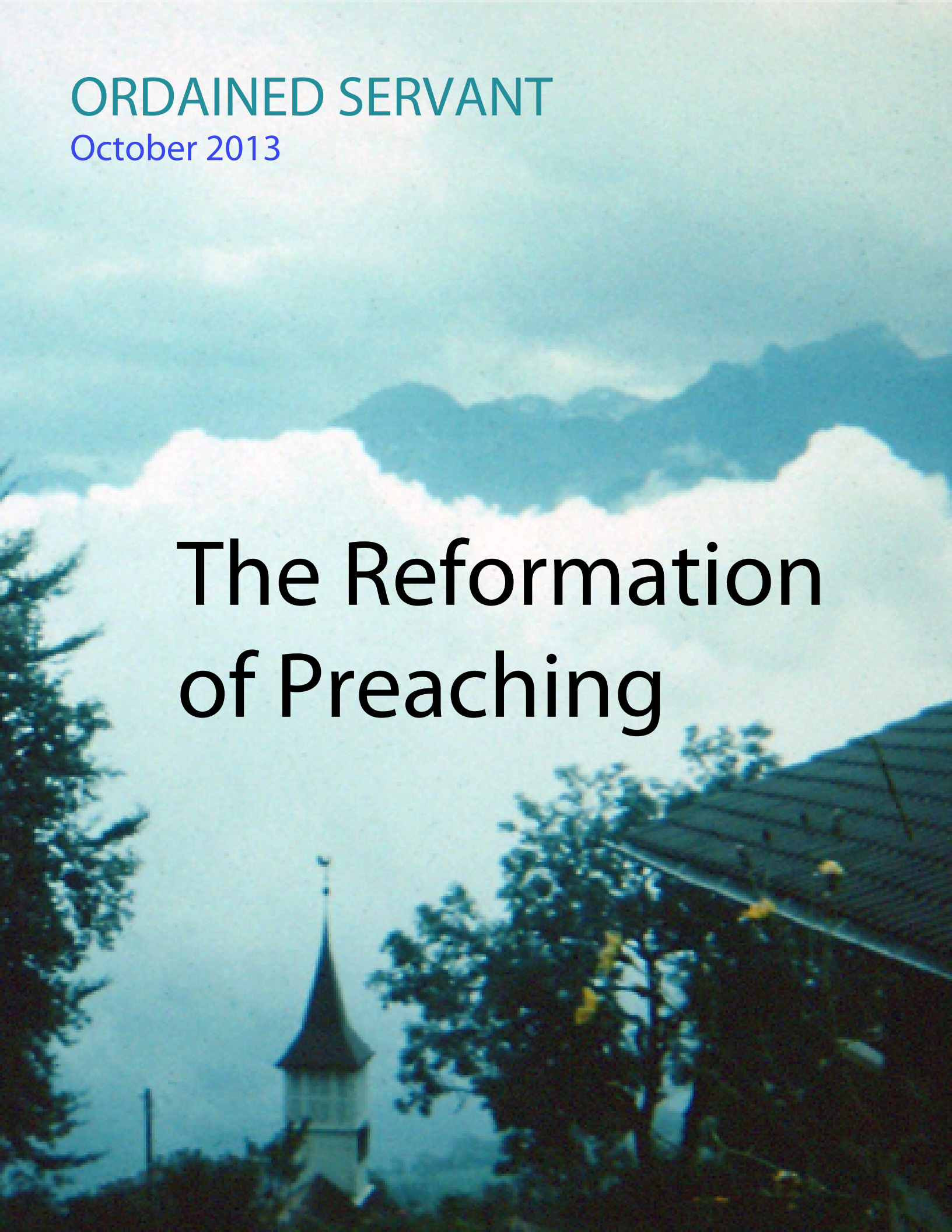


ORDAINED SERVANT

October 2013

# The Reformation of Preaching



# *Ordained Servant Online*

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### **CURRENT ISSUE: THE REFORMATION OF PREACHING**

**October 2013**

### *From the Editor*

Long after the first electronic media began sending its messages via the Victorian Internet—the telegraph—and a decade before the modern Internet, in the heart of the television age, sociologist Jacque Ellul was sounding an alarm. *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985 in English) warned the Christian community of the diminishment of the word in general and the Word of God in particular. Since then the great battle of Reformed churches ensues with increasing intensity. Electronic popular music along with general electronic distraction have made powerful inroads among the people of the Word. Worship has increasingly been disenchanted of the supernatural power of the preached Word. So, we celebrate Reformation month with the first of a three part article by Robert Letham, “The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World.”

I have augmented this article with a review of two important aids to personal devotion with “The Rhythms of the Christian Life in Bible Reading, Prayer, and Poetry,” a book of prayers for each chapter of the Bible, and a weekly meditation on the best sacred poetry of George Herbert.

Douglas Felch reviews an important book by Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*. This work, by a highly respected atheist philosopher, takes exception to the materialistic naturalism of evolutionary science, by dissenting from its pretension to make its naturalism an explanation for everything.

David Booth reviews Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*. Booth claims that this important book replaces “John T. McNeill’s *History and Character of Calvinism* as the standard introduction to the origin and development of the Reformed tradition.”

Darryl Hart reviews John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* He demonstrates how Fea offers a third way of understanding America’s founding. “Fea allows for a different category that is neither holy nor profane, one by which Christians may recognize the United States as valuable, wholesome, and virtuous (with admitted defects) without turning the nation into a Christian endeavor.”

Finally, to convince readers of the unique devotional value of George Herbert, don’t miss his poems on Holy Scripture.

The cover is the old Swiss Reformed church in Huemoz, Switzerland, where L’Abri Fellowship is located. The picturesque mountain, Dent du Midi, is in the background.

Blessings in the Lamb,  
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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

# ServantReading

## The Rhythms of the Christian Life in Bible Reading, Prayer, and Poetry

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

Lives without rhythm are not worth living, and I'm not talking about dancing. Busy lives in the modern world often lack the most important rhythm of all—spiritual rhythm rooted in the formative exercise of Scripture meditation and prayer. By meditation I mean the prayerful, thoughtful study of Scripture.

