

# apologetics

ordained servant

January 2015



# *Ordained Servant Online*

## *A Journal for Church Officers*

E-ISSN 1931-7115

### **CURRENT ISSUE: APOLOGETICS**

**January 2015**

### *From the Editor*

Apologetics is as much for the strengthening of the church as it is for winning the world. Of course a strong church will tend to win the world. If pointing out the beauty of the truth we affirm has not been first on our apologetic agenda—if it has been there at all—perhaps it is time to consider the importance of beauty in our defense of, or at least in our portrayal of, our faith. “Beautiful Truth” seeks, in a small way, to place this topic on our list of things to consider in the new year.

Brian DeJong brings another dimension of the apologetic enterprise to the fore. In “Lord Defender: Jesus Christ as Apologist” he challenges us to answer the question, “Why do we skip Jesus when we look to the New Testament for examples of apologetics?” He presents a challenging reconsideration of our usual Pauline approach.

I review what I consider to be the best introduction to the life and ministry of the late Francis Schaeffer: William Edgar’s *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*. Whatever differences we may have with his methodology at certain points, his is a life and ministry to be reckoned with. His formative influence on me is something I am very grateful for. Edgar presents us with a factual and compelling portrait, as a friend of Schaeffer and an influential apologist himself.

Next to Schaeffer there is no better known Christian thinker than Os Guinness, who was a student of Schaeffer’s in the 1960s. William Edgar, another student of Schaeffer’s from that era, reviews Guinness’s latest book, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*. Guinness’s brilliant penetration of the modern mind and the culture it has produced is especially significant due to his ability to communicate to an intelligent lay audience. Like Schaeffer, his analysis is only half the battle. Encouraging and guiding the church is the other half, convincingly delivered.

Douglas Felch’s review of Abraham Kuyper’s *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art* provides us with a very useful overview of Kuyper’s thinking about science and its relation to Christian faith. Kuyper has been one of the most influential thinkers in the last century of Reformed thought and practice. Our considerations of natural law and common grace must take him into account.

Mitchell Herring reviews a symposium based on a recent conference on the progress of Reformed missions in China. *China’s Reforming Churches*, edited by Bruce Baugus, analyses and emphasizes the need for distinctly Presbyterian and Reformed missions in China, continuing the reforming work of Presbyterian John Nevius, whose principles for biblical church planting have ironically given the name to the state sponsored church—Three Self.

Finally, the incomparable Christina Rossetti gives us the first of three poems in which she considers the new year in relation to the old.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

## CONTENTS

### ServantThoughts

- “Beautiful Truth”

### ServantWitness

- Brian DeJong, “Lord Defender: Jesus Christ as Apologist”

### ServantReading

- Gregory Reynolds review William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*
- William Edgar review Os Guinness, *Renaissance*
- Douglas Felch review Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*
- Mitchell Herring review *China’s Reforming Churches*

### ServantPoetry

- Christina Rossetti, “Old and New Year Ditties 1”

## FROM THE ARCHIVES “APOLOGETICS”

[http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject\\_Index\\_Vol\\_1-20.pdf](http://opc.org/OS/pdf/Subject_Index_Vol_1-20.pdf)

- “A Letter from Cornelius Van Til to Francis Schaeffer.” (Cornelius Van Til) 6:4 (Oct. 1997): 77–80.
- “The Post-Modern Paradigm Shift and the Biblical, Reformed Presuppositionalism of Van Til.” (Larry E. Ball) 5:4 (Oct. 1996): 87–90.
- “The Reason for God.” (William D. Dennison) 17 (2008): 146–51.
- “Van Til the Evangelist.” (Oliphint, K. Scott) 17 (2008): 54–59.

---

*Ordained Servant* exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

# Servant Thoughts

## Beautiful Truth

---

by Gregory E. Reynolds

When I emphasize the importance of poetry in my lectures on preaching, I always ask if anyone in the audience likes poetry and reads it regularly. Invariably only a few say yes. Then I tell them that I am certain that they *do* like poetry, because they like the Bible—more than a third of God’s Word is in the form of poetry. And all of the Bible is artfully composed in the forms of various literary structures.

In our age of bits and bytes we are told that science alone gives us truth, the hard facts of reality. Thus, we are generally suspicious of poetry. Many Christians believe that all talk of literary structures undermines our confidence in God’s Word. The creation debates in our own circles often yield such ideas. However, it is often overlooked that poetry was written under the inspiration of God’s Spirit to enshrine the Exodus event in a song (Exod. 15) and in many psalms (cf. Pss. 106, 136). They are no less historical or less true for being poetry. Poetry in the Bible presents truth in beautifully memorable form.

When we look at the intricacy of the design of all things in the created order, is it not a proof of the unique inspiration of the Bible that it is artfully composed? Among the Bible’s “incomparable excellencies” the Westminster Confession of Faith (1.5) refers to “the majesty of the style.” There are patterns in everything. Think of the beauty of the patterns of our DNA and the human genome system. So, because we are made in God’s image, we think and live and create in patterns. The eternal Word through whom all things were created and are presently upheld, became flesh in order to create a new humanity after his own glorified humanity. Thus, he refers to us as “his workmanship” or artistry (Eph. 2:10). The Greek word for “workmanship” is *poiēma*, the same as the English word “poem” or “poetry” (ποίημα). The Greek word refers more broadly to all creating or creations than our English word “poetry.”

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. (Eccles. 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 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."

The concept of artfully wrought truth reminds me of the Roman architect Vitruvius's three rules of good architectural design expounded in his foundational *The Ten Books of Architecture*: firmness (structural integrity), commodity (usefulness), and delight (beauty). They are all necessary to one another, just as biblical truth must be expressed artfully. So the text describes its own words in two ways.<sup>1</sup> The first is "words of delight (*hephets* הֶפֶת)." The basic meaning of "delight" is to feel great favor towards something. The Author of beauty gave literary skill to the human authors of Scripture to draw us to its meaning and transforming power. The second is "words of truth (*emeth* אֱמֶת)." These are straight or orthodox words. Truth and beauty go hand in hand. The medium is perfectly suited to the message. In God's Word content and craftsmanship are inextricably linked. The medium and the message are perfectly complimentary as they teach us the beauty of God's grace. This should give us confidence in our task of communicating God's Word in an artful way to the rising generation through preaching, teaching, and writing to the glory of God.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> We could also relate the three rules of Vitruvius to the biblical text in this way: 1) firmness (structural integrity) is found in the various literary forms of the biblical text, which serve the interests of the text's meaning—chiasm, for example, is structured to make a main point in the center; 2) commodity (usefulness) is the application of the biblical text in worship and service; and 3) delight (beauty) is the beauty of the text artfully crafted and structured to fulfill the purposes and designs of the ultimate author, God.

# ServantReading

## Lord Defender: Jesus Christ as Apologist

---

by Brian L. De Jong

Recently I attended a large conference for Evangelical theologians. Most of those in attendance came from the academic world, so I was not surprised to find myself sitting next to a seminary professor at the conference banquet.

Since this brother taught apologetics at a respected institution, I determined to pose a question. “Have you read anything that analyzes the apologetics of Jesus?” I asked. He pondered the question for a few moments, and then answered in the negative. Judging from his reaction, I wondered if the thought had ever crossed his mind. Not wanting to pursue an awkward conversation, I dropped the matter.

My new friend, however, was still thinking about my query. He seemed flummoxed by this thought, and tried to determine what I was really driving at. The conversation turned in an odd direction as he made slightly dismissive statements about “WWJD,” (what would Jesus do?) supposing that was my angle.

The question was legitimate and the response typical. Has anyone seriously considered Jesus Christ as an apologist? Scour most textbooks on apologetics, and you will see what I mean. The only relevant book I have discovered is *The Apologetics of Jesus* by Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran,<sup>1</sup> though it is of limited value.

The presuppositions of Geisler and Zukeran are revealed in the final chapter, entitled “Jesus’ Apologetic Method.” First, they state that

it is not surprising that Jesus was not a presuppositional apologist. That would have entailed beginning his apologetics with the Triune God, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and then reasoning from there.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after this they conclude:

From the summary of the evidence presented earlier (chaps. 1–8), it is clear that if Jesus had spelled out his apologetics systematically, he would have held to a classical apologetics system. His thought contained all the elements of classical apologetics.<sup>3</sup>

Douglas Groothuis likewise pursues the thesis in an article<sup>4</sup> and two books,<sup>5</sup> although he clearly doesn’t exhaust the subject. He helpfully demonstrates how Jesus employed

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). Kindle edition.

<sup>2</sup> Geisler and Zukeran, *Apologetics of Jesus*, Kindle locations 1934–1935.

<sup>3</sup> Geisler and Zukeran, *Apologetics of Jesus*, Kindle locations 1975–1976.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Groothuis, “Jesus: Philosopher and Apologist,” *Christian Research Journal* 25, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.equip.org/articles/Jesus-philosopher-and-apologist>.

various forms of logical argumentation in his disputes with the Jewish authorities of his day. Yet because Groothuis also dismisses the presuppositional approach, he fails to fully appreciate the profundity of Jesus's methodology.

To my knowledge, there has been no extended engagement with this concept by a presuppositionalist. Greg Bahnsen grappled briefly with this idea when he wrote:

In all our apologetical endeavors we must honor Christ as Lord over our thinking and argumentation. He alone must occupy this unique position of Lordship in our minds, for He must be set apart to that function.

