very much like Machen.

For those who are interested in seeing how our forefathers dealt with the ever-present issues of race, slavery, and the relationship of the church to the state, the reader will find much description of the issues outlined, and in detail, from a well-trained historian who writes clearly and lucidly. My concern at this point, however, is that reducing the discussion about that history and the Old School figures involved (i.e., by labelling them "radical") obscures more than clarifies for those disagreeing with Hodge.

One question that comes up repeatedly is the issue of whether the institutional church should have a "prophetic" voice (Strange's words) toward the world. The answer should be a qualified yes and no, as Strange says. I, however, would have appreciated seeing more clarification related to the use of this term "prophetic." Afterall, this is the very term that the Social Gospel proponents appealed to (e.g., Walter Rauschenbusch) in their day (early twentieth century) and that many appeal to in our own time. The prophetic voice of the church in the New Covenant *is* spiritual. But the question, precisely, is how does the church testify (*institutionally* and *corporately*) of her Lord to the culture in which she resides? It testifies to the world as it exercises Word and sacrament, and even church discipline. Hodge himself recognized this when he was comparing the Kingdom in his Systematic Theology:

> First it is spiritual. That is, it is not of this world. It is not analogous to the other kingdoms which existed, or do still exist among men. It has a different origin and a different end. . . . The Kingdom of Christ was organized immediately by God, for the promotion of religious objects. It is spiritual, or not of this world . . . all secular matters lie beyond its jurisdiction. . . . It can decide no question of politics or science which is not decided in the Bible. *The Kingdom of Christ, under the present dispensation, therefore, is not worldly even in the sense in which the ancient theocracy was of this world*. . . . The kingdom of Christ being designed to embrace all other kingdoms, can exist under all forms of civil government without interfering with any. It was especially in this view that Christ declared that his kingdom was not of this world. . . . He intended to say that his kingdom was of such a nature that it necessitated no collision with the legitimate author of any civil government. It belonged to a different sphere.[4]

For the "church" to address the society in the Old Covenant was expected, especially in the prophetic office of the Old Covenant, particularly in the time of the monarchy. The prophets played the role of lawyers, gathering legal briefs to indict the kings (or the people, or both) for their shortcomings in failing to live up the terms of the Mosaic covenant. But that office has ceased. The last great prophet of the Old Testament period was John the Baptist. He was the prophet of ultimatum. He called upon Israelites to repent at the inauguration of Christ's coming.

For the sake of argument then, how do Christians corporately primarily manifest the faith to the external world? By practicing the marks of the corporate church. Again Hodge:

3 Thornwell (Vol. IV, 565) quoted in Christopher C. Cooper, "Binding Bodies and Liberating Souls: James Henley Thornwell's Vision for a Spiritual Church and a Christian Confederacy," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 9 (2013): 35–47, especially at page 40.

4 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (1871; repr., Eerdmans, 1982), 605–06 (emphasis mine).

> As religion is essentially spiritual, an inward state, the kingdom of Christ as consisting of the truly regenerated, is not a visible body, except so far as goodness renders itself by outward manifestations . . . Christians are required to associate for public worship, for the admission and exclusion of members, for the administration of the sacraments, for the maintenance and propagation of the truth. They therefore form themselves into churches, and collectively constitute the visible kingdom of Christ on earth, consisting of all who profess the true religion, together with their children.[5]

This would seem to suggest that it is primarily when New Covenant Christians corporately exercise their sacred duties (e.g., attending worship, praying) that they testify to the world, not when they exercise their individual cultural duties that Christians manifest the KOG (kingdom of God) to a watching world. Instead of invoking a "prophetic" witness, I wish that Professor Strange had invoked these sections from Professor Hodge.[6]

Another area where the book could have been clearer was on the major area of disagreement between Hodge and Thornwell on church government. Precision is important here for the sake of further dialogue. This was at the heart of the matter in their disagreement over church boards. For Hodge, church government is *jure humano* (by human right). Its form of government should be left to the judgment of its members according to the circumstances.[7] Hodge lumps Thornwell together with Stuart Robinson as being "radical" in their approach to the SOTC, according to Professor Strange. Hodge had grown exasperated with Thornwell's concept of Presbyterianism, even stooping to label it "hyper-hyper-hyper High church Presbyterianism."[8] Hodge declared that "the great principles of Presbyterianism are in the Bible; but it is preposterous to assert that our whole Book of Discipline is there."[9] Hodge was in favor of claiming divine authority for the "essential elements of church government, but claimed a discretionary power for matters of detail and modes of operation."[10] As one of Hodge's biographers states, "Hodge argued that churches must be governed by general principles rather than hard and fast rules that apply equally to all congregations in every situation."[11]

Thornwell was a firm proponent also of *jure divino* (divine right) ecclesiology.[12] This is best explained by a leading Scottish theologian of the time, James Bannerman:

> Church government, according to this view, is not a product of Christian discretion, nor a development of the Christian consciousness; it has been shaped and settled, not by the wisdom of man, but by that of the church's Head. It does not rest upon a ground of human expediency but of Divine Appointment.[13]

For Thornwell, the church may not do whatever it deems wise in its polity; rather, there must be clear sanction for her worship *and* her practice. He claimed, contrary to Hodge, that he did not want to deny discretionary power, only limit, and define it.[14] Thornwell explains, "We hold it to be the *circumstances* connected with commanded duties, and hence affirm that whatever is not enjoined is

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5 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 604.

6 Again, this does not preclude individual Christians, or collectives of Christians, to address issues of social malaise. The issue is what the church is to do in its corporate capacity.

7 See James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A treatise on the nature, powers, ordinances, discipline and government of the Christian Church* (Banner of Truth, 1960), 2:202 for discussion.

8 See John Lloyd Vance, "The ecclesiology of James Henley Thornwell: An Old Southern Presbyterian Theologian," (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1990), 184.

9 Quoted in Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 440.

10 Quoted in Strange, *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church*, 440.

11 Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

12 In my judgment, Thornwell was correct to connect his church theory with that of Calvin, with Scottish and English divines, and with Westminster.

13 Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 2:202.

14 J.H. Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henry Thornwell*, vol. 4 (Banner of Truth, 1974), 4.245.

prohibited. He [Hodge] holds that it pertains to the actions themselves and maintains that whatever is not prohibited is lawful."[15]

A commitment to see Christ's headship articulated in terms of the *munus triplex* (Christ's threefold office, as Bannerman and border-state Pastor Stuart Robinson suggested), that is to say that the church's practice of doctrine, worship, *and* government should be influenced by Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly headship, might have brought about more rapprochement between these Old School giants.[16] In short, more eloquent listening was in order. Church government, according to Robinson and Thornwell, its limits and powers, are a confessional matter that flow from the headship of Christ.[17] In short, practices in the church, even the polity of her government, must be sanctioned by Scripture.