Even more neglected than this is the reading of sacred poetry. By this I mean poetry outside of the canon of Scripture written by Christians on biblical topics. The texts of the hymns we sing from the *Trinity Hymnal* are poetry. Among the famous poets included in our hymnal are George Herbert, William Cowper, John Milton, Christina Rossetti, and Christopher Wordsworth, nephew of the famous William. George Herbert is no doubt the most popular sacred poet since his posthumously published book of poems *The Temple* was published in 1633.

The two books reviewed briefly here encourage the spiritual rhythms of the Christian life from two different angles. The first is designed to encourage prayerful Bible reading by providing a prayer for each chapter of the Bible. The second is designed to encourage meditation on some of the finest poetry ever written in English and based on biblical truth and devotion—the poetry of George Herbert.

*A Book of Prayers: A Prayer for Every Chapter of the Bible*, by Stephen C. Magee. North Exeter, NH: Stephen C. Magee, 2010, 267 pages, \$11.89, paper, Kindle edition \$0.99.

Pastor Magee has given the church a unique resource to encourage prayer and Bible reading in tandem. Writing a prayer for all eleven hundred and eighty-nine chapters in the Bible is almost inconceivable, but Pastor Magee accomplished this in a season of great grief and growing dependence on the Lord. Even the genealogical sections of the Old Testament are graced with excellent prayers.

The theology of these prayers is soundly Reformed; the spirit of these prayers is a *cri de coeur* from one who sees his life and the life of the church through the lens of Scripture, and the lost world around him as in desperate need of the gospel. Consciousness of sin, the idolatry of the fallen human heart, the sovereignty of God and his amazing grace, all form the fabric of these prayers. The style exhibits an elegant clarity characteristic of the best Protestant prayers.

Having used this book for some time, I have found that reading the Bible chapter and then the prayer is the most effective use of the book, because the content of the biblical

chapter is essential to receiving maximum benefit from the prayers. When reading more than one chapter, the prayers may, of course, be read all at once after the Bible reading, or better still, after each chapter, thus instilling a prayerful attitude in the reading of Scripture.

Pastor Magee is the pastor of a PCA congregation in Exeter, New Hampshire. He has been a friend since we both began to be involved in planting churches in the mid-nineties. Because the book is self-published, it exists largely under the radar. But this is a sleeper that may be profitably used along with prayer books such as *The Valley of Vision*. I highly recommend it in either the paper or Kindle formats.

\* \* \*

*A Year with George Herbert: A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems*, by Jim Scott Orrick. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011, 159 pages, \$20.00, paper.

Professor Orrick has given us an incalculable gift—a devotional guide to the poetry of George Herbert. Herbert himself wrote his poetry to aid Christians in their understanding of Scripture and in devotion to the Lord and his church. Herbert’s poetry has been a favorite of Christians like C. S. Lewis, C. H. Spurgeon, and Richard Baxter. Of course, in Herbert’s day, when metaphysical poetry and Shakespearean theatre elevated Elizabethan English to its apogee, poetry was a highly popular form of entertainment and an intrinsic part of the fabric of public thinking. In our day, poetry has reached its nadir. Hence, the importance of a book like Orrick’s. If literary criticism and wearying college course analyses have helped poison the public’s appetite for poetry, books like this provide at least a partial antidote.

Free of technical jargon and analysis, Orrick’s book aims at Christian devotion and an appreciation of Herbert for the sheer beauty of what he wrote, a beauty inseparable from its content. Rather than a commentary on a poem for every day, he has wisely given us a week to search the meaning of each poem. Hence, the subtitle *A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems*. This reminds us that good poetry, like any worthwhile text, takes work, and thus time, to understand. In the age of “wit,” poets like Herbert, Crashaw, and Donne worked at what Alexander Pope said of poetry in general,

True wit is nature to advantage dress’d,  
What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed;  
Something whose truth convinced at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.  
As shades more sweet recommend the light,  
So modest plainness sets off spritely wit.

*An Essay on Criticism*

Herbert expected his readers to take time to fathom what he wrote and thereby enter the riches of his sparkling soul. Orrick assists us in this endeavor by explaining each poem, in usually two to four pages, under the following headings: Topic, Thesis, About this poem, Footnotes to explain the text, Poetry notes, and Ponder. “About this poem” locates the poem in the ministry and circumstances of Herbert. “Footnotes” explain the text, where the seventeenth-century language may be obscure, or point out theological

and biblical references. “Poetry notes” explain poetic elements that make the poem successful, without the burden of academic language. While I might like a bit more explanation about rhyme, meter, and poetic types, Orrick errs on the side of winsome engagement with those who may be encountering serious poetry for the first time. Finally, he asks us to “Ponder” the poem in terms of our individual lives, the church, and the world. These are very thoughtful. For example, in response to “The Alter,” which deals with sorrow for sin and repentance, Orrick asks if there is a place for such sorrow in modern worship.

Professor Orrick has spent a lot of time with Herbert and it shows. I highly recommend this book. It would be perfect for an adult study in church or in high school.

### **Suggested Reading**

Summers, Joseph. *George Herbert: His Religion and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Slater, Ann Pasternak, ed. *George Herbert: The Complete English Works*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

Wilcox, Helen, ed. *The English Poems of George Herbert*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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# Servant Word

## The Necessity of Preaching in the Modern World, part 1<sup>1</sup>

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by Robert Letham

### Introduction

J. Gresham Machen famously declared “Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative.”<sup>2</sup> The foundation of the Christian gospel is what God has done for our salvation in Christ, his Son. It is a sovereign work of the Holy Trinity. From this it follows that what the church is to do is at root an announcement, a declaration. It is good news. That good news is to be announced like a herald. Upon this all subsequent action by the church rests.

### WHAT IS PREACHING?

Preaching can be understood in a variety of ways, corresponding to the terms used in the New Testament for the preacher.<sup>3</sup> At root, it is possible to boil everything down to two major, indispensable aspects: proclamation of the word of God, which is foundational, and appeal to the hearers.