Bahnsen then inferred that “the content and logic of our apologetic comes from the word of Christ our Lord.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, like so many others, Bahnsen fails to explore Jesus's own apologetical theory, method and practice.

Although presuppositional and classical apologists disagree on many things, they would agree that 1 Peter 3:15 is a key passage for the task of defending the faith. Both sides of this intramural dispute stress the duty of always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks for an account of the hope that is in us. So far, so good!

Both camps typically overlook an obvious implication of Peter's prerequisite—to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Without recognizing the Lordship of Christ over every aspect of human experience, we can offer but a truncated defense of Christian truth.

Specifically, Reformed apologists sometimes fail to explicitly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord of apologetics. If his sovereign authority and power extend to every square inch of the creation, then he must necessarily be the sovereign Lord of apologetical theory, method, and practice.

I believe it is time for presuppositional apologists to plumb the depths of our Savior's apologetic—especially as it is revealed in the four gospels. He is the Lord Defender of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. This inquiry is needful for many reasons.

Such a study is appropriate because Jesus understood apologetics completely. His knowledge was thorough, exhaustive, and perfect, and thus he comprehended every component of apologetical theory and how those components interacted. Our Savior had an exhaustive knowledge of apologetics, elenctics, and evangelism, and how these three aspects of ministry worked together to challenge unbelievers to repent and believe.

Similarly, he alone possessed a perfect apologetical methodology, and there was no inconsistency between his theory and his practice. He knew how to effectively use questions to provoke thought. He employed stories to draw people into a consideration of the truth. He added miracles as confirming signs, challenging the Jews that even if they did not believe him, they should at least believe the works that he did. Christ employed a perfect blend of history, theology, and ethics in his pedagogy. He understood the role of imagination and persuasion in dealing with weak and ignorant sinners. He was neither too strong or too weak, too soft in his approach or too hard. He also maintained the perfect balance and blend in dealing with real people.

---

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *On Jesus*, Wadsworth Philosophers Series (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2003). Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision & Covenant, 2008), 26.

Likewise, no one ever better comprehended the true condition of sinners. Jesus well understood the noetic effects of sin, and the darkened mindset of fallen man. John 2:24–25 states, “But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” Christ was never fooled by the tricks employed by his opponents to trap him in his words.

It is also correct to say that Jesus did apologetics perfectly. To paraphrase the Jews in Mark 1:22, “No one ever defended the faith like this man—with authority, not as the scribes.” Because he was sinless, he never squandered a single opportunity to demonstrate and defend the rational coherence of revealed truth. His arguments were never based on fallacies, nor were his assumptions ever inaccurate. Moreover, Jesus always maintained the proper priorities and balance in his apologetical encounters, never allowing himself to become distracted by trivialities.

We should also pursue this project because we have abundant relevant evidence within the gospel accounts. Not only were there numerous direct encounters between the Savior and unbelieving critics, but his teaching often has obvious relevance for the work of apologetics. Reviewing the gospel of Matthew alone, the following twenty passages could be profitably mined for apologetical gold: Matthew 4:1–11; 9:1–8; 11:1–6; 12:9–14; 12:22–32; 12:38–42; 13:1–43; 15:1–20; 16:1–12; 16:21–23; 19:3–9; 19:16–22; 21:23–27; 21:33–46; 22:15–22; 22:23–33; 22:34–40; 22:41–46; 23:1–36; 26:57–68.

Jesus repeatedly faced opposition from the Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, scribes, teachers of the law, and elders of the people and even, at times, from the multitudes of his followers. We might understandably ignore this aspect of our Savior’s ministry if there were only a few scattered and inconclusive encounters. But because apologetical opportunities were increasingly numerous as his ministry ripened, and because they fill pages of the gospels, we ought to give them due consideration.

There are also theological reasons for examining the apologetics of Jesus. Colossians 2:3 informs us that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This leads us to be Christocentric in our theological formulations, and rightly so. If our Savior is the touchstone for truth and the very incarnation of truth itself, we would be shortsighted to attempt to construct a theological system that failed to recognize his primacy in all things. Everything points to him, and everything flows from him—especially in theology.

Accepting that apologetics is a legitimate and vital branch of the theological encyclopedia, why would we not be Christocentric in our apologetics? Is it correct to view the Apostle Paul as the chief apologist of the church? Should Paul hold ‘first place’ in defending the faith? Doesn’t that position belong logically and theologically to Jesus Christ? Wouldn’t Paul himself have pointed our eyes to Christ as we search for the perfect example of apologetics in practice?

Understand that I am not in any way dismissing or diminishing Paul’s fine example or the apologetical value of such passages as Acts 17:16–34. The scriptural accounts of Paul’s apologetical encounters are perfect and Christlike. I am simply suggesting that Paul should take a second place to Christ when it comes to defending the faith. This is in keeping with Paul’s own dictum in I Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Christ is the great original, and Paul’s example is authoritative in so far as he imitated Christ.

Some might object at this point, insisting that any talk of Jesus as an example is theologically liberal and smacks of moralism, à la Charles Sheldon. I would agree that treating Jesus as *merely* an example is moralistic and liberal. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God—very God of very God. Christ’s redemptive work is far more than a mere example of good conduct. That said, 1 Peter 2:21 explicitly states, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, *so that you might follow in his steps* (emphasis added).” The incarnate Redeemer of God’s elect does set an example in many areas for us to follow. To point to Jesus as the Chief Apologist for his church, and to call men to ponder and follow his example is not inappropriate.

Another objection might be raised—namely that Jesus is so far above and beyond us that his example does us little good. While he always understood the tricks and traps of his enemies, we often misunderstand and become confused. He always knew the right thing to say, but we stumble over our words, and are plagued with faulty memories and vast ignorance. How can imperfect creatures like us learn anything from the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Christ, perfect in all his ways? While this line of thinking may appear cogent, it leads us inescapably to an uncomfortable conclusion. If the disparity between Jesus’s perfections and our imperfections is so great as to nullify our learning from his teaching, then he was wasting his time by teaching us anything at all. Perhaps he should have come to earth solely to die on the cross, rise again, and return to heaven. Those three years of public ministry were for naught if this gap is too great to bridge.

It is here that Calvin’s insights help us greatly. In the *Institutes*, Calvin argues, For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to “lisp” in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.<sup>7</sup>

As in every other area, so also in apologetics. Jesus stoops down to us and accommodates himself to our weaknesses. He gives us a perfect pattern so that we can know how apologetics should properly function when done correctly. This divine archetype should not intimidate us, or suppress our enthusiasm, but lift us up and encourage us in our apologetical encounters.

So as to support my argument and simultaneously prime the pump, let me point out one of the more significant and obvious apologetical encounters of Jesus’s earthly ministry. In Matthew 22 Jesus was ambushed by the Sadducees. Although they denied the doctrine of the resurrection (among other things), they set a trap for Jesus which presupposed the doctrine of the resurrection. In their fictional account, a man died childless, so his brother did his duty by marrying the widow in order to raise up seed for the dead brother. The second man died childless as well. This pattern continued until the seventh and final brother had died. Finally the poor woman died, which led to the question, “In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her” (Matt. 22:28).

---

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, 1:13:1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

As Groothuis argues, this clever argument put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. By their scheme, they attempt to force him to choose between Moses's teaching on the law of levirate marriage, and the concepts of resurrection and the afterlife. They suppose he cannot choose both options, since Moses taught monogamy and not polygamy. Neither could he deny both options and still remain orthodox. Thus they supposed that they had trapped him.

How did Jesus respond to this assault? What was his defense? The Lord responds with an answer—a rational and reasonable answer to their question. Yet he does not answer their question simply or naively. He argues indirectly by addressing their presuppositions. He also answers in such a way to confront their true needs rather than their proposed problem.

The first thing he says is blunt and true—“You are wrong.” He challenges the validity of their theoretical construct. Their thought process is neither correct nor accurate, but is warped and twisted on the presuppositional level. How could they deny the resurrection and the afterlife, and then posit a story based on the resurrection? Furthermore, their presupposition that life after the resurrection will be largely the same as life before that great day is wrong. Such mistaken thinking must be identified, confronted, and rebuked—exactly as Jesus does!

The reason for their mistaken mindset is twofold—they do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God. Although they claim to be wise in their understanding of God's Word, their darkened minds have failed to grasp even the elementary truths of the Scriptures. Certainly the resurrection of the dead is one of the basic teachings of God's Word. Even the Sadducees' truncated canon taught the resurrection of the dead in such passages as Genesis 22:9–13 (cf. Hebrews 11:17–19). Jesus challenged their supposed grasp of the Scriptures—surely this is a presuppositional critique of the Sadducees.

The second problem is that they failed to understand the power of God. While this could be taken in a personal sense—that they failed to experience the power of God in their own lives—it is more likely that Jesus is continuing his attack on their rejection of the resurrection and the afterlife. Scripture states and Jesus demonstrates that “God is able to raise the dead.” Their theology was aberrant in not allowing for life after death, given that God can do whatsoever he chooses—even raise the dead.

Jesus next declares the truth about the state of men and women in the resurrection. They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. He categorically refutes the minor premise of their argument by declaring invalid the assumption that resurrected people will be in a married state. The life to come will be very different from the world we now inhabit. Their supposed dilemma rests upon false foundations.