In conclusion, these are merely criticisms that are asking for fuller historical disclosure and detail on these complex issues. In my opinion, this would enrich even more fruitful discussion on what has become an essential ecclesial doctrine in our day and age. My friend and colleague, Professor Strange, has given us a new book that is a welcome addition to the topic. Take up and read; you will not be disappointed. ©

Bryan Estelle *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian church and serves as professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.*

15 Thornwell, *The Collected Writings* 4.251. A discussion of the distinction between regulative principles vis-à-vis constitutive principles could have made for greater clarification of differences among these Old School Presbyterians at this point as well. See, e.g., T. W. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Presbyterian Committee on Education, 1892), 109.

16 See, for example, Craig Troxel's discussion in "'Divine Right' Presbyterian and Church Power," (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 116, 184–85, 252.

17 See, WCF, chapter 30.

Bach against Modernity

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by Stephen M. Michaud

Bach against Modernity, by Michael Marissen. Oxford University Press, 2023, xvi + 184 pages, $34.95.

No less than Beethoven referred to Johann Sebastian Bach as "the Father of all harmony,"[2] and he is far from alone in his paean of the celebrated cantor of Leipzig's Thomaskirche. Countless other composers, performers, writers, artists, and thinkers have likewise expressed wonderment at the creative power, matchless organization, and staggering poignancy of Bach's music. Such an assessment might initially suggest that much of his body of work is beyond the reach of the masses to appreciate; on the contrary, his music has virtually permeated the musical consciousness and enjoyment of a varied strata of classes and cultures right up to the present day. This raises an interesting question: since his music has such appeal to both non-religious people and Christians alike, should one assume that his music was thus borne out of a secular, modernistic, "enlightened" worldview? Or put another way, should the universal appeal of Bach's music be attributed to some kind of intrinsic "modernism" that enables it to "transcend" its religious themes? Although numerous scholars have answered these questions in the affirmative, the very title of this book leaves no doubt as to its author's view; namely, that Bach's Christian worldview was absolutely integral to his art, and this is the thesis he very ably defends here in this fascinating new collection of essays.

The concept of modernism means different things to different people, so Marissen in the first chapter wisely identifies his working understand-

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1141.

2 In Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach; His Life and Work* (Harcourt, 2006), ix.

ing of the term for the reader, opting for philosopher Louis Dupre's fivefold designation:

- "exalting reason above revelation—whatever the flaws of reason—as arbiter of truth"
- "exalting human autonomy and achievement"
- "exalting religious tolerance"
- "exalting cosmopolitanism"
- "exalting social and political progressiveness" (5)

If Bach, on the contrary, is a pre-Enlightenment thinker and opposed to the above tenets, what accounts for his broad appeal? The author rejects the common explanation that people simply want to be entertained, and he proceeds to ally himself with the illuminating sentiment of Richard Russo (5–6), "It's been my experience that most people don't want to be entertained. They want to be *comforted*" (emphasis added by author).[3] In the author's experience, non-Christians pick up on a joy and hope in Bach's music that cannot be reduced to a mere "aesthetic exaltation," even though these same listeners stop short of assigning these emotions to the specifics of the Christian message (6). Still, many musicologists nevertheless insist that the sheer greatness and order of Bach's music must be due to math and science rather than religion.

At this point, a more devotionally-minded admirer might be hasty to react by appealing to an alleged preponderance of the markings "J. J." ("Jesu juva"—"Jesus, help!") and "S.D.G." ("Soli deo gloria"—"To God alone be glory!") in the scores of Bach to clinch the argument singlehandedly that he was a religious composer. Some have even claimed that these markings were affixed to every single composition. Although this is an attractive and oft-claimed proposition, Marissen sets the record straight with a helpful sketch of Bach's notations. Although there is not nearly the number of markings so frequently and carelessly asserted, they still occur plentifully enough to rebut the idea that Bach saw himself essentially as a non-religious composer. Furthermore, a chronological survey of Bach's vocal compositions is given that clearly indicates the composer's utter rejection of the reliability of human reason unaided by divine revelation. Lest it be said that Bach simply included such sentiments in his works publicly to appease traditionalist patrons, the author provides a lengthy and telling quote from Bach himself, inscribed in Bach's own hand in the Calov Bible from the esteemed composer's private collection (you will have to buy the book to read this very revealing citation!); needless to say, it powerfully supports the fact that Bach's somber view of human reason is one he held *in private* as well as in public.

The author goes on to shatter any contention that Bach held to any of the other tenets of modernism. Regardless of Bach's monumentally high achievements, passages from his cantatas see him falling squarely in line with the Lutheran doctrine that even the highest human works are corrupted by sin and incapable of justifying one before God. Far from modernism's exalting of religious tolerance, Bach's cantata 126 petitions God with these words: "Uphold us, Lord, with your word, and restrain *the murderousness of the Pope and of the Muslim . . .*" (20). Contrary to cosmopolitanism, the author provides a passage from cantata 24 that speaks of "*German* faithfulness and goodness" (25, emphasis added). The author ends chapter 1 by showing that Bach, far from being a political and social progressive, wrote vocal compositions that extol a "premodern, hierarchical social view" in which even a so-called "secular" cantata can speak of "God as the upholder of the Saxon throne" (28–29).

In chapter 2, the writer engages in a captivating discussion on the handwritten entries in Bach's personal "Calov Bible," named after Abraham Calov, who compiled various passages from the writings of Luther to function as commentary for a study Bible. Bach's numerous marginalia in this Bible reveal a man thoroughly committed to Lutheran beliefs rather than being an autonomous thinker. The compelling proofs cited by the author in this regard include the care with which Bach corrected typographical errors, biographical

3 Richard Russo, *Straight Man* (Random House, 1997), xi.

statements of his receiving God's consolation in an antagonistic world, reflections on the divine nature of his calling, and his belief that the God devotionally "immanent" in his music is the God of the Bible who affects the hearts of believers, rather than some vague notion of "god" or "art as religion" springing from the mere psyche as opposed to Scripture (39)—a notion any good Lutheran like Bach would quickly see to be idolatry. On the contrary, an important handwritten note in Bach's Calov Bible alongside 1 Chronicles 28:21 indicates that this Scripture passage was "proof" to Bach that "his eighteenth-century church music is an 'antitype' of which the ancient Jerusalem Temple music was a 'type'" (40). Similarly, a convincing argument is advanced by the author that Bach's use of the word *vorspiel* in his annotation next to Exodus 15:20, contrary to popular thought that it refers to the prelude to a composition, is actually another spelling of Luther's "furspiel"—a theological word for "type," which in the context of Exodus would indicate that this "Song of Moses" was a prefigurement of Christian singing in the New Covenant era. Marissen ends his treatment on Bach's Calov Bible entries by highlighting Bach's interest in the Book of Leviticus. The cumulative weight of Marissen's analysis greatly helps to establish Bach as a devout Lutheran who cannot be lumped into the mold of Enlightenment thinking.