### Proclamation

For Barth, proclamation is integrally connected with the lordship of Christ; he declares, “preaching does not put it into effect; preaching declares and confirms that it is in effect.”<sup>4</sup> In turn, Stott states, “the preacher does not supply his own message; he is supplied with it.”<sup>5</sup> This follows from Machen’s “triumphant indicative.” Christianity is not a method of self-help; it is a manifestation of the grace of God. Hence, in the public teaching of the Christian faith, the primary weight falls on declaring what God has done to save his people from their sins. As Barth puts it, proclamation “is directed to men with the definitive claim and expectation that it has to declare the Word of God to them . . . in and by which God Himself speaks like a king through the mouth of his herald, and which is meant to be heard and accepted as speech in and by which God Himself speaks.”<sup>6</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a lecture given at the International Conference of Reformed Churches, Cardiff, August 2013.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 47.

<sup>3</sup> John Stott considers the preacher as a steward, a herald, a witness, a father, and a servant. J.R.W. Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait* (London: Tyndale Press, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–77), 153.

<sup>5</sup> Stott, *Portrait*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Barth, *CD*, I/1, 51–52.

short, all comes from God to humanity. The message, and consequently the medium, is prescribed for us.

In the light of this, Barth continues in his inimitable style, “God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen to him if he really does. But unless we regard ourselves as the prophets and founders of a new Church, we cannot say that we are commissioned to pass on what we have heard as independent proclamation.”<sup>7</sup> Rather, true preaching is “the attempt by someone called thereto in the Church, in the form of an exposition of some portion of the biblical witness to revelation, to express in his own words and to make intelligible to the men of his own generation the promise of the revelation, reconciliation and vocation of God as they are to be expected here and now.”<sup>8</sup> This definition of Barth’s lacks the element of appeal—it is simply a declaration, an exposition, a making intelligible. This is both necessary and primary and—as Stott remarks—if one or other of these elements only were present it would be best that this be the one. Without the proclamation and content we would be left with emotional manipulation; but without the appeal we would not have a sermon but a lecture.

On the other hand, Barth’s threefold form of the Word of God provides some helpful ways of considering the question. His proposal of the perichoretic interpenetration of the revealed Word, the Word written, and the Word proclaimed points us in the direction of an integrated grasp of the relationship among Christ, the Bible and preaching.<sup>9</sup> We should see these three as interconnected. Christ, the living Word, is the central theme of Scripture (Luke 24:25–27, 44–45, 1 Pet. 1:10–12) and thus of preaching. The written word testifies of Christ and is the basis of preaching. Preaching itself must be grounded on Scripture and testify of Christ. Not only are the three integrally interconnected but they are inseparable. No one element can be excluded without undermining the whole.

## Appeal

By this we do not mean the kind of evangelistic call associated with the Arminianism of preachers like Billy Graham, which presupposes some form of autonomy in the human subject. Rather, it is an appeal by the preacher to the consciences of the hearers, whether they are believers, covenant children, or unbelievers. It is an appeal to submit to the Word of God, to trust in Christ, to be obedient to his call. It is an integral part of what makes preaching what it is. As Stott says, “the herald does not just preach good news, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. No. The proclamation issues in an appeal. The herald expects a response. The Christian ambassador, who has announced the reconciliation which God has achieved through Christ, beseeches men to be reconciled to God.”<sup>10</sup> Since in preaching God directly confronts men and women with himself, it follows that he expects faith and obedience to result. We find in all biblical sermons, and in every biblical book, a demand for change by those who hear or read. Declarations of truth are followed by searching calls for repentance or discipleship.

These appeals are most urgent entreaties to people to get right with God—“nothing

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<sup>7</sup> Barth, *CD*, I/1, 55.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>10</sup> Stott, *Portrait*, 31.



less fervent would be appropriate to one who labours ‘on behalf of Christ’ and Him crucified.”<sup>11</sup> The proclamation comes first<sup>12</sup> but without an appeal it is not biblical preaching.<sup>13</sup> Stott cites Richard Baxter, who wrote, “I marvel how I can preach . . . slightly and coldly, how I can let men alone in their sins and that I do not go to them and beseech them for the Lord’s sake to repent . . . I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent . . . it asketh me: ‘How could’st thou speak of life and death with such a heart?’ ”<sup>14</sup>

Inherent in the appeal are searching diagnostic questions. The interrogative is an essential element of true preaching, as Carrick insists.<sup>15</sup> As much as the preacher is to indwell the Word he proclaims,<sup>16</sup> he is to get under the skin of those to whom he preaches. There is to be an engagement with the Word and the world, with Christ and his church. The preacher is to grasp both of these elements and not to let them go, rather like a dog gnawing at a bone.

## Necessity

Calvin regards preaching as at the heart of the church’s life. He states that “doctrine is the mother from whom God generates us (*Doctrina enim mater est, ex qua nos Deus generat*).”<sup>17</sup> Again, in the *Institutes* he affirms that “the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church (*salvifica Christi doctrina anima est Ecclesiae*).” The context indicates that he is writing about preaching, for a few lines later he mentions “the preaching of doctrine (*ad doctrinae praedicationem*).”<sup>18</sup>

Reformed theology has consistently maintained that the ministry of the Word and the sacraments together are the outward means God uses to bring his people to salvation (Westminster Shorter Catechism 88: Westminster Larger Catechism 154). Yet the Word has priority over the sacraments; the sacraments are nothing without the Word (Westminster Confession of Faith 27:3, WLC 169).<sup>19</sup> As Barth says of the Reformed, “they could not and would not assign to the sacrament the place which falls to preaching according to Roman Catholic dogmatics” for “the former must exist for the sake of the latter, and therefore the sacrament for the sake of preaching, not *vice-versa*.”<sup>20</sup> Yet the sacraments are to be together with the Word, if under it.

A number of biblical passages reinforce this claim. In Romans 10:14, in which Paul

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48–49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>15</sup> John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 56–81.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (T.H.L. Parker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 85; John Calvin, *Commentarii in Pauli Epistolas* (Ioannis Calvini Opera Exegetica; Genève: Librairie Droz, 1992), 108.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, 4:12:1; John Calvin, *Opera Selecta* (Petrus Barth; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1936), 5:212.

<sup>19</sup> See also *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (1645), in *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large, Together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Applecross: The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1970), 383, 385.