Going on, Jesus persuasively argues from the Scripture to back up his critique. In other words, he exegetically shows how the Scriptures teach life after death and support the resurrection. Reasoning from God's own statement in Exodus 3:6, Jesus draws a good and necessary inference. Since God said, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”—in the present tense—he must be considered the God of the living. Yet the historical moment when God spoke those words was hundreds of years after the patriarchs had died. How could God declare himself to be the God of those men if they were forever dead and gone? Rather, he is the God of the living as his statement

proves. Therefore, those who die in faith yet live, and everyone who believes in Christ will never die.

It might be argued that the text that Jesus chose from Exodus 3 did not teach the doctrine of the resurrection per se. It explicitly establishes the fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive hundreds of years after their deaths were recorded, and their bodies buried in Machpelah. But the text doesn't "prove" their resurrection from the dead. Here again we see Jesus arguing by presupposition. As D.A. Carson points out:

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection: both body and soul, they held, perish at death. . . . The Sadducees denied the existence of spirits as thoroughly as they denied the existence of angels (Acts 23:8). Their concern was therefore not to choose between immortality and resurrection but between death as finality and life beyond death, whatever its mode.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Jesus is not supplying a proof text as evidence for the validity of the resurrection, but rather giving a presuppositional challenge to the whole fabric of Sadducee theology.

Throughout this encounter, our Savior employs the two-pronged apologetic of Proverbs 26:4–5. Jesus does not answer the foolish Sadducee according to his folly, lest he be like him. Jesus then answers the fool according to his folly, lest that Sadducee be wise in his own eyes.

Despite Geisler and Zukeran's claim to the contrary, the Lord does begin by assuming the Triune God as revealed in Holy Scripture, and then reasoning from that vantage point. This passage, and others like it, show The Lord Defender of the faith employing a thoroughly scriptural apologetic to overthrow his opponents.

It is my sincere hope that my brothers who appreciate presuppositional apologetics will take up this thesis and flesh it out to the vindication of the truth, to the benefit of the church, and to the winning of souls for the kingdom of Christ.

**Brian L. De Jong** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.*

---

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Matthew, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:461–62.

# ServantReading

## Countercultural Spirituality

### A Review Article

---

by Gregory E. Reynolds

*Schaeffer and the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* by William Edgar.  
Wheaton: Crossway, 2013, 206 pages, \$17.99, paper.

*Schaeffer and the Christian Life* is part of a Crossway series titled “The Theologians on the Christian Life,” which “provides accessible introductions to the great teachers on the Christian life gaining wisdom from the past for life in the present.” The series includes: Augustine, Bavinck, Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Edwards, Newton, Luther, Owen, Packer, Warfield, and Wesley. What makes Schaeffer unique is the context in which he taught and lived the Christian life—L’Abri Fellowship, a community where living and learning were intimately connected.

Bill Edgar is well qualified to write on this topic since he became a Christian through Schaeffer’s ministry and lived and worked with the Schaeffers at L’Abri. Edgar himself is an important thinker and apologist in the Reformed tradition.

The book’s ten chapters are divided into three parts. Following Edgar’s “Personal Introduction to Francis Schaeffer” is the first part, “The Man and His Times,” a biographical account. The second part, “True Spirituality,” unpacks Schaeffer’s essential principles of the doctrine of the Christian life. Finally, in part three, “Trusting God for All of Life,” he focuses on prayer and guidance, affliction, life in the church, and engaging the world. Edgar’s personal biographical account is artfully woven into these topics.

Edgar begins with a personal introduction that forms an important ingredient in this account of Schaeffer’s ministry. Edgar first went to L’Abri at the urging of his Harvard professor and friend Harold O. J. Brown at the age of nineteen in 1964 (18–19). He was immediately impressed with the warm welcome he encountered. It was in the context of this inviting and intelligent community that the Lord brought him to genuine faith. He observed that prayer was not a ritual but a reality (22). Here was orthodox Christianity embodied in a true community. Furthermore, Schaeffer exhibited a love for people that attracted them to the love of God (23). “The extraordinary combination of community life and intellectual challenge was essential to the fabric of life in Huémoz” (25).

Schaeffer has often been criticized for simplistic generalization and a lack of academic carefulness. Edgar makes a strong case for his brilliance despite a lack of formal scholarship. He collected “insights from Scripture, people, articles, clippings, and his own hunches” (25).

He had a “nose” for generalizations. Occasionally they were over simple or even mistaken. But mostly he had a sense of what was reasonable and what was not, and would explore his ideas accordingly. He possessed a considerable knowledge of the arts and was able to converse about them or most any other subject with just about anybody who would come across his path. (25–26)

Edgar does not gloss over Schaeffer’s weaknesses, but emphasizes the ideas and practices that readers ought to consider and emulate. Nor is he afraid to discuss controversial aspects of Schaeffer’s thought. He recounts Edmund Clowney’s attempt at a meeting of the minds between Schaeffer and apologist Cornelius Van Til (29). Schaeffer believed Van Til did not give enough place to “evidences in arguments for the Christian faith. Van Til, on the other hand, worried that Schaeffer had slouched toward rationalism” (29). Edgar’s article “Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared”<sup>1</sup> confirms that his appreciation for Schaeffer is not hagiographic. For example, in commenting on the documentary *How Should We Then Live?* which Schaeffer produced with his son, Franky, together with Billy Zeoli of Gospel Films, Edgar observes, “To be honest, it is not the best documentary ever produced. Various portions of it lack professionalism” (33). Yet, as Edgar goes on to say, nothing like this had ever been done in the evangelical world, and its wide viewing in American churches stimulated excellent discussion.

Chapter 2, “The Journey to L’Abri,” is a concise summary of Schaeffer’s development leading up to the L’Abri ministry. It is filled with many interesting and little-known tidbits like, “Machen gave his very last exam to Fran, who had to sit for it by Machen’s sick bed” (45). Most helpful is the array of influences catalogued by Edgar. Van Til, particularly in his critique of Karl Barth, shaped Schaeffer’s thinking about neoorthodoxy (44). While on an exploratory mission for the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1947, Schaeffer either met or heard such luminaries as André Lamorte, Willem Visser’t Hooft, Reinhold Niebuhr, Ole Hallesby, G. C. Berkouwer, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones (49). And then there were the influence and friendship of surgeon C. Everett Koop (50) and art historian Hans Rookmaaker (51).

Edgar’s analysis of Schaeffer’s crisis of faith is very compelling. First, as suggested by biographer Barry Hankins, Schaeffer needed to move beyond the influence of mentor professor Allan MacRae. More significantly, it began to trouble Schaeffer that disagreement among the Reformed was often not seasoned with love. “ ‘The Movement’ was stressing doctrinal gatekeeping at the expense of love” (54). Finally, a letter of sharp rebuke over Schaeffer’s critique of neoorthodoxy from Karl Barth must have troubled him, since Barth censured him for lack of an open mind and a loving attitude (54). These three elements combined to give Schaeffer a lot to think about.

Thus began a struggle to reconsider the very truth of Christianity. Over a number months he concluded that what he had believed was indeed true and began to enjoy a “newfound spiritual reality,” which formed the basis for his book *True Spirituality* (55).

In chapter 3, “L’Abri and Beyond,” the ministry of “The Shelter” is described. At this point especially, the writings of Edith Schaeffer become important. Her story of the founding of the ministry *L’Abri*, her larger history, *Tapestry*, and her family letters, all form an intricate and interesting picture of the life of this community. Its purpose was:

---

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 57–80.

“To show forth by demonstration, in our life and work, the existence of God” (62). Prominent in that life were daily discussions about life’s meaning (61).

The section on Schaeffer’s eclectic, and thus unique, apologetics is a useful summary of the way he approached people with biblical truth (64–67). His understanding of history follows the pattern of decline and fall, à la Edward Gibbons, and thus has its weaknesses, especially in Schaeffer’s identification of the “line of despair.” While I have always found Van Til’s rationalist-irrationalist dynamic approach a better lens through which to view all of history and man’s place in it, Schaeffer does properly identify a shift in the nineteenth-century view of truth.<sup>2</sup> Edgar makes the same point in the final chapter of the book, while suggesting that Schaeffer may have had in mind the shift from modernism to the “postmodern condition” (178). Schaeffer was also prescient in identifying postmodern relativism earlier than most cultural critics. And, although not a strict transcendentalist in apologetic methodology, he did believe in the importance of presuppositions at the foundation of a person’s worldview.

Although he may not have used a fully transcendental method, he had an uncanny way of identifying the contradiction between a person’s basic commitments and that person’s real life, and thus the impossibility of living successfully in God’s world with an unbelieving philosophy. (65)

The most well-known example used by Schaeffer was the inconsistency of the chaotic atonal music of composer John Cage, whose philosophy was that life was “purposeless play,” and the orderly precision with which he picked mushrooms (26).