The next four chapters in the book consist of various talks given by the author in which he provides concise assessment of several significant compositions of Bach, each example further cementing the central premise that Bach was operating firmly within a premodern, Lutheran framework. Far from Bach emerging as a modern individual seeking supreme satisfaction through his own human attainment of excellence, the thoughtful reader is presented with an artist humbly and self-consciously functioning as a recipient of divine grace. Particularly poignant in this regard is the author's treatment of the *Christmas Oratorio*, which ends with a fifty-year-old Bach contemplating not some heritage of earthly fame after his death, but the glorious prospect of departing his present "mortal coil" to dwell in eternal and heavenly blessedness with God. All this is in keeping with the very heart of Bach's artistic orbit—an orbit in which spiritual contentment is his lifeblood, as opposed to mere aesthetic enjoyment devoid of scriptural faith. It is impossible to read these cogently argued chapters and conclude that one is reaping the full benefit of Bach's sublime music apart from personal faith in the God of Bach. I would simply add that the reader would receive even greater profit and enjoyment of the penetrating insights of these chapters by listening to recordings of the vocal compositions being treated: Cantatas 64, 23, and 102 and the *Christmas Oratorio*. If a recommendation is desired, the recordings of the marvelous conductor and world-renowned Bach expert Masaaki Suzuki (himself a devout Christian referenced in this book) with the resplendent Bach Collegium Japan are the best you will find anywhere and are not to be missed.

In chapter 7, the author collaborates with Daniel Melamed in an interesting discussion of the technical issues associated with translating the librettos from Bach's church cantatas along with supplying annotations for each. Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the thorny question of anti-Judaism within Bach's art, particularly focusing on a group of choruses from the *St. John Passion*. This is followed by a treatment of the music of Bach and his sons in the Jewish salons of the mid and late eighteenth century, particularly those operated by the German Jewish *salonniere* Sara Itzig Levy of Berlin, in which

> men and women, Jews and Christians, aristocrats and bourgeois, all gathered to drink tea and eat finger food; engage in convivial conversation about literature, art, philosophy, and politics; and hear performances of certain old-fashioned and newer repertories of instrumental music whose styles we now call high baroque and pre-classical. (148)

The last two chapters cover an oft-overlooked component of Bach's oeuvre: the theological character of Bach's *secular* compositions. The author very potently dispels the common misconception that Bach's instrumental music had nothing to

do with God. The *Brandenburg Concertos*, typically thought to be unmoored from any spiritual "constraints," are argued by the author rather to evince a "fluidity between the secular and liturgical" (161). Finally, Marissen turns his attention to what he calls "The Serious Nature of the Quodlibet in Bach's *Goldberg Variations*" (163). The "Quodlibet" (a musical composition utilizing several different melodies) is the final variation in this celebrated work. Often understood to be a jocular, lighthearted movement, Marissen explains that Bach combines a folk tune ("Cabbage and Turnips") with the music of a hymn, showing that Bach, rather than setting forth a sacred verses secular dichotomy in his body of work, is actually juxtaposing those spheres in an "all-embracing harmony," and that far from being "jokesome entertainment," the *Goldberg Variations* were written as "an act of premodern, Lutheran tribute to the heavenly and earthly realms of God" (172).

Marissen's exceedingly fine work has much to commend it. To analyze and elucidate the outlook of arguably the greatest composer the world has ever seen, particularly in the face of much scholarship that is sadly antithetical to the perspective of the author, is no small task. The author's undeniable scholarship, however, is so careful and extensive that the reader will be hard-pressed not to reach Marissen's well-reasoned conclusions. For those who think that the music of Bach can be fully appreciated apart from possessing the scriptural faith that informed and controlled the heart and mind of its composer, this book will powerfully challenge such an opinion. For those who share the faith of Bach, there will be many gems here to stock head and heart, setting one on an unparalleled journey to explore with even greater devotional heft this truly great and *spiritual* composer. The book can be heartily recommended without reservation! Ⓢ

Stephen Michaud *is an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and serves as the pastor of Pleasant Mountain Presbyterian Church in Bridgton, Maine. He has also performed professionally for many years as a jazz fusion drummer.*

The Promise and Peril of Reconnecting with Reality through Poetry

Originally published in *Ordained Servant Online*
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by Andrew S. Wilson

Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment, by Charles Taylor. Belknap, 2024, xii + 620 pages, $37.95.

Robert Frost: Sixteen Poems to Learn by Heart, by Jay Parini. Library of America, 2024, xxxii + 120 pages, $24.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has gained considerable notoriety in the Reformed world in recent years as a number of Christian writers have drawn from and expounded upon the insights in his 2007 book, *A Secular Age*. In his latest volume, *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment*, the prolific nonagenarian considers how poetry from the Romantic era and beyond responds to the disenchantment that took place as a result of the Enlightenment, resulting in a shift from seeing the world as having its own natural order and mysterious agency to adopting "a picture of the universe as the realm of mechanical causation, without intrinsic human meaning" (179). This reduces reality (including human beings themselves) to something subject to human manipulation and technocratic control. While Taylor does not address this in this book, in our society this is largely done through the propagandistic shaping of narratives and "vibes" that inform the public mood and regulate behavior. This bears mentioning because it is such an obvious misuse of language, and language is central in *Cosmic Connections*.

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1147.