<sup>20</sup> Barth, *CD*, I/1, 70.

insists on the urgency of preachers being sent to his compatriots, the Jews, the subjective genitive is to be preferred, yielding the clause, “How are they to believe him whom they have not heard?” (my translation). In short, Christ is heard in the preaching of the gospel.<sup>21</sup> When the Word is truly preached, Christ is present.<sup>22</sup> That Paul refers to the preacher as sent indicates the ministerial nature of preaching; the preacher is subservient to the Word and is commissioned by the church.<sup>23</sup> In Ephesians 2:17, Christ is said to have preached peace to the Gentiles at Ephesus: “he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.” Jesus never visited Ephesus; Paul refers to his own preaching in founding the church. In Paul’s preaching, Christ himself preaches. In Luke 10:16, Jesus sends the apostles to preach and heal, saying “the one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” The apostles were Jesus’s special representatives in their preaching ministry; their preaching is his own, their words will be his. Their acceptance or rejection is the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. The intrinsic quality of their preaching is not in view—their status depends on their having been commissioned by Jesus. In John 5:25, the voice of the Son of God raises the dead. This means spiritual resurrection in the present rather than the physical resurrection in the future mentioned in vv. 28–29. Already present (“and now is”), it comes through hearing the voice of the Son of God, or hearing the word of Christ and believing (v. 24). Finally, Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:19–20 that God makes his appeal through us. Paul and all true preachers are ambassadors of Christ, so possessing the authority of the one they represent. Behind this is the figure of the *shaliyach*, a personal emissary, who the Talmud considered to carry the authority of the one who sent him.

In line with this, Calvin regarded preaching as both a human and divine activity, the Holy Spirit working in sovereignty through the words of the preacher.<sup>24</sup> As such, he states that “God himself appears in our midst, and, as author of this order, would have men recognize him as present in his institution.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965), 2:58; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 533–34; James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 38b: Romans 9–16* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 620; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 389–90. In this and the following paragraph see Robert Letham, “The Authority of Preaching,” *Baptist Reformation Review* 3, no. 4 (1974): 21–29.

<sup>22</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 1 The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 186–87.

<sup>23</sup> Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures: Volume 1*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion by John H. Leith, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Us Today,” in *John Calvin & the Church: A Prism of Reform* (Timothy George; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 210–12.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4:1:5.

# ServantReading

## Mind and Cosmos

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by Douglas A. Felch

*Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, by Thomas Nagel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 144 pages, \$24.95.

In current discussions related to science and the Christian faith, many apparent conflicts between science and religion actually operate at the level of rival worldview or religious perspectives between theism and naturalism. Theism asserts that God has created the world and brought about life in all of its variety and complexity. Naturalism assumes there is no God and that complex life evolved through some process, not yet fully understood, of natural selection (hence NS).

This is sometimes framed as a creation/evolution controversy, but the issues are more complex. The Christian perspective does not forbid that God used some kind of process, at least in part, to bring about life, nor do Christian scientists reject Darwin's principle of NS. Darwin's theory states simply that certain variations in a living creature existing within a certain environment are selected out according to the likelihood of allowing that creature to survive or thrive. It is a simple and elegant principle. It is also true. Evidences of NS are clearly observable in variations within species, the development of antibiotic resistance in certain bacterial diseases, and the challenge to existing ecosystems by invasive species (such as the threat to the Great Lakes ecosystem by Asian carp).

So the question is not whether NS is a true scientific and explanatory principle. It most certainly is. The question is this: how *much* can it explain?

At this point the divide between theism and naturalism (not between theism and natural selection) becomes apparent. Naturalistic evolutionists appeal to NS as a "theory of everything." For naturalists, NS must not only account for variations in species, disease adaptation, and ecological equilibrium, but also must explain how life arose from non-life and how it developed in all of its variety and complexity. Since nature is all there is, and there is no God, all of life must be accounted for by the mindless, purposeless, and entirely random process of NS. But does NS have sufficient explanatory power to bear the weight of being a theory of everything?

Many Christian scientists and thinkers doubt this. The intelligent design (ID) movement, developed by Michael Behe and others, argues that many biological systems are irreducibly complex, making it difficult to account for the incremental evolution of such multifaceted biological systems (such as the eye) on the basis of NS alone.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga points out the difficulty for

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 2006).

evolutionary naturalists to account for the trustworthiness of our mental faculties, because the evolutionary process that has allegedly led to the formation of our minds is itself unintelligent and random and does not select for truthfulness.<sup>2</sup>

Some naturalistic scientists, including the “new atheists” like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, have strongly resisted such arguments and have insisted that the materialistic perspective provides all that is necessary to account for the emergence of life, mind, intelligence, consciousness, and self-reflection.

It is in this context that the philosopher Thomas Nagel raises a significant challenge to the view that NS can be successfully used as a theory of everything in *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. What makes this refutation of Neo-Darwinism especially noteworthy is that Nagel is an avowed atheist who explicitly rejects the theistic worldview perspective. Nonetheless, he argues that the current materialistic Darwinian evolutionary model is insufficient to account for the emergence of life, and, among human beings, of consciousness, intelligence, and value. For his position he has been severely criticized by many of his colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

## The Critique of Materialism

In his first chapter, Nagel suggests that the attempt to use the physical processes of NS as a theory of everything is nothing more than “materialistic psychophysical reductionism.” It is materialist in that it insists that the fundamental stuff of the universe is simply matter in motion. It is reductionist in that it tries to explain the emergence of consciousness and cognition as simply another aspect of material in motion.

Nagel is skeptical of such materialistic explanations of the emergence of both life and cognition. Regarding the former, he observes:

It seems to me that, as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense.

I would like to defend the untutored reaction of incredulity to the reductionist neo-Darwinian account of the origin and evolution of life. It is *prima facie* highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection. We are expected to abandon this naïve response, not in favor of a fully worked out physical/chemical explanation but in favor of an alternative that is really a schema for explanation, supported by some examples. What is lacking, to my knowledge, is a credible argument that the story has a non-negligible probability of being true. (5–6)

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<sup>2</sup> This essay is available in many forms as well as in online video presented by Plantinga himself. The most recent print form is found in “The Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism.” Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 307–50.

<sup>3</sup> For an intriguing account of the controversy, see Andrew Ferguson, “The Heretic: Who is Thomas Nagel and why are so many of his fellow academics condemning him?” in *The Weekly Standard*, March 25, 2013, available online at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/heretic\\_707692.html?nopager=1](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/heretic_707692.html?nopager=1)

Accordingly, Richard Dawkins's account of the evolution of complex structures like the eye can no longer be viewed as legitimate. Further, NS cannot be applied to the origin of life from non-life, because NS can only function among organisms that are already existing (9–10).