One area of possible disagreement with Edgar is the degree to which Schaeffer changed his views or emphases throughout his ministry.<sup>3</sup> Edgar tends to minimize the changes. Ken Myers distinguishes between an earlier “bohemian” (hippie) Schaeffer and a later “bourgeois” (activist) Schaeffer.<sup>4</sup> Biographer Barry Hankins contends that Schaeffer’s ministry was not simply divided in two, but that Schaeffer’s strength was to adapt to his environment through three distinct periods in his ministry. In the 1930s and 1940s he was an American Fundamentalist separatist; then during the 1950s and 1960s he was the European Evangelical apologist; and finally in the 1970s and 1980s he returned to America as a Christian Right activist (xiii). I tend to favor this taxonomy. In Edgar’s favor he gives evidence that examples of the activist phase can be seen in the apologetic phase. For example, Schaeffer lectured on theologian Rousas John Rushdoony, favoring his “conservative assessment of the American constitution” (75). Here Edgar does hint at a change in which political themes, while present in the middle phase of ministry became more prominent in his later ministry (75). Furthermore, Edgar reminds us that in the most political of his writings, *A Christian Manifesto* (1981), Schaeffer “carefully warned that ‘we should not wrap Christianity in our national flag’ ” and that in his views on civil

---

<sup>2</sup> Edgar, “Two Christian Warriors,” 70. Edgar cites Robert Knudsen’s balanced assessment of Schaeffer’s view of history. Knudsen acknowledges the shift toward irrationalism in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but wonders why apostate philosophy was any better before the employment of dialectic.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory E. Reynolds, “Francis Schaeffer: Reformed Fundamentalist?” *OS* 18 (2009): 152–58 [*OSO* Oct. 2009], a review article based on Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Ken Myers, “The Bohemian Temptation: Francis Schaeffer and the Agenda of Cultural Apologetics,” (November 2004), 2, 8.

disobedience “he generally sides with the magisterial Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin)” (76).

Clearly the greatest contrast was between the early McIntire Fundamentalist phase and everything that followed. “More than ever, in his later days he insisted that church separation, if necessary, always be conducted with love and forbearance” (77).<sup>5</sup>

Part 2 considers true spirituality proper. The chapter titled “Fundamentals” begins with a quote from Machen, “If our doctrine be true and our lives be wrong, how terrible is our sin! For then we have brought despite upon the truth itself” (81). Schaeffer stressed the utter importance of sanctification, which is the process of growing in acting upon our knowledge of the person and the work of Christ (83).

At the foundation of the Christian life is the authority of the Bible as God’s Word (85). I remember having a conversation with a rebellious minister’s son who said Schaeffer was at heart a Fundamentalist because he believed that the Bible was infallible and that Christianity was the only way to God. I am thankful that Schaeffer never wavered from this core belief and demonstrated that legalism and a lack of biblical love, not biblical authority, were the problems with Fundamentalism.

One of Schaeffer’s great strengths was his “worldview spirituality.” Free of Christian jargon Schaeffer was able to communicate the Christian worldview in seven basic ways. 1) The triune God existed before creation, 2) the visible and invisible universe is God’s creation, 3) the Fall radically changed the course of history, 4) the incarnate Son is central to all biblical truth, 5) people receive Jesus Christ as Savior, once-for-all, by bringing nothing but faith to trust him, 6) the Christian life of sanctification is a process, 7) that process ends in glory (88–91). “All in all,” Edgar concludes, “Schaeffer was a Reformed eclectic” (92).

Schaeffer was above all a biblical realist. He believed that the Bible teaches us the way things really are in the visible and invisible realms, God being the final reality (92–94). “He was deeply concerned to experience the presence of God and then show others the way to live in that same reality” (95).

Among the realities, for Schaeffer, was freedom in the Christian life. Here is where he parted company from Fundamentalism in the sharpest way. But in emphasizing freedom, he did not wander into the perilous territory of antinomianism as the two sections of the thirteenth chapter, *True Spirituality*, reveal: 1) “Freedom Now from the Bonds of Sin,” 2) “Freedom Now from the Results of the Bonds of Sin” (98). The Ten Commandments, therefore “represent the law of love” (99). Growing in sanctification means that we become what God intended us to be as his image bearers (105). Here Edgar perceptively shows that Schaeffer could have used a strong dose of the eschatology of Geerhardus Vos. Schaeffer was unclear that redemption is not a mere restoration, but an eschatological giant step forward in the maturity of God’s image bearer. The new heavens and the new earth are far more than a return to the original Edenic state, but rather a consummation of God’s original purposes beyond Eden, as symbolized in the tree of life (105–6).

In the final chapter of this second section, “Applications,” Edgar fleshes out five implications of true spirituality. While eschewing perfectionism, Schaeffer believed that

---

<sup>5</sup> Schaeffer’s vocal opposition to the merger of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1975 indicates that the separatist impulse had not entirely disappeared.

the separation from self cause by sin can be substantially overcome through the application of the finished work of Christ. But this does not mean that we should take sin lightly. We may achieve practical victory now (110–11). Schaeffer praised John Wesley's serious quest for holiness of life, but he rejected his perfectionism. He was also critical of what he called "cold orthodoxy" in some Reformed people. Although Edgar understands what Schaeffer was getting at, he wisely corrects misunderstanding when he cites the Reformed ideal as "a marvelous marriage of high orthodoxy and warm piety" (112).

A second implication is the importance of the inner life. The centrality of the mind in Schaeffer's view of the Christian life at times "seems an over-reach" observes Edgar. However, he also emphasized that truth is more than merely rational and that even the mind has been effected by sin (113). Although Schaeffer does not comment on the effect of cultural forms in influencing the thought-life in terms of the sociology of knowledge, his emphasis on the importance of community and the church in Christian formation demonstrated that he understood the Christian life to be an embodied life (115).

Along with the importance of living concretely in the present (a third implication), while trusting God, we may also learn from unbelievers. While Schaeffer does not use the term "common grace," he does refer to having common cause on certain issues with unbelievers, that is, "cobelligerence" (117).

After a fourth implication on "substantial healing" psychologically, he concludes with the importance of loving our neighbor. Schaeffer detested the impersonal approach of much evangelical evangelism. He believed that that each person should be treated as a human being, made in God's image (121). Only an authentic spirituality will have any worthwhile effect on the culture in which we live (122).

In Part 3, "Trusting God for All of Life," Edgar covers the major terrain of prayer and guidance, affliction, the church, and the world.

Edgar's devotion of an entire chapter to the subject of prayer is simply a reflection of its importance in Schaeffer's life and ministry. "Besides the intellectual content and warmth of the community, what struck most visitors, including this one, in the early days of L'Abri was that everything was bathed in an atmosphere of prayer" (125). This was especially notable in the writings of Edith Schaeffer, but something that both she and Fran believed to be foundational to the Christian life, and the only explanation for L'Abri's existence, because prayer connects the believer with the "God who is there." Prayer is a constant and urgent necessity (129). But it must not be reduced to a psychological reality (130).

Directly connected with prayer is guidance. The Schaeffers believed that God would guide them in particular situations, not with direct revelation, but by giving them wisdom to act in particular ways (136). This was always mixed with simply trusting God in what they were doing. At times the Schaeffers' approach to funding seems pietistic, but it was probably more a reaction to some of the gimmicky fund raising techniques they had observed and soundly rejected. Furthermore, they did not recommend their way of approaching funding as the only way, but set a profound example of the importance of really trusting God to provide the means of ministry (137).

Edith's book *Affliction*, which articulates the Schaeffers' convictions on this difficult subject, deals in biblical realism, affirming both God's sovereignty and human freedom.

One thing is certain, “evil is utterly real” (142). Schaeffer challenges modern existentialist thinking in his first book, *The God Who Is There* (1968), as Edgar explains:

In a manner suggestive of Cornelius Van Til, Schaeffer states that there are really only two possible explanations for the problem of evil. The first is that evil has a metaphysical cause. That is, our basic problem is our finitude. The other is that it is a moral issue. If our problem truly is a metaphysical one, then we are without hope, for there is no real way out of finitude, and no real cure for cruelty, because there is no way to identify something as cruel or not cruel. (142–43)

For Schaeffer this was a life and death issue. There can be no social justice without absolutes (144). But this denial of the historic Fall, which leaves people stuck in the reality of man in his fallenness, should lead us to compassionate humility. We should weep for sinners. The world the way it is is not normal, Schaeffer insisted (145). While some may think Schaeffer’s Calvinistic diagnosis of humanity’s fallen condition is harsh, “the effect is really just the opposite. The new theology’s approach and the pantheistic response, in which evil is an illusion, are in fact the cruel ones, offering no way out” (146). This aspect of Schaeffer’s apologetic is one of his greatest strengths.

The penultimate chapter deals with life in the church. While Schaeffer’s ecclesiology was not perfect, nor was it systematically articulated, he was seeking the church’s return to spiritual authenticity. He called the church to do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way, which is the title of one of his most famous sermons. He criticized the American church for compromising its identity with middle class affluence and lifestyle (148). He was also critical of the church’s lack of appreciation for beauty in worship and everyday life. He demonstrated that orthodoxy and creativity are not at odds (149–50). Furthermore, the church is a community of loving fellowship in which honest questions may be asked and should be answered, where genuine love is exhibited, especially through the exercise of forgiveness as an attitude toward others, and the ability to deal graciously with differences (151–54).

The message of the church must be biblical truth. “For Schaeffer, liberal theology resulted from following the trends in secular culture, only using religious language to express them” (155). “True truth,” a Schaeffer coinage, was central to his quest for reform. Ever since the Western world had crossed the “line of despair,” especially with the synthetic dialectical approach of philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, truth became relative (156). So Schaeffer believed that it was important to make sure people understand what we mean by truth as we set forth the claims of historic Christianity. Otherwise faith is meaningless (157).