The book draws upon the way Romantic poets used language in their efforts to counteract disenchantment, as they sought to reveal the true nature of the larger order and thereby bring man to a point of self-realization. As Taylor puts it,

> The central notion here is that this is what revelation through a work of art as "symbol" does. It doesn't just inform you about the links in and with the cosmos. It makes them palpable for you in a way which moves you and hence restores your link to them. . . . [Poetry] evokes for us, gives us a vivid sense of what it is like to be in the situation of the lover, the bereaved, the devout seeker of God. Or otherwise put, it invokes the intentional object of the emotion. (20–21, 70)

Another way Taylor explains this is by saying that a poem can open up an "interspace" of interaction between us and the world, a concept that Taylor puts forth as a third way of discovering human meaning, "challenging the simple distinction [between] ontological versus psychological" (55), that is, between the reality that exists external to the human mind versus that which is the product of the mind. For Taylor, the interspace created by poetry is not merely subjective, but situates us before nature in a revelatory manner and gives "a powerful sense of [nature's] meaning for our purposes, our fulfillment, or our destiny" (85).

The bulk of the book consists of chapters in which Taylor traces this idea in the works of the poets Hölderlin, Novalis, Shelley, Keats, Hopkins, Rilke, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Eliot, and Miłosz, as well as several others along the way. While there is much to ponder here, it will be best appreciated by avid poetry readers who are already familiar with these works, as Taylor strings together citation after citation, many in the original German or French (with translation). In spite of the amount of space devoted to this, whatever insights into the natural order Taylor derives from these poets remain fairly vague. Perhaps this is related to his appreciation for the Symbolist movement in poetry, which condemned works that attempted to give exact representations of reality and made indefiniteness a virtue (475–76). Indefiniteness is indeed an important aesthetic quality, as Emily Dickinson shows in this poem:

> Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
> Success in Circuit lies
> Too bright for our infirm Delight
> The Truth's superb surprise
> As Lightning to the Children eased
> With explanation kind
> The Truth must dazzle gradually
> Or every man be blind—[2]

Taylor's fondness for indefiniteness extends well beyond the realm of aesthetics, even finding expression in the way he follows Miłosz in preferring an "open and human variant of Catholicism, very different from the cramped, self-enclosed, and backward-looking" variety (541, cf. 594). Readers get a sense of what this looks like for Taylor when he expresses his support for "gay rights" (578) and his appreciation of Pope Francis's ambiguous calls for pluralistic openness (580–86).

Given that Taylor's religion is accommodated to our secular age, it makes sense that he embraces the identitarian moralism that is so prominent in Western society. This is seen in his expression of contempt for "U.S. Republican voters," whom he characterizes as being threatened by "universal human rights" and sympathetic to "white superiority," traits supposedly made evident in their embrace of "the scarcely veiled appeal of Donald Trump to uphold 'law and order'" (16). At first, this seems like an isolated rant. But its centrality to the book's argument becomes clear in the penultimate chapter, "History of Ethical Growth," where Taylor considers whether poets help bend the "arc of the moral universe" toward justice (553), drawing upon the Romantic "notion that the things of this world are a language, and that poets are those who can decipher this" (392) and help us reach our destiny of "a condition of harmony and resonance with Nature" (95). His conclusion is that although humans have "come up with deeper

2 Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems in the English Language: From Chaucer through Robert Frost* (Harper Perennial, 2007), 586.

ethical insights" across the centuries, we do not "on the whole act more morally than our ancestors" (586). While he acknowledges the advances that have been made in civil rights, he still asserts that "Jim Crow, and white supremacy, continue to wrack American society" (562). Unsurprisingly, the villains are those who belong to "the American Right" (in which Taylor groups such disparate figures as Mitt Romney and Donald Trump), who defend "the individualism of unlimited freedom, of a general license to follow [one's] own way" (560).[3] Taylor also denounces the Right for striving to protect their privileged status in society by clinging to their cultural heritage (570–77), promoting "vote-suppressing legislation" (575), and opposing an expansive welfare-state (576–77).

It would be one thing to criticize certain figures and factions on the Right. But Taylor pathologizes the Right in general as xenophobic and white supremacist. This calls for a response, especially since it is how he applies the insights he gleans from his poetic interlocutors. What evidence does he set forth to support his contention that the Right is racist, and how does the evidence stand up to scrutiny? First, he implies that because a disproportionate percentage of violent crimes are committed by racial minorities, it is racist to expect the civil magistrate to punish criminals. This illogical, and fundamentally unjust, notion is based on the civilization-destroying fallacy of disparate impact thinking.[4] Second, Taylor claims it is racist to think that a society should be united around a shared past and a shared understanding of the good, rather than be marked by its embrace of a multiculturalism that pits allegedly oppressed identity groups against whiteness. This exhibits Taylor's blindness to the fact that a culture based on repudiation will inevitably break apart and that some kind of consensus about principles and values is needed in order for a society to enjoy a measure of stability. While there certainly can be diversity within unity,[5] cultural roots and boundaries are necessary because they are constitutive of identity.[6] Third, Taylor claims that it is racist to oppose voting practices that undermine the integrity of elections. This ignores the fact that people oppose such practices because they imperil the legitimacy of the state.[7] And fourth, Taylor suggests that those who oppose an ever-expanding welfare state are motivated by racial animus. This is dismissive of patent evidence indicating that expanding and fostering dependence on state aid perpetuates poverty and a sense of victimhood,[8] enables the state to accumulate more power,[9] and pushes the nation closer and closer to a debt catastrophe.[10]

Taylor's broad characterization of the Right as racist is the result of seeing the Right through the lens of an ideology that ignores one of the most basic human realities. As Daniel Mahoney explains,

> The new ideological binary, innocent victim versus rapacious oppressor, forgets the insight so powerfully articulated by Solzhenitsyn in the opening volume of *The Gulag Archipelago*: "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing

3 This is an odd criticism. It is the Left that promotes the radical licentiousness of expressive individualism, which it then ironically leverages to bolster its authoritarian managerialism. While the Right is not immune to problems with individualism, it is far more supportive of traditional institutions that constrain the excesses of individualism.

4 See Heather MacDonald, "Disparate Impact Thinking Is Destroying Our Civilization," *Imprimus*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Feb. 2024): https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/disparate-impact-thinking-is-destroying-our-civilization/.

5 For a good example of this, see this article about my alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh: Howard Husock, "Diversity That's Not Divisive," *City Journal* (Sept. 3, 2024): https://www.city-journal.org/article/diversity-thats-not-divisive.

6 See Adam Ellwanger, "Multiculturalism Is Anti-Culture," *The American Conservative* (May 16, 2022): https://www.theamericanconservative.com/multiculturalism-is-anti-culture/.