In arriving at these conclusions, Nagel credits some of the discussions developed by Michael Behe and Stephen Meyers, two of the proponents of the ID movement:

Even if one is not drawn to the alternative of an explanation by the actions of a designer, the problems that these iconoclasts pose for the orthodox scientific consensus should be taken seriously. They do not deserve the scorn with which they are commonly met. It is manifestly unfair. (10)

However, while Nagel is open to some of the insights and criticisms of the ID movement, he is not the least bit sympathetic to their theistic leanings:

I confess to an ungrounded assumption of my own, in not finding it possible to regard the design alternative as a real option. I lack the *sensus divinitatis* that enables—indeed compels—so many people to see in the world the expression of divine purpose as naturally as they see in a smiling face the expression of human feeling. . . . Nevertheless, I believe that defenders of intelligent design deserve our gratitude for challenging a scientific worldview that owes some of the passion displayed by its adherents precisely to the fact that it is thought to liberate us from religion. (12)

In a footnote accompanying this declaration that he lacks the *sensus divinitatis*, he further admits that he is not simply unreceptive but also strongly adverse to the idea. Alvin Plantinga notes in his review article on *Mind and Cosmos* an earlier reference of Nagel to his attitude on religion:

I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. . . . It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.<sup>4</sup>

Plantinga is saddened by Nagel's rejection of theism, but also observes that Nagel's discomfort seems more emotional than philosophical or rational (8–9).<sup>5</sup>

Although Nagel is appreciative of the scientific accomplishments of reductive materialism (which he believes will continue to be productive), he does hope his critique will lead to a new openness to find substitute solutions. If the materialist perspective is shown to fail to provide adequate explanation for the emergence of consciousness in the

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<sup>4</sup>From Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Cited in Alvin Plantinga, "A Secular Heresy" in *The New Republic*, December 6, 2012, and found on p. 9 of the online version of the article entitled, "Why Darwinist Materialism is Wrong" at <http://www.newrepublic.com/authors/alvin-plantinga>

<sup>5</sup>Plantinga, "Why Darwinist Materialism is Wrong," 8–9.

evolutionary story, this may provide an additional “reason for pessimism about purely chemical explanations of the origin of life as well” (12) and may eventually lead to a better, although still non-theistic, alternative. Nagel himself, however, is unable to provide a convincing alternative.

## **Antireductionism**

Having framed the issue in his introduction, Nagel pursues his project in four succeeding chapters. In Chapter 2, “Antireductionism and the Natural Order,” he considers the explanations of the presence or emergence of human consciousness provided by theism and materialistic naturalism, weighs them in the balance, and finds them both wanting. Theism is deficient because (in his mind) it does not offer a sufficiently substantial explanation for our capacities within the natural world but pushes the quest for intelligibility outside the natural world by appeal to divine intervention. For Nagel, “Such interventionist hypotheses amount to a denial that there is a comprehensive natural order” (26).

On the other hand, materialistic naturalism is deficient because it does not offer a sufficiently credible account of the emergence of human consciousness. “Evolutionary naturalism provides an account of our capacities that undermines their reliability, and in so doing undermines itself” (27). Nagel agrees with Alvin Plantinga that “mechanisms of belief formation that have selective advantage in the everyday struggle for existence do not warrant our confidence in the construction of theoretical accounts of the world as a whole” (27). This is because natural selection selects for survival not for truth or the trustworthiness of our minds, which are themselves the product of a random evolutionary process according to materialistic naturalism.

Further, what is true of the mental realm also applies to the moral sphere with equally detrimental consequences:

The evolutionary story leaves the authority of reason in a much weaker position. This is even more clearly true of our moral and other normative capacities—on which we often rely to correct our instincts. . . . Evolutionary naturalism implies that we shouldn’t take any of our convictions seriously, including the scientific world picture on which evolutionary naturalism itself depends. (28)

If that is true, why is it that naturalistic evolutionary theory has dominated the intellectual landscape? Nagel comments:

The priority given to evolutionary naturalism in the face of its implausible conclusions about other subjects is due, I think, to the secular consensus that this is the only form of external understanding of ourselves that provides an alternative to theism—which is to be rejected as a mere projection of our internal self-conception onto the universe, without evidence. (29)

If both theism and naturalism are inadequate, what is the alternative? Nagel suggests that it opens the way to a third approach which takes into full consideration our nature as

intelligent, conscious, and moral beings. While he is not able to provide an explicit alternative, he does sketch out its parameters:

The essential character of such an understanding would be to explain the appearance of life, consciousness, reason, and knowledge neither as the accidental side effects of the physical laws of nature nor as the result of intentional intervention in nature from without but as an unsurprising if not inevitable consequence of the order that governs the natural world from within. That order would have to include physical law, but if life is not just a physical phenomenon, the origin and evolution of life and mind will not be explainable by physics and chemistry alone. (32–33)

In the following three chapters, Nagel continues his negative critique of the materialistic reductionist account of the emergence of “Consciousness” (Chapter 3), “Cognition” (Chapter 4), and “Value” (Chapter 5).

## **Consciousness**

In his discussion of consciousness and cognition, Nagel finds it doubtful that either one could emerge if materialistic evolutionary naturalism is true.

Consciousness is an obvious obstacle to physical naturalism because of its irreducibly subjective nature, a subjectivity that provoked the mind/body dualism of Descartes. While current evolutionary thought rejects such dualism in favor of a materialistic monism, its attempts to find an alternative “begins a series of failures” (37) because it tries to reduce mind and its experiences to physical processes or observable behaviors. However, the experience of mind cannot ultimately be suppressed, because “conscious subjects and their mental lives are inescapable components of reality not describable by the physical sciences” (41).