While Schaeffer was not a theonomist, he did believe that the Mosaic civil law provides “a pattern and a base” for modern countries. Edgar observes that Schaeffer is less supersessionist than the Westminster Confession, which refers to the expiration of the Mosaic civil laws (159). Thus, I would contend, when back in the American context, he became something of a moderate transformationist.

For the structure of the church Schaeffer believed that there must be freedom within the bounds of biblical form (160–61). Edgar goes on to enumerate eight “structural norms that govern the visible church” in Schaeffer’s thinking (161–63). “His main interest . . . is minimalism, that is, finding a few rules so as not to bind the Holy Spirit’s work in giving

us freedom. . . . liberty to innovate wherever the Scripture does not speak” (163). The international church he helped found in 1954 was essentially New School Presbyterianism, although Edgar does not use this historical label for what he describes. I would agree with Edgar’s plea that we should not evaluate Schaeffer’s work by his ecclesiology, as Edgar suggests that Schaeffer was a revivalist and an evangelist first and foremost. But perhaps the Old School’s stricter ecclesiology, which does not compromise its principles in the face of the exigencies of the mission field, would have made a very good thing even better. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has sought to do this in both the foreign and home mission fields.

The book concludes with Schaeffer’s engagement with the modern world. Schaeffer helped liberate many from the Bible believing church’s separatist disdain for cultural and creative activity. The Schaeffers embraced the natural and eschewed plastic. Creativity in everyday life was encouraged. Edith’s book *Hidden Art* beautifully portrayed and encouraged such a life. For those raised with these values, acquired by common grace, it was very important to learn that the Bible didn’t require us to reject those sensibilities (167–69).

Under the heading “Revolutionary Christianity,” Edgar compares and contrasts Schaeffer with Kuyper, but most helpful is his description of Schaeffer’s revolutionary Christianity. First, it must be “hot,” as Marshall McLuhan defined that term. Rather than the cool, suggestive, subliminal messages of Madison Avenue, it must communicate simply and directly the historical, factual truth of the Bible (172–73). Edgar mistakenly claims that McLuhan “touted” cool communication (173), whereas he was actually a critic; after *The Mechanical Bride* he claimed to be a mere observer of culture, simply seeking to navigate the new electronic world, and not a critic. Second, revolutionary Christianity must be compassionate. Schaeffer was especially concerned with racism among white evangelicals (174–75).

Schaeffer believed that the world could only be effectively transformed through revival and reformation. He often cited the social benefits that the revivals of Wesley and Whitefield produced. Reformation itself is a deeper transformation of culture (175). For Schaeffer did not envision a theocracy but a cultural consensus that respected God’s law (176). Edgar points out that Schaeffer’s contrast between the benefits of the Reformation and the liabilities of the Renaissance, which depended heavily on Jacob Burckhardt’s historiography, has been challenged by recent historians (176, n. 33).

Edgar’s section titled “Revival and Reformation” is a very helpful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Schaeffer’s apologetic, especially his critique of the situation on this side of what Schaeffer called “the line of despair.” Schaeffer’s main burden was to prophesy against the decline in Western civilization (177). Rather than placing religion at the center of this decline, as Abraham Kuyper did (171), he begins with philosophy (178). Science comes next, with existentialism and art following close behind (179). Then society itself breaks down. Edgar points out the difficulty of verifying Schaeffer’s taxonomy of decline, especially in the arts (179). However Schaeffer’s analysis of particular problematic themes, such as relativism and the dangers of social engineering, has proved very helpful in alerting the church to its need of developing critical skills. Schaeffer, unlike Van Til was a non-academic cultural critic and prophet, not an academic philosophical apologist.

Edgar points out that while Schaeffer was not fully Kuyparian in his approach, they did share the recognition of “the need for every portion of life to be redeemed” (181). He goes on to briefly describe Schaeffer’s application of this idea to the spheres of family, business, the arts, the sciences, and politics (182–86). Schaeffer was “remarkably prescient about the contextualization in the arts,” encouraging artists to develop a style “appropriate to one’s own culture” (183). Regarding politics Edgar observes, “Because he is a prophet, not a social analyst, Schaeffer’s material borders on the alarmist” (185). But in the end Schaeffer is most concerned generally about “the increasing loss of humanness.” Schaeffer never wanted people to “be divided into a spiritual and a secular self” (186). While I balk at the idea of redeeming anything but people, I think Schaeffer was speaking in a more general way about thinking and living as Christians in every arena of life, rather than seeking to make the arena of life Christian.

What we should take away from the Schaeffers’ teaching and example, and indeed from the ongoing work of L’Abri around the world, is that Christ is Lord of all of life, and because of that, there is no realm of life not subject to our scrutiny and to our calling as Christians in the world. For many, this message and this practice represent what is so wonderful, so exciting, about the Schaeffer legacy. (187)

The afterword concludes with six essential aspects of this legacy (189–92). 1) “He loved his family.” 2) “He was passionate about serving the Lord.” 3) “Cultural interests and pursuits” are an important part of life. 4) He had the “uncanny ability to look deeply into a person’s heart” in order to “carry out the principles of presuppositional apologetics in actual practice.” 5) His “greatest spiritual rediscovery was the present value of the blood of Christ.” 6) “He cared very deeply about human beings.” Schaeffer was not without his faults. “He was human, very human, in the worst way and the very best way . . . Truly, Francis Schaeffer’s life was authentic, and his legacy will endure. He was no little person” (192).

This lovely book is the best all around introduction to the life and ministry of Francis Schaeffer of which I am aware. Edgar’s personal knowledge of Schaeffer along with his critical assessment of his life, ministry, and thought provide a thorough primer on Schaeffer. What Schaeffer set out to do, and what the Lord molded him to achieve, was truly remarkable. Edgar captures this in a most admirable composite of what made him what he was—a spokesman, uniquely suited to our generation of confused radicals, and who introduced so many to the Reformed tradition. For this I am in his eternal debt.

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

# ServantReading

## Renaissance by Os Guinness

---

by William Edgar

*Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*, by Os Guinness. Downers Grove: IVP, 2014, 187 pages, \$16.00, paper.

The astonishing breadth of Os Guinness's knowledge of history, trends, and biblical truth is only exceeded by the boldness, indeed the urgency, of his proposal: "These bones can live" (Ezek. 37:5–6). Why would an appeal to God's resurrection power be bold or urgent? Because of what Guinness describes in the pages of the book. The first chapter appeals to us to recognize our "Augustinian Moment." Just as Augustine was active during the collapse of the Roman Empire, so are we alive at a time of transition, living as we do "in the twilight of five hundred years of Western dominance of the world" (22). Guinness argues that the West has become post-Christian. It is characterized by "advanced modernity." Despite the unquestioned advantages of science, globalization, and technology that advanced modernity brings to us, these very advances, with their Christian underpinnings gone, have been powerful instruments for the secularization of the church. The salt and light that the church once brought to civilization have been removed. What about the Global South? Whereas there is extraordinary growth of the Christian presence in the Global South, for which we may be very grateful, the liability there is that the impact of the Christian faith is often "a mile wide and an inch deep" (36). And because modernity will inevitably steamroll its way into the Global South, the church there may be ill-prepared to face its distorting power.

Guinness has described the wet-blanket of modernity in a number of his previous books. Here he underscores the fatal temptation of evaluating things with "measurable outcomes." He quotes former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg as saying, "In God we trust; all others bring metrics" (39). As a seminary professor, I am particularly sensitive to this critique, because in the years since I began my career I have seen various institutions whose putative call is to train ministers increasingly subject themselves to trends, measurable goals, large administrative staffs, strategic plans, and ever-improving computer technology. Guinness never suggests these are bad in themselves. But he states the obvious: you can measure the enormous tonnage of sheep and oxen sacrificed in Solomon's temple, but not what made God say he was sick of them (43).

How can all this change? The simple answer is the gospel, God's power unto salvation. The historical verification of this is what Guinness calls the two great missions to the West. They were completely unlikely, even impossible to human eyes. But they happened. The first was the conversion of the Roman Empire, followed by the taming of European barbarians by the cross of Christ. At the "Augustinian Moment" the Christian faith was moving from becoming merely legal (under Constantine) to becoming predominant (in the early Middle Ages). The second was when the "Irish saved civilization," in the language of Thomas Cahill. St. Columbanus and many others who loved the Bible rekindled the nearly extinguished light of culture to the European Continent. Eventually followed the

Reformation, the Awakenings, and the reforms against slavery, poor health care, and racism, led by believers such as William Wilberforce, Florence Nightingale, and Martin Luther King Jr. (49–50).