7 See Armin Rosen, "Broken Ballots," *Tablet* (Sept. 3, 2024): https://www.tabletmag.com/feature/broken-ballots-american-voting.

8 See John McWhorter, *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America* (Penguin, 2007), 5–14, 63–72, 114–34, 153–96.

9 See Mark T. Mitchell, "Plutocratic Socialism and War on the Middle Class," *The American Conservative* (Sept. 9, 2022): https://www.theamericanconservative.com/plutocratic-socialism-and-war-on-the-middle-class/.

10 See Jeffrey H. Anderson, "America's Debt Emergency," *City Journal* (Aug. 8, 2024): https://www.city-journal.org/article/americas-debt-emergency.

> evil deeds, and it were necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"[11]

Colin Redemer elaborates, "it is best to be reminded that we are all already guilty. The leftists who keep attempting to kill, jail, or otherwise destroy their rivals need to be reminded that our political longing, like all of our longings, will only be satisfied when they are satisfied in God."[12] Carl Trueman adds that victim-oppressor ideology, also known as "critical theory," is marked by its "inability to articulate a positive social vision in anything but the vaguest terms" because it "denies that the world has an intrinsic moral shape."[13] Note the irony. Though Cosmic Connections seeks to realign its readers with the order of nature, it concludes with Taylor promoting an ethical vision that is not rooted in that order but is a projection of what some people think the world should be like, a projection that is promoted through manipulative smears of racism. Without making any attempt to explicate the Right's program as it is understood by the Right, Taylor simply asserts that it is indecent of the Right to notice certain realities. This undermines his claim that poets can unlock the meaning of reality and help advance ethical progress.

Being a poet, or a reader of poetry, does not exempt one from the impact that the fall has had on the human faculties. True, some poems may help better attune our thoughts and feelings to reality. But any insights we derive from poetry need to be tested against God's revelation in Scripture, as well as by other insights from the light of nature. As is the case with all other human attempts to understand and connect with reality, poetry can enlighten, but it can also misconstrue, manipulate, and distort. So can the reader of a poem. This is illustrated by the way Richard Wilbur speaks of the power of language in his wonderful little poem "A Barred Owl":

> The warping night air having brought the boom
> Of an owl's voice into her darkened room,
> We tell the wakened child that all she heard
> Was an odd question from a forest bird,
> Asking of us, if rightly listened to,
> "Who cooks for you?" and then "Who cooks for you?"
>
> Words, which can make our terrors bravely clear,
> Can also thus domesticate a fear,
> And send a small child back to sleep at night
> Not listening for the sound of stealthy flight
> Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw
> Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw.[14]

On the one hand, the words spoken by the parent calm fears that are not grounded in reality, as the owl poses no threat to the child. On the other hand, the parent's words intentionally obscure elements of reality that might give the child nightmares. This is a kind of beneficent obfuscation.[15] But because human words have this power, the very ideas that bring ethical advances can also become instruments of ethical regression. This is seen in the way the Civil Rights movement was co-opted to advance the LGBTQ agenda and its rebellion against God's natural order. In fact, even the Civil Rights movement's correction of racial injustices had mixed results. As Christopher Caldwell has pointed out, "Starting with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, . . . the United States had re-created the problem that it had passed the Civil Rights Act to resolve: It had two

11 Daniel J. Mahoney, "Mimetic Musings," *The New Criterion* (Sept. 2024): 61–62.

12 Colin Redemer, "Searching for Our Plot of Innocence," *First Things* (Sept. 17, 2024): https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2024/09/searching-for-our-plot-of-innocence.

13 Carl R. Trueman, "Critical Grace Theory," *First Things* (Nov. 2023): 31.

14 Richard Wilbur, *Collected Poems: 1943–2004* (Harcourt, 2004), 29.

15 Such efforts are not always necessary. When my daughter memorized this poem at the age of three or four, she found particular delight in reciting the last two lines.

classes of citizens."[16]

Given that the poems discussed in *Cosmic Connections* are likely to be both daunting and unfamiliar to many readers, I would like to call attention to another book that makes a familiar English-language poet even more accessible: Jay Parini's *Robert Frost: Sixteen Poems to Learn by Heart*. Parini teaches at Middlebury College and authored a highly regarded biography of Frost in 1999.[17] In his new book, he provides a brief introduction to Frost, makes a case for memorizing poems, offers several pages of helpful commentary on each poem, and gives practical tips on how to commit a poem (or even part of one) to memory. He also calls attention to how Frost's poems often make use of elements drawn from the "daily work of farmers" (xxi), a fact that makes them especially helpful in connecting readers to reality. This includes life's darker realities, as is evident in the first poem selected by Parini, "Storm Fear." In it, Frost describes the experience of a father waking in the middle of the night while a fierce New England snowstorm rages outside his small family's isolated farmhouse. Here is the full poem:

> When the wind works against us in the dark,
> And pelts with snow
> The lower chamber window on the east,
> And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
> The beast,
> 'Come out! Come out!'—
> It costs no inward struggle not to go,
> Ah, no!
> I count our strength,
> Two and a child,
> Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
> How the cold creeps as the fire dies at
> length,—
> How drifts are piled,
> Dooryard and road ungraded,
> Till even the comforting barn grows far away,
> And my heart owns a doubt
> Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
> And save ourselves unaided. (3)

The reader is made to feel how vulnerable we humans are to the forces of nature, and the ending suggests that the family is on their own in the face of this crisis. The frenzy of the storm is reinforced by the poem's irregular form and rhyme scheme. Though this confronts us with a terrifying reality, it might nevertheless call our attention to the fact that we stand in need of help from Someone who transcends nature. Similar thoughts emerge as one ponders the other poems in the book, as well as Parini's reflections upon them.

While discernment and critique are necessary, Christians should be sympathetic toward the notion that poetry can play an important role in helping us modern people reconnect to reality. Reading poetry helps us slow down, notice things, and ponder them. It can make us more responsive to realities that are external to us, and less susceptible to manipulation by those who would seek to control us. It can even be a source of civic cohesion and renewal.[18] Of course, as this article has shown, poetry can be misused. But it also offers considerable benefits, especially for a people who are called to seek the welfare of the earthly cities in which we sojourn (Jer. 29:7), to not be conformed to the pattern of this world, and to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). ©

Andrew S. Wilson is an OPC minister and serves as the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Laconia, New Hampshire.

16 Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (Simon & Schuster, 2020), 238.

17 Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (Henry Holt, 1999).