This failure carries over to attempts to account for the emergence of consciousness by materialistic evolutionary process. While physical science can explain a good many facts about our world, it is unable to provide any explanation of the emergence of consciousness (46). Nagel finds trying to explain simply the development of the purely physical characteristics of organisms by evolutionary theory difficult enough (48) and “the confidence among the scientific establishment that the whole scenario will yield to a purely chemical explanation hard to understand” (49). However, if the emergence of consciousness is added to the mix, the problems become intractable. If evolutionary materialism cannot account for the rise of consciousness, there is little hope that it can provide an intelligent account of the world in which we find ourselves:

The existence of consciousness is both one of the most familiar and one of the most astounding things about the world. No conception of the natural order that does not reveal it as something to be expected can aspire even to the outline of completeness. And if physical science, whatever it may have to say about the origin of life, leaves us necessarily in the dark about consciousness, that shows that it cannot provide the basic form of intelligibility for this world. (53)

Any solution must be either reductive or emergent (as in the case of chaos or complexity theory). However, both of these result in an end product, consciousness, that bears no resemblance to its cause and is qualitatively different from its physical origins (54–56).

In sum, we are left with three alternative explanations: causal, teleological, or intentional. A causal explanation would argue that consciousness arises out of the “properties of the elementary constituents of the universe” (59). A teleological explanation would point to principles of self-organization or complexity that go beyond the physical laws of causality. An intentional explanation would point to the intervention of an intelligent being (such as God) in order to combine the constituent elements and self-organizing elements to bring about consciousness. Nagel finds the first two inadequate and obscure, and the last an option for theists, but personally unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, Nagel remains optimistic about some form of naturalistic explanation: “I believe that it makes sense. . . . The more a theory has to explain, the more powerful it has to be” (69).

### **Cognition**

The problem is even more pronounced with the development of belief and cognition, because “it is not merely the subjectivity of thought but its capacity to transcend subjectivity and to discover what is objectively the case that presents a problem” (72). These include such activities as thought, reasoning, evaluation and belief formation, and the use of language. The presence of such cognitive abilities generates two intractable difficulties for Darwinian evolutionary theory:

The first concerns the likelihood that the process of natural selection should have generated creatures with the capacity to discover by reason the truth about a reality that extends vastly beyond initial appearances—as we take ourselves to have done and to continue to do collectively in science, logic, and ethics. . . . The second problem is the difficulty of understanding naturalistically the faculty of reason that is the essence of these activities. (74)

The first problem is intractable because it requires that the process of mutation and natural selection be able to account not only for physical characteristics, but also the human experience of desire and aversion, the ability to discern the presence of other minds, the ability to think logically, and the ability to formulate logical abstract structures through language (77). The second problem arises because

any evolutionary account of the place of reason presupposes reason’s validity and cannot confirm it without circularity. Eventually the attempt to understand oneself in evolutionary, naturalistic terms must bottom out in something that is grasped as valid in itself—something without which the evolutionary understanding would not be possible. Thought moves us beyond appearance to something that we cannot regard merely as a biologically based disposition, whose reliability we can determine on other grounds. It is not enough to be able to think that *if* there are logical truths, natural selection might very well have given me the capacity to recognize them. That cannot be the ground for my trusting my reason, because even that thought implicitly relies on reason in a prior way. (81)



Despite these strong arguments against materialistic naturalism, Nagel continues to reject the theistic alternative as “unscientific” (89) and opts instead for what he calls a “natural teleology” in which organizational and developmental principles are “an irreducible part of the natural order and not the result of intentional or purposeful influence by anyone” (93). Although he admits that this view is not fully developed, he believes it is a coherent possibility and is more congruent with his atheism (95).

## Value

As Nagel’s discussion progresses from consciousness, to cognition, to value, the obstacles they pose for materialistic naturalism loom larger and larger. The existence of a moral sense poses serious problems for evolutionary naturalism. Human beings are for the most part confident that moral judgments have objective validity. While we may disagree on the precise meaning of what constitutes something being right and wrong, the reason why they are right or wrong is not viewed as simply fantasy or opinion, but real. Therefore:

An adequate conception of the cosmos must contain the resources to account for how it could have given rise to beings capable of thinking successfully about what is good and bad, right and wrong, and discovering moral and evaluative truths that do not depend on their own beliefs. (106)

According to the reductionist narrative, morality evolved as part of the strategy for survival. Certain behaviors, like being nice to others, proved to be beneficial to the community. These were labeled as “good.” Risky behaviors such as being continuously angry or pugnacious were quickly identified as “bad.” However, neither behavior was *really* good or bad, they were only branded as such in order to perpetuate or eliminate them.

This account, argues Nagel, flies in the face of the way our moral senses actually do function. Moral sense and nuance goes far beyond anything that might be required for adaptive survivability.

The human world, or any individual human life, is potentially, and often actually, the scene of incredible riches—beauty, love, pleasure, knowledge, and the sheer joy of existing and living in the world. It is also potentially, and often actually, the scene of horrible misery, but on both sides the value, however specific it may be to our form of life, seems inescapably real. . . . Therefore the historical explanation of life must include an explanation of value, just as it must include an explanation of consciousness. (120)

However, it is precisely this kind of explanation that materialistic Darwinianism is unable to provide because NS can only demonstrate what is, not that what is has objective value.

Nagel admits that the intentional or theistic explanation does provide a coherent explanation of value, but he again chooses to set that aside in favor of his preference for a

natural teleology in which “the natural world would have a propensity to give rise to beings of the kind that have a good—beings for which things can be good or bad” (221). He admits that his movements in this direction are offered “merely as possibilities, without positive conviction” (124). What he is positively convinced of is the inadequacy of materialistic Darwinianism to account for our moral nature (125).

### **Nagel’s Conclusion**

In his two-page concluding chapter, Nagel is apologetic that his own attempts to explore alternatives to materialistic reductionism are “far too unimaginative” (127), but he is unwavering in critique of materialistic evolutionary orthodoxy:

I find this view antecedently unbelievable—a heroic triumph of ideological theory over common sense. The empirical evidence can be interpreted to accommodate different comprehensive theories, but in this case the cost in conceptual and probabilistic contortions is prohibitive. I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid. The human will to believe is inexhaustible. (128)

### **Assessment**

What should we do with Nagel’s critique of materialistic naturalism? His atheistic perspective is at one and the same time happily insightful but also disappointingly limiting. His critique reinforces what various Christian theists have been saying about naturalistic evolution for some time, but his personal rejection of Christian theism is lamentable and his vague quest for some pan-psyche alternative, simply lame.