Guinness challenges us to engage in a third mission to the West. Such a mission would address issues such as secularization, pollution, civil disharmony, consumerism, Islam, and so many more. In short, Guinness calls us to look for a renaissance. He carefully explains that he is not inviting us to a return to the Renaissance which began at the *quattrocento*, which, though glorious, was only partly Christian. He likes this term because it literally means *rebirth*. If we so chose we could use other equivalents, such as renewal, reformation, restoration, revival (29). One of the great virtues of this book is that at no point does the author give us a method on producing a Christian culture. In fact, the kingdom of God most often leads to cultural benefits as a by-product rather than from a direct program (107). This reviewer would have been interested to know if Os Guinness has ever spent time seriously interacting with Abraham Kuyper, Klaas Schilder, or other so-called neo-Calvinists. While some of his emphases strongly resemble them, his language is less directly theological, and certainly less philosophical than theirs, which is not to say it is less learned.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is its balance between a devastating critique of modern cultural trends and a humble dependence on the Lord. He constantly warns against triumphalism, or trying to achieve results by strategies and five-year plans. He points out that the gospel came to Europe not by missions tactics, but by special supernatural intervention. “When that unknown rabbi (Paul) crossed unheralded from Troas to Philippi at the orders of the Spirit of God, it made more impact on world history than even the great sea battle of Actium a few miles away, the battle that settled the fate of the Roman Empire after the assassination of Julius Caesar” (102). This is not to say we do nothing, or “let go and let God.” Rather, what we *do* is to live faithfully before God, to respond against injustice, to create beautiful music, lift up the family, fight for life, etc.

Os Guinness proclaims *hope* throughout this text. God will not forget his purposes. The darkest hour is just before dawn. If we look first to be living-out the priorities of God’s kingdom, we can then wait for God to move. How and when he will do it are not easy to say, nor should we expend a great deal of energy doing so. But he will. The last chapter in the book is *An Evangelical Manifesto*. The brief document is a call to Evangelicals (in this case, particularly American Evangelicals) to reassert their proper biblical identity in the light of the various confusions and corruptions which plague them. The document is a robust appeal to be truly faithful to Christ as he is presented in the Scriptures. He asks that we be neither privatized nor politicized (171). He asks that the public square be civil, not “naked” (173). He asks that we follow the way of Jesus, not of Constantine, particularly in the light of the two great threats of *coercive secularism* on the one side and *religious extremism* on the other (174).

One added bonus in the book is that each chapter ends with a powerful prayer, and then with discussion questions. A good use of it thus could be in small groups, which could read a chapter, pray over the issues, and apply the contents to their lives using the discussion questions. This marvelous book represents a summation of the years of study, reflection, and engagement that Os Guinness has lived. I would urge everyone concerned about the trends in the world, in the church, and in their souls, to read it and find themselves galvanized by Christian hope.

**William Edgar** is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America serving as Professor of Apologetics and Ethics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

# ServantReading

## Science as God's Work: Abraham Kuyper's Perspective on Science

A review article

---

by Douglas A. Felch

*Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, by Abraham Kuyper.  
Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman. Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011,  
191 pages, \$14.99, paper.

### Introduction: Framing the Issue

#### The Supposed Conflict between Christianity and Science

John William Draper, in his *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), asserted that the history of science “is a narrative of the conflict between two contending powers, the expansive force of the human intellect on the one side, and the compression arising from traditional faith, particularly Catholicism, on the other.”<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Dickson White, in his *The History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), reinforced this view. White argued that religious intervention in science has always been detrimental to both science and religion, although he thought Protestantism and Catholicism both shared equal blame.<sup>2</sup>

Science historians David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers contest these claims, arguing instead that “recent scholarship has shown the warfare metaphor to be neither useful nor tenable in describing the relationship between science and religion.”<sup>3</sup> James Moore concurs. He believes that the warfare metaphor has not only outlived its usefulness but “has made historians ‘prisoners of war’ by preventing a more objective and subtle reassessment of the relationship between science and faith.”<sup>4</sup> Despite these correctives,

---

<sup>1</sup> John William Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874; repr., New York: D. Appleton, 1897), vi.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, (New York: D. Appleton, 1896; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 1:130.

<sup>3</sup> David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, “Beyond War and Peace: A Reappraisal of the Encounter between Christianity and Science,” *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* 39 (September 1987): 141.

<sup>4</sup> James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinist Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 48.

the warfare metaphor persists and many Christians and non-Christian alike view science as being on a collision course with historic Christianity.

In the context of this debate, Abraham Kuyper offers an alternative perspective that is as simple as it is profound: You can't drive a wedge between science and God because science is not simply a human enterprise. It is, first and foremost, a work of God, rooted in the divine decree, and manifested in the providential unfolding of history. Kuyper defends this thesis in a series of magazine articles on common grace, recently translated and published under the title *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art* (hence *WAW*). This review will focus on his discussion of science.

## Abraham Kuyper's Life and Work (1837–1920)

### Recent Interest in Kuyper's Thought

Renewed interest in thought of Abraham Kuyper has produced a number of books, translations, and articles on his life and work.<sup>5</sup> *WAW* is the first fruit of a larger-scale Kuyper Translation Project beginning with the publication of his writings on common grace.

The name Abraham Kuyper is well-known within the Reformed and Presbyterian community for his Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898 (subsequently published as *Lectures on Calvinism*).<sup>6</sup> His is a household name within the Dutch Reformed community, and his intellectual legacy has been disseminated to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church through the writings of Dr. Cornelius Van Til (who freely admitted his debt to Kuyper), and by those who have sought to continue the work of Kuyper and Van Til in the area of Christian worldview, apologetics, and epistemology.

### Abraham Kuyper, the Man

Some have described Kuyper as a nineteenth-century “reincarnation” of John Calvin. That's an exaggeration, but there is no question that he was a genius and a man of many talents. Kuyper was a theologian, a university professor, a preacher and pastor, and a man of deep personal piety. He was also a prolific writer, and his literary output was staggering. He produced approximately 2,200 devotions and over 20,000 newspaper articles. A published annotated bibliography contains 692 pages of listings.<sup>7</sup>

He was also a Christian activist. He established Christian newspapers, developed Christian labor unions to address the plight of the worker, and was involved extensively in politics. That involvement eventually led to his becoming the Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901–5).

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, James D. Bratt, ed. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); Jan De Bruijn, *Abraham Kuyper: A Pictorial Biography*, trans. Dagmare Houniet (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); James E. McGoldrick, *Abraham Kuyper: God's Renaissance Man* (Darlington, England and Carlisle PA: Evangelical Press, 2000); Richard Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). Delivered at Princeton University in 1898 under the auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation.

<sup>7</sup> Tjitze Kuypers, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography, 1857–2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Finally, he was also a man of great personal intensity. He experienced three nervous collapses or breakdowns in the course of his life, and could at times be extremely authoritarian and unkind towards his adversaries. This reminds us both that genius can be a hard stewardship and that we bear the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels.

## **Four Primary Elements of Kuyper's Thought**

To facilitate the discussion of Kuyper's treatment of science in *WAW*, it is helpful to survey the four core concepts of his thought for the benefit those who may be unfamiliar with them.

**1. The Lordship of Christ over All of Creation.** Kuyper summoned Christians to acknowledge the universal Lordship of Christ over all of life, culture, and society. This is captured in his oft-cited declaration, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"<sup>8</sup> Jesus is not only the savior of souls (although he certainly is that), but also the king over the earth and all that it contains. This emphasis on the sovereign Lordship of Christ over all creation and Kuyper's attempt to develop its implications for all of life is the engine that drives much of his work.

**2. Principial Psychology.** Everything that a person believes or does emanates from root principles or fundamental commitments that comprise the way he or she looks at the world. This means everyone has a worldview. It also implies that no one's understanding or perspective on the world is value-free or religiously neutral. There are no uninterpreted facts. Every object of study involves a perspective. This is why Kuyper is often considered the founding father of Christian worldview.

**3. Sphere Sovereignty.** A sphere is a societal institution, an area of life, or a dimension of existence in our society. Examples include family, church, education, government, science, and art, just to name a few. These spheres are structures embedded in the fabric of the creation according to God's purposes and governed by different rules of his making. This makes them independent from each other and "sovereign" in their own sphere. It also means that the rules governing one sphere ought not be confused with another (e.g., you should not run a family like a business, or the church like the government), and one sphere should not dominate another.

**4. The Principle of Antithesis.** Kuyper refers to the opposition in this world between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom since the Fall as the "Antithesis." This conflict is not between the church and the other spheres (which might result in a sacred/secular distinction). It pertains to the battleground that emerges within each sphere as Christian and non-Christian worldviews offer rival perspectives on art, science, education, business, etc. Indeed, it becomes our responsibility to develop a Christian worldview perspective in the various spheres of life.

### **Kuyper's View of Science**

#### **1. In His Other Writings**

---

<sup>8</sup> James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

Kuyper left no systematic treatise on science. Much of his thinking must be gleaned from a number of his writings.<sup>9</sup> Kuyper's views on evolution are mentioned in the Ratzsch article, and spelled out in his rectoral address, "Evolution." In that address, while Kuyper appears open on the question as to whether God might have used some divinely guided process to bring about life in all of its variety and complexity, he completely and unrelentingly excoriates naturalistic evolution.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that "science" for Kuyper has a broader referent than simply the natural sciences, and would include other forms of *scientia* or knowledge that have been a part of human discovery. Nevertheless, what he says about "science" and most of the examples he chooses, are directly applicable to what we would normally think of as natural science.

## **2. In His Discussion in *Wisdom and Wonder***

In a nutshell, Kuyper argues (a) that science is a realm of human endeavor independent of church or state; (b) that it is a God-authored enterprise entrusted to human beings as his image-bearers; (c) that it unfolds in history through the work of a community of scientists, according to God's eternal and providential purpose; (d) that it generates true and useful knowledge through common grace despite the effects of sin on the endeavor; (e) that it is a spiritual activity governed by thinking and not reducible to materialistic empiricism; (f) that it is subject to worldview considerations that differentiate Christian and non-Christian science, and (g) that the need to develop a Christian perspective on science suggests the importance of establishing Christian educational institutions in which Christian science can flourish unhampered.