18 "Reflective poetry that connects the past to the present . . . evokes a self-conscious sense of national identity, that is, our distinct humanity, that which makes us human in a specific way in our own specific circumstances." David P. Goldman, "Can Poetry Save a Nation?" (Sept. 17, 2024): https://tomklingenstein.com/can-poetry-save-a-nation/.

Choosing Better

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by David VanDrunen

Choose Better: Five Biblical Models for Making Ethical Decisions, by T. David Gordon. P&R, 2024, xvii + 123 pages, $16.99, paper.

T. David Gordon, PCA minister and retired professor at Grove City College, has provided a very helpful new book on Christian ethics. Not only is the content useful, but Gordon also writes in a concise, clear, and engaging way that will make this book of interest to a broad range of readers.

Gordon provides an initial definition of "ethics" at the beginning of his Preface: "the study of how to live and how to live well" (ix). Shortly thereafter, he gives another definition: ethics "constitutes the *disciplined reflection on human choice-making*" (xi) (all italics in quotations are his). The latter definition is key for the book, since, as the title indicates, Gordon focuses on human choice. How do we make good decisions? For Gordon, this is not just a question of making right rather than wrong decisions, although some situations call for this. Ethics is also about making better rather than worse decisions in the many circumstances of life when there are no single right or wrong choices. Gordon proposes five "models" that should guide moral decision-making. He believes Scripture advocates all five and that different Christian traditions emphasize (and neglect) different ones. Since all are biblical, they are complementary rather than competitive. Utilizing one should strengthen use of the others, while neglecting some will impoverish and distort how we utilize others. The five models are like a mechanic's tools. He will do his best work when he uses many tools rather than a single one.

Gordon first considers the *imitation* model. The basic idea is that God has made and called human beings to be like him, in a way appropriate to our creaturely status. God created us in his own image, and Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to imitate him: for example, to be holy as he is holy and to love others as he has loved us (Lev. 19:2, John 15:12). This model encourages us, when faced with a moral choice, to ask, "*Does this decision allow me (or us) to emulate God or to cultivate human traits that reflect his image*" (11)? Gordon suggests that this imitation model has close links to the virtue tradition of ethics, for imitating God is not just a matter of doing what God does but also of becoming like him. This model also encourages us to ponder the communicable attributes of God and to consider how our choices can reflect them. Gordon notes that many prominent Christian thinkers have regarded the imitation theme as the fundamental biblical model, and he agrees with this judgment. According to Gordon, however, a potential limitation of the model is that it does not tend to provide ready, quick answers to moral problems but requires long and sustained study.

The book's second entry is the *law* model. This understands God to have rightful and wise authority over his creatures. Accordingly, God gives commands throughout Scripture that he expects his people to keep. This model thus prompts us to ask, when faced with a moral decision, "*Has God, in Holy Scripture, commanded or prohibited this behavior*" (31)? Gordon notes, and is surely correct, that this model has played a dominant role in the ethics of churches descending from the Protestant Reformation, as illustrated by the prominent use of the Decalogue in the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. While Gordon affirms this model's vital importance, he also devotes extended discussion to challenges it poses. In particular, many biblical commands do not oblige all people. God directed some commands toward a specific person, for example, and some commands binding under one biblical covenant do not bind people living under another covenant. While some readers may think Gordon devotes disproportionate space to this model's limitations, this discussion is

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1148.

quite helpful and is obviously directed at Reformed communities prone to emphasize the law model to the detriment of others.

Third is the *wisdom* model. Scripture includes wisdom literature and often exhorts readers to be wise. For Gordon, wisdom entails understanding the true nature of reality and perceiving how things work. This model encourages us to ask, when making moral choices, "*What is the likely outcome of this decision*" (53)? Recognizing that God created the world with wisdom, this model urges us to pay attention to natural as well as special revelation. It also enables us to recognize that what works for one person in a certain situation may not work for another in different circumstances. The wisdom model thereby helps us to live charitably with each other when we make different decisions in matters on which Scripture does not bind our consciences. But this model too has limitations to keep in mind. It provides counsel and perspective but often not clear imperatives. It describes how the world tends to operate, not how it always operates.

The fourth model is the *communion* model. It focuses on the biblical idea that God made us for fellowship with himself and that we alone of God's creatures have the privilege of direct communication with him. This model sets the following question before our ethical decision-making: "*How might this decision enhance or inhibit my (or our) communion with God*" (77)? The Bible commends this model to us in many ways. It urges us to pray without ceasing; the Psalms are filled with praise, thanksgiving, request, and lament that express intimacy with God, and the pattern of God speaking to us and we responding back to him pervades the Scriptures. Gordon notes, however, that this model's special challenge is the danger of subjectivity. We are often not very good judges of our own souls or of what conduces to our spiritual benefit.

Finally, Gordon presents the *warfare* model. This draws on the numerous biblical texts describing life as a great battle pitting God and his people against Satan and his host. God often portrays himself as a mighty warrior and the Old Testament depicts warriors such as David as types of Christ. Scripture also enlists Christians in the fight, exhorting them to put on the armor of God and wage war against the passions of the flesh. This model instructs Christians to ask about their moral choices: "*In the often invisible, yet real warfare between the forces of good and evil, will this decision likely serve the forces of good or the forces of evil*" (101)? This model encourages Christians to be vigilant, obedient to Christ their commanding officer, and always prepared. It requires us to think strategically, although in doing so it demands that we incorporate insights from the other models.

There is a real sense in which *Choose Better* sells itself. All five models indisputably appear throughout Scripture, so we Christians committed to biblical authority ought to acknowledge the propriety of Gordon's call to incorporate them into our moral thought. One benefit of heeding this call is that it ensures the holistic character of ethics. Far too often contemporary writers treat "ethics" as if it focuses only on big, life-crisis, cultural-war issues. This can leave the impression that ethics has little to do with the 99.9 percent of life when such issues are not before us. Gordon's book never leaves that impression. Utilizing the five models also helpfully connects us to the broad moral-theological tradition of the Christian church. As Gordon recognizes, great theologians throughout church history have incorporated these themes into their ethical writings.

If I were to interrogate the author, I might ask him two questions, one general and one specific. In general, I wonder why he focuses so intently on *decision* and *choice* throughout the volume. While decision-making obviously is a crucial part of ethics, Gordon himself suggests that ethics is deeper and richer than this. For example, he acknowledges the importance of *virtue* (especially through his imitation model) and of *spirituality* (especially through his communion model), both of which transcend decision-making, it seems to me. Does Gordon's focus on choice, therefore, suggest a narrower view of ethics than he himself holds?