The Orthodox Presbyterian theologian and apologist Cornelius Van Til famously argued that all non-Christian thought hangs itself on the horns of the dilemma between rationalism and irrationalism. That is, unbelievers want what the Christian worldview has to offer in terms of intellectual stability and moral authority (the rational pole), but ground their own views in something that is ultimately arbitrary, meaningless, purposeless, or valueless (the irrational pole).

Nagel’s critique of materialistic evolutionary naturalism is useful in vividly illustrating Van Til’s point, but sadly he himself does not escape the dilemma Van Til outlines. Nagel also wants what the Christian worldview has to offer but grounds that hope in a physical or metaphysical reality that he admits he cannot articulate and only vainly hopes can be discovered.

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# Christ's Churches Purely Reformed

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by David A. Booth

*Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, by Philip Benedict. Wheaton, New Haven, and London: Yale University Press, 2002, xxvi + 670 pages, \$40.00.

Historical theology is frequently the most helpful form of practical theology. Reformed Christians in North America are currently wrestling with many challenging questions. How orthodox does a local church or a denomination need to be in order for someone to commit his family, time, and treasure there? Should we work for reform within larger denominations with important institutions or depart into the wilderness with a tiny band of like-minded believers? How much diversity is good or acceptable in faith and practice? And, what should the relationship be among Christianity, church, and the civil magistrate? Because Reformed Christians have been grappling with such questions for five centuries, reflecting on our past is an essential aspect of pursuing faithfulness to Christ in the present. Philip Benedict's *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* is a brilliant and delightful aid to doing just that.

Benedict masterfully conveys the broad social, political, and economic upheavals that were sweeping through Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries without swallowing up the distinctive contributions of individual leaders or theologians. As he repeatedly demonstrates, individuals are not only shaped by history, they also shape it in unexpected ways. He writes:

Clearly, the small corners of the European continent that had embraced Reformed worship by 1555 would not have assumed the importance they did had they not become home to several talented and deeply committed theologians, men who were capable of writing a body of treatises that won them admirers and disciples across national and linguistic boundaries. (115)

In a similar vein, while many historians have assumed that the acceptance or rejection of Calvinism by European princes can largely be explained in terms of political expediency, Benedict plausibly argues that:

Rather than attempting to link the enactment of second reformations to calculations of functional utility, a more illuminating approach might recognize that many rulers tried to act as conscientious Christian princes and then undertake to identify the conditions under which some found the arguments for such changes convincing. (227)

A second distinctive contribution of *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* is that it pays far more attention to the development of Reformed ecclesiology than is common among histories of the Reformation era. Particularly striking are the glimpses into how the experience of exile and marginalization profoundly shaped the development of Reformed Christianity. For example, while serving as a pastor to the immigrant community in Strasbourg, Calvin was able to gain experience in exercising church discipline. Neither the civil magistrates in Geneva nor in Strasbourg were willing to allow their established city churches to engage in such discipline (95). Benedict also traces the development of Presbyterianism in France and regularly reminds the reader that:

Although the Presbyterian-synod system ultimately came to be justified in biblical terms, it began as an improvised solution to the problem of maintaining unity among scattered congregations established without government support, and it operated somewhat differently in each country. (283)

These are helpful reminders that Christ's work of building and refining the church is not hindered by the apparent marginalization of his servants.

This volume is also a wonderful reminder of both the diversity and essential unity of the early Reformed churches. Benedict rightly points out that the Reformed churches never became entirely uniform in their approach to worship:

The English knelt to receive communion from a surplice-wearing minister; the French filed by their minister, who was dressed in a simple gown; the Dutch and Scots sat at a table as the elders passed around the bread and wine. While the Scots uncompromisingly eliminated all holy days, they continued to abstain from meat on Fridays and marrying during Lent. (282)

Yet, such diversity rarely prevented Reformed Christians from recognizing each other, and political as well as theological concerns drove them to express their fundamental concord. This unity was underlined in 1581 through the publication of the *Harmony of Confessions* in Geneva. Rather than crafting a new confession that all the churches could agree to, this project sought to highlight all the areas of agreement which were already exhibited in eleven existing confessions of faith. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Lutheran confessions in this Harmony reminds us that "the boundaries of the Reformed community were fuzzy around the edge" (290).

There are surprisingly few lapses for a work of this scope. Benedict does refer to Abraham Kuyper as "neo-orthodox" where he should have indicated that he was an advocate of "neo-Calvinism" (298). A more significant misunderstanding involves Benedict's presentation of Scripture as understood by Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. He writes: "Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin had not argued that every word of the Bible was divinely inspired; they simply believed that the essential salvific message and key historical details of the Bible were unarguable and assured" (301). Those familiar with the primary sources, such as Calvin's treatment of 2 Timothy 3:16 or how he spoke of the Holy Spirit "dictating" Scripture, will find it more difficult to drive a wedge between the early Reformers and post-Reformation formulations of the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. That such lapses are so rare in a work of such extraordinary breadth is a testament to Benedict's meticulous scholarship.

*Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* will rightly replace John T. McNeill's *History and Character of Calvinism* as the standard introduction to the origin and development of the Reformed tradition. Not to be overlooked is how this fine work of scholarship is simply a delight to read. Give your friends a copy for Christmas and remember to treat yourself to a copy as well. Highly recommended.

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# Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?

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by Darryl G. Hart

*Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction*, by John Fea. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011, 340 pages, \$30.00, paper.

What does it mean for a nation to be Christian? John Fea's book, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* obviously has the United States in view. But other nation-states have religious identities that demonstrate how difficult is the task Fea has undertaken (even if some readers think the answer is obvious). For instance, England is a constitutional monarchy in which the crown is the head of the Church of England. Does this mean that England is an Episcopalian (or Anglican) nation? And what does this identity mean for the other parts of the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland)? Some cultural conservatives may think the affinities between contemporary Anglicanism and England's cultural decay fitting. But England's case makes the United States' status all the thornier since we have no constitutional connection between the nation's government and a specific Christian communion.

Or take the example of Turkey. It is officially a secular nation. Its founding in 1922 brought an end to Islam's dominance in the former Ottoman Empire. Turkey's constitution guarantees religious freedom and reserves no special protections for Muslims. And yet, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs provides oversight of the nation's mosques and pays for the services of Turkey's imams and muezzin. Though Turkey is legally a secular republic, it is also formally a Muslim nation, given its official support for Islamic institutions.