## **Kuyper's Treatment of Science in the First Five Chapters of *Wisdom and Wonder***

### **Chapter 1: Wisdom**

#### **The Independent and Divine Nature of Science**

Consistent with his concept of "sphere sovereignty," Kuyper insists on the independent character of science: that it must stand on its own as a discipline and "may not be encumbered with any external chains" (*WAW* 33). This level of autonomy is not an accident of history or development, but science "possesses this independence by divine

---

<sup>9</sup> His discussion of science in *Principles of Sacred Theology* is nicely summarized in a journal article by Del Ratzsch, "Abraham Kuyper's Philosophy of Science." *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (1992): 277–302. The 1898 Stone Lectures, published as *Lectures on Calvinism*, contain lectures on a variety of subjects, including science and art. These lectures are commented on by Peter Heslam in *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). A helpful commentary on some of the material translated in *WAW* is provided by Clifford Blake Andrews, "A Canopy of Grace: Common and Particular Grace in Abraham Kuyper's Philosophy of Science." *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24:1 (2003), 122–40.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Kuyper, "Evolution" (Free University Rectoral Address delivered 1899), trans. and repr. *Calvin Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (1996): 11–50.

design” and would abandon its divine calling if it surrendered this independence to either church or state (34–35).

Further, says Kuyper, science has its roots in the creation (35). Even if there had been no sin, there would have been science although its development would obviously have been different (35). It is as much a part of the creation order as are marriage, family, or the Sabbath. But because it is of the creation it has a calling separate from either church or state (35).

### **Science and Image-bearing**

Science depends on the ability of human beings, who bear his image, to think God’s thought after him (36). God is the primal thinker who through the divine decree has imbued all created things with a wisdom that reflects his own independent thought (36–38). There is nothing in the universe that fails to express or to incarnate the revelation of God’s thought (39):

The whole creation is nothing but the visible curtain behind which radiates the exalted working of this divine thinking. Even as the child at play observes your pocket watch, and supposes it to be no more than a golden case and a dial with moving hands, so too the unreflective person observes in nature and in the entire creation nothing other than the external appearance of things.

By contrast, you know better. You know that behind the watch’s dial, the hidden work of springs and gears occurs, and that the movement of the hands across the dial is caused by that hidden working.

So, too, everyone instructed by the Word of God knows, in terms of God’s creation, that behind that nature, behind that creation, a hidden, secret working of God’s power and wisdom is occurring, and that only thereby do things operate as they do. They know as well that this working is not an unconscious operation of a languidly propelled power, but the working of a power that is being led by *thinking*. (39–40)

This thought of God, which brings about the development of all things, is directed toward a purpose and a goal according to fixed rules. As a result, all of creation has proceeded from the thought, consciousness, and Word of God, as established by his divine decree (40).

Not all creatures possess the capacity to rethink the thought of God, not even angels, but only humans (40). As image-bearers of God, they possess the ability of discerning the wisdom embedded in the creation. This ability is not an add-on, but belongs to the foundation of human nature itself (41). Kuyper summarizes:

In this way, then, we obtain three truths that fit together: First, the full and rich clarity of God’s thoughts existed in God from eternity. Second, in the creation God has revealed, embedded, and embodied a rich fullness of his thoughts. And Third, God created in human beings, as his imagebearers, the capacity to understand, to grasp, to reflect and to arrange within a totality these thoughts expressed in the creation. The essence of human science rests on these three realities. (41–42)

### **Science as a Communal Activity**

However, this work is not assigned to every human being. The breadth of this task is far too great for that and the capacity of individual persons much too limited. It is realized only in the combination of the talents bestowed upon specific persons in the course of history (42).

Science in this exalted sense originates only through the cooperation of many people, advances only gradually in the generations that come on the scene, and thus only gradually acquires the stability and that rich content which guarantee it an independent existence, and begins to appear only in this more general form as an influence in life. At the same time from this it follows directly that Science can acquire significance only with the passing of centuries, and will be able to develop in its richest fullness only at the end of time. (44)

### **Science as a Temple of Knowledge Created by God**

Kuyper uses the metaphor of temple building to describe how the scientific enterprise, guided by God, results in the beautiful construction of an edifice of knowledge:

Science is not the personally acquired possession of each person, but gradually increased in significance and stability only as the fruit of the work of many people among many nations, in the course of centuries. . . . Working separately from one another, without any mutual agreement and without the least bit of direction from other people, with every body milling about, everyone going their own way, each person constructs science as he thinks right. Through that endless confusion . . . a temple emerges. . . . At this point it will not do to suggest that this most beautiful result emerged by accident, without plan, all by itself. Rather we must confess that God himself developed his own divine plan for this construction. . . . (45–46)

Seen this way, however, science is then also an invention of God, which he called into being, causing it to travel its paths of development in the manner he himself had ordained for it. What does this mean except to say and to confess with gratitude that God himself called Science into being as his creature, and accordingly that Science occupies its own independent place in our human life. (46)

## **Chapter 2: Knowledge**

In this chapter Kuyper examines how we can embrace with confidence the knowledge produced by this divinely authored task discharged by his image-bearing agents. This might seem counter-intuitive given both that Scripture often condemns human knowledge and, reciprocally, the way many scientists criticize Scripture and Christian belief (49–50). But while Scripture condemns knowledge that is falsely called such, it distinguishes between true and false knowledge and inspires love and respect for the former (50). False knowledge arises because of sin, which lures and tempts people to place science outside of a relationship with God, thereby stealing science from God, and ultimately turning science against him (51). Nonetheless, no one can deny that in the disciplines of astronomy, botany, zoology, physics, etc., a rich science is blossoming. Although being

conducted almost exclusively by people who are strangers to the fear of the Lord, this science has nevertheless produced a treasury of knowledge that, by common grace, we as Christians ought to admire and gratefully use (52–53):

Consequently, we are confronting the fact that outside the Christian orbit a science has blossomed that, seen from one angle, supplied us with genuine and true knowledge and yet, seen from another angle, has led to a philosophy of life and a worldview that run directly contrary to the truth of God's Word. Or, to state it differently, we are really confronting a science that has arisen from the world, a science that lies very definitely under the dominion of sin and that nevertheless, on the other hand, may boast of results from which sin's darkening is virtually absent. We can explain this only by saying that although sin does indeed spread its corruption, nevertheless common grace has intervened in order to temper and restrain this operation of sin. (53)

It is clear that Adam originally possessed the ability to think and understand the world as a coherent whole (e.g., naming the animals) (57). It is this coherence that Kuyper believes that empirical science has lost and needs to recover (59).

### **Chapter 3: Wonder**

Since sin has affected our ability to perceive the systematic unity of things, this has led secular science post-fall to attempt to make science simply a matter of objective empirical observation. Kuyper believes this to be a mistake. Science is more than what can be objectively weighed and measured. By removing subjectivity from science you reduce the higher work of the mind (thinking) that comes from making sense of our observations in an integrative way:

We will sense how deeply this penetrates the essence of science when we consider that science without reflection is unimaginable, yet *thinking* itself is a spiritual activity. The very instrument that serves as a trowel in the construction of the edifice of science belongs not to the external but to the invisible, and the law governing this thinking can never be discovered through hearing, seeing, measuring, or weighing, but manifests itself in the human spirit. The contradiction arises immediately that our thinking cannot help but enquire about the *origin*, the *coherence*, and the *destiny* of things, whereas observation neither can or does teach us anything about these. (68–69)

### **Chapter 4: Sin**

The attempt to remove the subjective element from science elevates the material over against the spiritual (which includes thinking). In response, Kuyper asserts the need for the autonomy of the spiritual to be preserved over against the material. In support of this he makes two points:

First, by preserving the religious worldview perspective people obtain a larger unity, harmony, and coherence of life that is not obtained by simply observing data. Failure to do so not only draws people away from God, but also results in the destruction of the personal self as nothing more than matter in motion:

Neglecting already at one's starting point to maintain the independence of the spirit over against *matter* will eventually lead one, by the time the destination is reached, from worshiping man ultimately to idolizing the material. Applying the scientific method to the higher sciences makes it impossible to maintain the independence of the spirit. Any science choosing this route will wander further and further away from God, and will finally deny him entirely. In this connection the scientific researcher who takes his starting point in the world around him, and stakes his honor on grasping for neutral objectivity, is doomed by his very method to seeing the independent existence of his own ego finally perish. This is why we are insisting so vigorously that the subjective starting point once again be honored in science. (77)

Second, we need to consider the scriptural emphasis on common grace if we are to pursue scientific academic study that provides genuine knowledge and insight about the way things really are beyond the knowledge that leads to salvation:

It is of highest importance, however, that we place clearly in the foreground the fact that this strengthening [of the light of common grace] came from special revelation. Had it been the case that special revelation restricted itself to only what, strictly speaking, concerns the salvation of the sinner, and ignored the rest, we would lack the requisite data for building a temple of science that rested on a Christian foundation (83).