My specific question concerns his discussion of Satan's activity under the warfare model. Since Scripture warns us to be on guard against Satan's devices, Gordon appropriately considers this topic.

He speaks of how Satan deceives us, diverts our attention, and employs our corrupt desires. But Gordon doesn't explain *how* Satan does this. Satan spoke audibly to Adam and Christ when tempting them, but he does not do that to us. Does Satan have access to our innermost thoughts and feelings? Can he actually put ideas in our minds or stir up vices latent within us? If not, what exactly is Satan's role in our spiritual struggle against the world's lies and the passions of our sinful nature?

Reformed churches should be grateful for this excellent new contribution to Christian ethics. I recommend it highly for pastors, elders, deacons, and thoughtful laypeople. ©

David VanDrunen *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the Robert B. Strimple professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California.*

A Beautiful Mind and Pen at Work Reading the Book of Genesis

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by Bryan D. Estelle

Reading Genesis, by Marilynne Robinson. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024. 344 pages, $29.00.

Most readers will recognize the name Marilynne Robinson. She is a Pulitzer Prize winner in fiction for her novel *Gilead*. This speaks for itself. Need this reviewer tell you other reasons why you should read her new book on Genesis? Although I will allude to a couple of her books below, I will not rehearse her many other books and awards. They are numerous. The reader can easily access that information. Yet, despite these accolades, Robinson's writing does not come across with panache, but rather with humility. There is a steady constancy in God and his covenant, she claims, even while stating, "My language is entirely insufficient to my subject, but I hope to draw attention to an important consistency to be found in Genesis" (217).

I will tell you why you should read this book. I have come up with ten reasons. Therefore, this will not be your typical book review. Yes, she is one of my favorite authors; however, any good review should include strengths and critiques (in her case, there are not many of the latter). Even so, she has weighed in on a masterpiece of Old Testament literature. Since I am an Old Testament scholar and biblical theology professor by trade, my duty is to report how she may have come up short in certain respects. I will recount ten reasons why officers in the church should read this new book. Then, I will add some notes of caution about how she

1 https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=1154.

may have over-argued her case.

1. *She emphasizes the point that Genesis is unique among contemporary literary texts in the ancient Near East* (hence, ANE), although influenced by its neighbors. She talks about the myths of Babylon, Carthage, the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, and Egypt, and she is well informed about these other cultures and their epic myths (e.g., 17–19, 27, 29, 30). Nevertheless, she makes no equivocations: "Hebrew Scripture is intended as history" (122).

She is also conversant with the classics, making numerous references to Greek literature. But these are not superfluous allusions; they are used to good effect. For example, when she compares the wily Odysseus and his "ecstasy of rage" in the great slaughter at the end of Homer's memorable epic (*The Odyssey*) vis-à-vis the denouement of the Joseph narrative, the differences could not be starker. She states,

> In another literature a character in Joseph's place could have made a choice of this kind, could have demonstrated wiliness and power while he satisfied a crude definition of justice. But this is Scripture, and in place of catharsis there is an insight that casts its light over the narrative of Joseph and over the whole book of Genesis. (226)

2. *She is not shy about "poking the bear" of mainstream scholarship, with which she seems conversant.* This is especially the case with regard to source critical methodologies that have been so dominant (e.g., 22, 26) in commenting on the Pentateuch. More below.

3. *Throughout her new book, she emphasizes in detail, with humanist insight, the great mystery of this sublime literature.* She recaptures the awe and mystery revealed in the Bible time and again (e.g., 28, 36–37, 40, 42, 45, 60–64, 95–96, 126, 149). Melville-like, she narrates the story with great attention to small details and suddenly states a blazing insight that applied to the ancient Hebrews as well as to us (e.g., 70, 130). Toward the end of the book, she even alludes to Herman Melville's character Father Mapple twice and to good effect, who calls Scripture "'a mighty cable.' Its intertwined strands of narrative exist in time, which they also create, or assert" (224).

4. *Even though her training and expertise is in the humanities, she does not shy away from commenting on the vexed relationship between science and Scripture* (e.g., 26, 30, 126). This is not surprising since she wrote *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought*[2] and delivered the prestigious Terry Lectures, published as *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*.[3] Both books, especially the latter, delve into the complex and tumultuous waters of the modern problem of the relationship between science and Scripture.

5. *She plumbs the depths of this biblical book by demonstrating that it introduces great themes having to do with theodicy, i.e., the justification of God's ways before humankind.* She declares it in the opening pages, and it never goes away, even though it recedes into the shadows.

6. *She has an intelligent, critical and thoughtful approach to the mainstream idea that the Old Testament is comprised of "sources"* (see, e.g., 4–5, 138, 145). On the one hand, she thinks any idea of a theory of redactors dealing with "disparate, unreconciled documents with no unifying vision behind them" cannot stand (183). On the other hand, she is committed to the notion of oral tradition in this ancient culture (who could not be?) and therefore allows for redactors being involved with different versions of the story being transmitted on minor elements in the story, e.g., whether Joseph's captors were Ishmaelites or Midianites (184). Toward the end of her book, Robinson assumes Moses is not the author of Genesis when she says, "Since Genesis would have been written, or have received its last refinement, long after the time of Moses (219)." This claim may not be well-received by readers of this journal; however, in my opinion, such an opinion should not keep readers from engaging this fine book.

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2 Marilynne Robinson, *The Death of Adam: Essays on Modern Thought* (Picador, 1998, 2005).

3 Marilynne Robinson, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self* (Yale, 2010).

7. *She writes in exquisite prose, and the mere reading of her, paying close attention to how she constructs a sentence, is bound to improve the writing* [and preaching] *of any minister.* It is well known that J. G. Machen and a few other contemporary Christian authors (e.g., Frank Gaebelein) developed a reputation for their beautiful and clear prose. If Machen "could work a verb" like very few in our day, Robinson is a master at construing artful prose, and she can "work a comma" like few in our day. Many modern Reformed writers fall far short of this ideal. Could this contribute to the modern malaise of why confessional Reformed theology has not achieved a significant following for one of the greatest systems of theological thought? To paraphrase a Federal Vision author, which I rarely do, Reformed theology is the best-looking ship in dry dock. We desperately need authors like Marilynne Robinson to help us learn how to capture our sublime theology in captivating prose: she can help us achieve that goal. Not many authors can make the claim about Genesis, that this is a "masterpiece of compression" (24) and "the extreme compression and efficiency of a fragment of narrative like this one makes it feel as though it has been turned and turned, considered in every light, but first of all in light of the belief that God is one and that He is loyal to the whole of Creation" (74). But an author who has achieved this style herself can make such claims (with exquisite self-effacement). Robinson takes it a step further. I am no stylist, and my prose is chubby. I am thankful for good editors throughout the decades that have made it less so. But Robinson is a master. I stopped counting her artful use of commas at the end of a sentence (to focus on a point being made). Her timing and cadence are impeccable. She educates on the narrative's "point of view" (or lack thereof, cf., 187) throughout the book. She is intimately aware of how the narrative arc of a story works and even more so how narrative tension occurs in a story. Additionally, she knows how characterizations are intertwined with these, or should be.