Compared to England and Turkey, the United States resembles more the latter than the former (which makes sense considering America's War for Independence). The nation that in the 1770s emerged from the British colonies in North America adopted a republican form of government and explicitly refused to use religion as a basis in setting up a federal government. Unlike England, the United States has no monarch and no established church. Even here, the United States is less religious legally than Turkey since the American government (and all state governments after 1833 when Massachusetts disestablished its churches) provides no financial support for religious institutions.

And yet, the notion that America is a Christian nation lives. Polls reveal that close to eighty percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian. This statistic likely accounts for the approximately seventy percent of adults in the United States who think that America is a Christian nation. To answer the title of Fea's book in the negative is a sign of disloyalty within some sectors of American society. The book is more an attempt to clarify the sets of issues that go into an answer than it is an argument about the religious character of the United States. Fea builds on years of experience as a student of the American founding and a teacher of pious undergraduates with preconceived ideas about a Christian America. Some may become frustrated that Fea takes a simple question and complicates it. But as the examples of England and Turkey suggest, "Christian-nation" status is not a simple matter.

Fea breaks the question of his title into three aspects. The first includes a historical overview of Protestants in the United States who have asserted and promoted the notion that America is a Christian nation. For instance, modernist Protestants and fundamentalists both operated on the

assumption that their country was Christian and fought threats to it. William Jennings Bryan and Billy Sunday became influential among conservative Protestants at least in part through their appeals to preserve the nation's Christian civilization, whether by supporting Prohibition or opposing evolution in public schools. In this respect, they followed the Social Gospel minister, Washington Gladden, who hoped for the United States that "every department of human life—the families, the schools, amusements, art, business, politics, industry, national politics, international relations—will be governed by the Christian law and controlled by Christian influences" (37). Of course, Christians' aspirations for their nation do not prove that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. They could be wrong. But as Fea explains, throughout American history "there have always been believers who have tried to promote this idea" (245). At the same time, as the example of fundamentalists and modernists shows, the idea of a Christian America has generally devolved into a form of moralism more congenial to liberal Protestantism than to historic Christianity. The measure by which most Protestants evaluated Christianity's health within their nation was a virtuous citizenry, not church membership, or orthodox beliefs.

A second part of Fea's book—arguably worth the price of the book—is a search for the place of religious interests in the political crisis that led to the founding of a new and independent republic in North America. As he concludes, "it would be difficult to suggest, based upon the formal responses to British taxation between 1765 and 1774, that the leaders of the American Revolution were driven by overtly Christian values" (245). So, for instance, in 1765 when Virginia responded to the Stamp Act (a provision to raise revenue for Parliament by requiring colonists to purchase only newspapers that been specially stamped) with the "Virginia Resolves," a document that Patrick Henry strongly advocated, "no reference to God, the Bible, Christianity, or any religious reason" for political resistance was part of the argument (98). Indeed, between 1765 and 1774 as the colonists became increasingly alarmed by Parliament's "tyranny," delegates to the Continental Congress "seldom explained their views in religious terms" (106). Silence about Christianity extended, of course, to the Constitution where "it is clear that [its] framers . . . were not interested in promoting a religious nation of any kind" (162). Fea rightly observes that a majority of the states in the union retained established churches. But if the Constitution defines the American nation legally and politically, its silence also informs Christianity's place in the American nation.

The last part of Fea's book addresses the beliefs of the founders themselves. He features George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin, but includes a chapter on three "orthodox founders," John Witherspoon, John Jay, and Samuel Adams. This is a subject where Christian nationalism has often turned the founders into devout and orthodox believers, partly at least to justify a reading of America as a Christian nation. Fea is not so sentimental, however. On Washington, he concludes that Christians may laudably celebrate his leadership, courage, civility, and morality, but not his Christianity. Washington's "religious life was just too ambiguous" (190). Adams "should be commended . . . for his attempts to live a life in accordance with the moral teachings of the Bible," but was finally a Unitarian who denied the deity of Christ (210). Jefferson, likewise, was a great statesman who strived to live a moral life but "failed virtually every test of Christian orthodoxy" (215). Although a successful businessman and patriot, Franklin "rejected most Christian doctrines in favor of a religion of virtue" (227). Meanwhile, in the case of the orthodox Christian founders, Fea concludes that "Christianity was present at the time of the founding" but "merged with other ideas that were compatible with, but not necessarily influenced by, Christianity" (242). The best that can be said of Christianity's

influence on the American founding was that “all the founders believed . . . that religion was necessary in order to sustain an ordered and virtuous republic” (246).

The value of Fea’s book is not simply the careful historical questions he puts before readers that break through received religious and patriotic pieties. He also inserts sufficient distance between the United States as a political manifestation and the Christian religion, so that believers can entertain the notion that America is good even if it is not explicitly or formally Christian. Too often the categories used by Christian apologists for America lack a middle term. For them, either the nation can only be either Christian or opposed to it. Fea allows for a different category that is neither holy nor profane, one by which Christians may recognize the United States as valuable, wholesome, and virtuous (with admitted defects) without turning the nation into a Christian endeavor. Fea himself does not answer the question of his title explicitly. But his deft handling of some of the issues involved in sound historical answer will help readers be as careful as is his book.

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# ServantPoetry

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George Herbert (1593-1633)

## The H. Scriptures I.

OH Book! infinite sweetnesse! let my heart  
Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,  
Precious for any grief in any part;  
To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain.

Thou art all health, health thriving till it make  
A full eternitie: thou art a masse  
Of strange delights, where we may wish & take.  
Ladies, look here; this is the thankfull glasse,

That mends the lookers eyes: this is the well  
That washes what it shows. Who can indeare  
Thy praise too much? thou art heav'ns Lidger here,  
Working against the states of death and hell.

Thou art joyes handsell: heav'n lies flat in thee,  
Subject to ev'ry mounters bended knee.

## The H. Scriptures I I.

OH that I knew how all thy lights combine,  
And the configurations of their glorie!  
Seeing not onely how each verse doth shine,  
But all the constellations of the storie.

This verse marks that, and both do make a motion  
Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:  
Then as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,  
These three make up some Christians destinie:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,  
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing  
Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,  
And in another make me understood.

Starres are poore books, & oftentimes do misse:  
This book of starres lights to eternall blisse.