### **Chapter 5: Education**

In this final chapter Kuyper provides his apologetic and vision for Christian higher education. The worldview forces that draw a contrast between Christianity and secular science are only going to intensify, and the desire on the part of secular science to remove Christianity entirely from the realm of science will only increase. This, argues, Kuyper, is the engine that ought to drive Christians to develop Christian institutions of higher learning:

Confessing Christianity cannot suffice with its faith-confession, but like every human being, the Christian also needs a certain understanding of the world in which he dwells. If for this he receives no guidance from a Christian science, then he can and will have no choice but to adopt the results of unbelieving science. In so doing he lives with a world-and-life-view that does not fit his faith, but one that irreconcilably contradicts his confession at numerous points. . . . That destroys the unity of his thinking, and also weakens his power. The inevitable result is that gradually his faith begins to yield to his scientific view, and without noticing it, he slips into the unbelieving mode of viewing the world. (93–4)

Kuyper's description of the rise of secular science seems, in retrospect, almost prophetic. But for Kuyper, while on the one hand, this development is to be lamented, on the other hand, the pressure it exerts has the potential desirable effect of forcing thinkers to do what they ought to be doing anyway—developing a Christian perspective on learning and higher education:

With escalating determination, unbelieving science substitutes a completely atheistic worldview for ours, and makes our continued lodging in her tents increasingly impossible. This, after all, is how it will increasingly press Christians to take a stand within their own territory. And what Christianity would never have done on its own impulse it will finally accomplish under the pressure of an increasingly bold unbelief that denies all that is sacred. All of this means that Christians will begin to perceive the inexorable need to begin pursuing science independently on the basis of their own principles, leading them to strive for a university life that honors the mystery of all wisdom and all science in Christ. (103–4)

### **Assessment**

What should we make of this? On the one hand, it must be admitted that Kuyper is painting with a broad brush which makes it difficult to know how precisely to translate his vision into particular implications and applications of what might constitute a Christian view of science or “Christian science” which he is advocating. On the other hand, Kuyper’s discussion of science in *WAW* reminds us of two items of immense and immediate value for current discussions of the tension between Christianity and secular science.

First, it forcefully asserts that the work of science is ultimately God’s work, rooted in the divine decree, grounded in the creation order, and providentially unveiled in the course of human history. This is a much needed and powerful antidote to the simplistic notions of conflict between science and the Christian faith often raised today. Although sin (and the apostate motives it brings) has complicated the development of science, we should not for a moment yield to the temptation of viewing science as the work of Satan and his minions. It is God who in the cultural mandate commands the human race to engage God’s world and develop its potentials. We must never forget this, and we ought to encourage our sons and daughters who are so gifted to engage in scientific vocations as *Christian* vocations. It is *sin*, not *science*, that is the problem.

Second, it reminds us of the significance of worldview assumptions in discussions related to science. Kuyper is keenly aware of the importance of presuppositions in the work of Christian science and secular science respectively. The former understands the world to be governed by an infinite-personal God who has endued the creation with wisdom, order, and latent potentials, and who has given to human beings the capacity of discerning that wisdom and developing those potentials. The secularist denies this, and asserts that there is no God, that nature is all there is. This naturalistic worldview, more often than not, reduces the world to nothing more than matter in motion—with devastating consequences. As Kuyper wisely points out, it leads not only to the loss of purpose, but the loss of the personhood, the loss of the self. But note well: This is not a science-faith conflict, it is a faith-faith conflict in which naturalism has pitted itself against theism. While science and faith are not at war, naturalism and theism, as rival worldview perspectives, most certainly are. Kuyper is keenly aware of this antithesis in the sphere of science.

Understanding the importance of presuppositions helps to distinguish things that differ. That is why, on the one hand, Kuyper can be open to the concept of evolution, and even say nice things about the genius of Darwin, while at the same time be implacably opposed to and devastatingly critical of the naturalistic evolution Darwin advocates.

The Kuyper Translation Society and the Acton Institute have done the Christian and Reformed world a great service by making available, in new and fresh translations, Kuyper's works on common grace. If you are interested in learning more, this brief introductory work is a wonderful place to begin in anticipation of additional volumes to follow.

**Douglas A. Felch** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as professor of theological studies at Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

# ServantReading

## China's Reforming Churches *edited by Bruce P. Baugus*

---

by Mitchell R. Herring

*China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*, edited by Bruce P. Baugus. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014, xii + 336, \$20.00, paper.

*China's Reforming Churches* grew out of the China's Reforming Churches Conference, held in College Park, Maryland, from January 2–4, 2013. It is an engrossing read not only for those concerned about China, or even missiology, but also for those committed to the Reformed faith and to how its distinctives and dynamics impact church and society in the unique historical, political, and cultural context of China. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the Reformed faith is universally relevant in carrying out the Great Commission. Right from the introduction, the editor's deep conviction comes across concerning the "rich biblical and theological resources of the Reformed tradition and Presbyterian polity" (1), a theme which is repeated in various places throughout the text.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of Christian believers in China over the last few decades. Part of that growth has been built on the work of early Presbyterian and Reformed missions in China, which is covered in the first part of the book. This is a necessary and helpful inclusion, as this history has tended to get lost in the accounts of Chinese church growth during the last several decades. Even the history of earlier periods has tended to focus, not without merit, on the labors of Chinese evangelists and church leaders, such as Wang Mingdao and John Sung, as well as those of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission. But how many of us were aware, for instance, that the term "Three-Self," the government organization of officially recognized and supervised churches since the early 1950s, actually originated with nineteenth-century Presbyterian missionary to China John Nevius, as a sound model for indigenous church planting?

The book goes on to offer an overview of Presbyterian and Reformed work in China today. Western misconceptions (and there are quite a few) about the Chinese church and its political and cultural context are dealt with. We see the distinctives of the Reformed faith spelled out regarding their relevance to the "on the ground" experience of Chinese church and culture today, particularly as they impact the life of the church and offer authentic biblical witness to the broader culture around her, under an authority that is still officially atheist. A particularly fascinating account of this experience is a conversation with two of China's leading reformers—one of whom is known to me—as they speak of the current state of church and society, the role of Reformed theology, efforts to develop an indigenous Presbyterian church polity, and the impact they foresee of Reformed Christianity on the wider society.

Another theme stressed throughout the book is that of great challenge and difficulty, yet through which there is also much opportunity, evident in the essay on the endemic social

conditions in China today. The book contains several essays on the importance of church government, including a thoughtful study and insightful reflection on the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, from which observations are drawn with implications not only for the church in China, but everywhere.

Finally, there is an overview of Christian publishing and theological education in China, both areas with which I am involved. It is suggested that, notwithstanding the establishment of Christian schools and hospitals of a bygone era, past neglect of Christian publishing, i.e., the publishing of solid, substantial books in Chinese, has cost the church dearly. Surprisingly, the greatest obstacle to such publishing today is not the government, but lack of funds. What is needed is both accurate translation of solid theological works and the development of indigenous scholarship. The rise of Reformed “house-church” seminaries, while still in a formative stage, is an encouraging development to this end, as well as for the building of the church, yet not without its own restrictions and challenges. It is emphasized more than once that opportunities are before us and they are now; and owing to the political and social climate in China, things could change very quickly. Yet Chinese church reformers are growing stronger and are gently and respectfully pressing forward.

In summary, not all that was presented at the conference is presented here, and not all presented here was presented at the conference. The book is offered, however, as an extension to the conference, especially valuable to those such as myself who desired but were unable to attend, as well as a summary for those who were present. The stand-out themes are clear and relevant to all: the rich biblical and theological resources of the Reformed tradition and Presbyterian polity; circumstances that are at once formidable barriers but also present unprecedented opportunities; the need for biblical church polity in an environment of rapid increase in the number of believers, as essential for church growth and work of the Great Commission; and finally, the ultimate goal—the long-term development of the church and church leaders, and indigenization of Reformed Christianity in China and throughout the world.

God has revealed the eternal truth of the gospel and mandated a corresponding polity for the church. Yet as one of the contributors put it, “our aim is not constitutional regularity” or “mechanical perfection” for its own sake. These have no power in themselves to prosper the church. This is the Spirit’s work. It is to him, not to procedures, we must look as the source of the church’s life and blessing” (242), even as we seek to be faithful to God’s revealed truth, which the Holy Spirit has authored. And Baugus concludes:

Presbyterian and Reformed folk strive to advance Reformed theology in China—or anywhere else in the world—only because we believe it is the purest and fullest exposition of the gospel of Jesus Christ that the church has yet achieved. . . . We do not hope to see presbyterianism established in China out of petty sectarian pride, but out of a desire to see God glorified through a deeper and fuller enjoyment of Him and His steadfast love for us in Jesus Christ. (306)

For me, there is deep joy in being a small part of this transcendent enterprise on behalf of his beloved servants laboring throughout that great land. And this book, as I read it, only served to sharpen that sense.

**Mitchell R. Herring** *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church serving as the senior pastor of the Rochester Chinese Christian Church in Penfield, New York.*

# ServantPoetry

---

## Old and New Year Ditties

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

1

New Year met me somewhat sad:  
Old Year leaves me tired,  
Stripped of favourite things I had  
Baulked of much desired:  
Yet farther on my road to-day  
God willing, farther on my way.

New Year coming on apace  
What have you to give me?  
Bring you scathe, or bring you grace,  
Face me with an honest face;  
You shall not deceive me:  
Be it good or ill, be it what you will,  
It needs shall help me on my road,  
My rugged way to heaven, please God.

*13 December 1856*