8. *She is unafraid to step into the rarified atmosphere of theology*. For example, she addresses God's impassibility (65), God's justice (e.g., 204, 226) tempered by grace (216), making moral sense of history, and the vengeance claimed by God alone.

9. *She* (and the publishers) *has provided a translation of Genesis at the end of the book, which in my opinion is not a weakness or liability; rather, it is a strength (for reasons explained below).* Although she quotes the KJV throughout her book, she is not slavishly bound by it. Some readers may be wondering if she is committed to the *textus receptus* version of the Old Testament. My guess is that because she is a woman of letters who appreciates good prose, she chose the KJV for that reason (for anyone who knows anything about the process that the KJV went through, this is answer enough). However, there may be another reason why it is good that she chose the KJV, whether or not she is even aware of this. The KJV sounds archaic and "other worldly" to most Americans and to most English speakers around the world. Thus, Robinson has (whether inside of conscious awareness or outside, I do not know) chosen a version that communicates something "distant" and "far away" from our language and culture, though beautiful. Our Old Testament is written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Therefore, her choice fits like a glove. That is exactly what she should and did communicate in her translation choice. Even so, she seems somewhat familiar with Hebrew, and I am glad she is willing to cite other translations (e.g., 93) to alert the reader to differences of opinion. Consider her comparison between the JPS translation and the RSV on pages 140–41. Concerning whether English can correctly capture the nuances of a preposition in Hebrew, she concludes the discussion with, "English has no way of expressing the ambiguity of this utterance."

10. *She exquisitely and most importantly demonstrates how this archaic literature prefigures Christ, showcasing his glorious work of forgiveness and grace through figural language in these stories* (e.g., 104).

In our day, many officers in the church are still overly exercised and flirting with such minor topics as "the length of the days" expressed in

Genesis, or how old the earth really is. But the fact of the matter is that the bastion of Reformed orthodoxy has been sieged by attacks on graver and more consequential topics, such as the historicity of Adam, let alone Abraham or the Exodus.[4] Robinson's book is a breath of fresh air on Genesis and for us who are trying to reach a lost and decaying culture crying out for answers.

The one area I wish she had discussed is the difficulty attached to considering the relationship of the Old Testament (Genesis in this case) to her ANE neighbors. This is an extremely complex task and involves risk, especially considering the antiquity of the data in question.[5] Some grouping on a continuum along a spectrum, ranging from minimalist to maximalist, about influence and polemics regarding Genesis and contemporary myths would have been helpful. I would consider Robinson a maximalist, in the sense that Genesis is indeed polemicizing against its neighbor's myths. But here, as an example, she could have employed the work of the great Harvard Semitic scholar W. L. Moran,[6] who was convinced that Genesis 9:1ff. was a direct polemic or rejection of the Atra-Hasis epic, even though other scholars (Lambert and Millard) saw the differences between Atra-Hasis and the Genesis account as too great for any direct connection.[7] For the record, Atra-Hasis is not a mere variant of the Gilgamesh epic; it is in this Akkadian work that we find the standard account of man's creation from the Babylonian sources.

Here I quibble, and it may sound to the reader like Chesterton's quip from another context: "The doctors disagree, as it is the business of doctors to do."

Even so, more important here is her weighing in against any view of "mythological revisionism." This is the position that Genesis is merely a reflex based upon previous mythological pagan texts like the Enuma Elish, the Gilgamesh Epic, or Atra-Hasis. No, she has eloquently shown that in the Genesis account of creation there is no polytheism. There is no theogony. There is no theomachy. Indeed, she has shown that the portrayal of God and his deeds is fundamentally and categorically different than its neighbors. In another context, writing against the mythological revisionists, I said, "It seems to me that the church would best serve its people by situating the biblical creation story in its cultural setting and then demonstrate how it is different and unique in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern worldviews."[8] This is the kind of mandate Robinson has fulfilled.

One gains the impression that Robinson has chewed upon, meditated upon, reassessed time and again, and finally understood the story of Genesis. She has not only sipped but drunk deeply from this well. She has insights to share. She assists the reader in recapturing the mystery and surprise of God's grace through the messy lives found in the book of Genesis. She is astounded by and communicates exquisitely the realism of the ugliness, darkness, and horror of earth dwellers, the humanity of saints, and how challenging plodding through life can be. But above all—and this is where the beauty of the book captivates—she unveils the encouragement of God's grace working back of and behind the outworking of the mystery of iniquity narrated in the storyline.

She concludes her essay on Genesis with this clash of cymbals,

> I know of no other literature except certain late plays of Shakespeare that elevates grace as

4 "Genesis prepares us for the book of Exodus of course."

5 For further information, including bibliography, the reader may consult my discussion in Appendix 1, "Ancient Near Eastern Context" of *The Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation*, printed pages 270–91 of the Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly (June 2–8, 2004) or available online at the denomination's site: https://opc.org/GA/creation.html#Ancient.

6 W. L. Moran, "Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood," *Biblica* 52 (1971): 51–61.

7 Bryan Estelle, "The Old Testament and the Comparative Method," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Volume 6, (2010): 145–66, especially at 164. See, e.g., W.G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis" in *I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, eds. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96–113, especially at 102–03.

8 Bryan Estelle, "The Old Testament and the Comparative Method," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, (Vol. 6, 2010), 145–66, especially at 164.

> this book does . . . Joseph's act of forgiveness in effect opens the way for them to assume their essential, though unexplained and unrecorded role in sacred history. In every instance where it arises, forgiveness is rewarded by consequences that could not have been foreseen or imagined. (228–29)

Take up and read—you will not be disappointed. Ⓢ

Bryan D. Estelle *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary California in Escondido, California.*

EDITORIAL POLICIES

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