



what is man?

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From the Editor

The doctrine of man is central to the modern debate about sexual identity. The rejection of transcendent reality by the modern mind sets people free to seek to redefine the human. In my editorial essay, “Diminishing Humanity: How the Modern World Is Dehumanizing Us,” I explore the theme of dehumanization in modernity. Carl Trueman reviews the work of a relatively unknown twentieth-century Italian political and cultural philosopher in his review of Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*. His exploration of the disenchantment of modern life in terms of an assumed materialism is profound.

The human quest for rest without God leads to the exhaustion of hope. God has designed it that way, so that we may not find rest outside of resting in him. The Sabbath trajectory of human life is meant to drive us to our Creator, in whom true rest may only be found. I explore this theme in George Herbert’s poem “The Pulley.”

John Muether continues the celebration of Reformation 500 as he explores the confessional development of the Reformation with “Reformed Confessions: Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619).” This demonstrates the doctrinal consistency of biblically based ecclesiastical symbols forged in the ecumenical spirit of a truly ecumenical endeavor.

In another area of historical exploration, Danny Olinger gives us chapter 10 of his Vos biography, “Geerhardus Vos: Grace and Glory,” in which he explores the sermonic production of Vos. Few in number, Vos’s sermons provide a rich example of biblical theology applied appropriately and powerfully to the Princeton seminary students of Vos’s day.

David Noe’s review article on Kirk Summers, *Morality after Calvin* focuses on another volume of historical theology studies that demonstrates the genetic connection with the theology of the magisterial reformers. Theodore Beza (1519–1605) is considered to be among the first generation after the magisterial reformers. Beza’s high commitment to exegesis as the basis of his theology undermines the false thesis that Post-Reformation dogmatics is a synthetic system built on human logic rather than divine revelation.

William Kessler reviews Joel Beeke’s and Randall Pederson’s *Meet the Puritans*. This great resource for one of the central streams of our tradition is encyclopedic in its scope.

Finally, enjoy the simple profundity of John Bunyan’s “The Shepherd Boy’s Song in the Valley of Humiliation.”

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.

Servant Thoughts

Diminishing Humanity: How the Modern World Is Dehumanizing Us¹

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The psalmist's age-old question, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" is now the great question of our age, as technology has given us tremendous power to manipulate the created order. For all its benefits, it has also given sinful, autonomous man the false idea that he can redesign human nature. This is a dangerous concept, the hazards of which are becoming more evident with each passing year. Without the Creator's view of what the being he has created is, dehumanization, which began with original sin, is inevitable. Notice that the psalmist's question is addressed to God. It is precisely the lack of transcendent reality in the modern mind that leads to the illusion of pervasive human control. The apotheosis of the human ends ironically with dehumanization.

The problem of dehumanization has emerged as one of the fundamental problems of the modern world, especially since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The Christian view of humanity, based on the transcendent special revelation of God's Word, offers unique intellectual and spiritual tools to analyze, critique, and present solutions to the problem. Tragically both the church and the world seem only to be able to feel the pain of our diminishing humanity without really understanding the problem, much less its solution.

There is a hint of dehumanization in the International Style of architecture. This style grew out of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus School, uniting art and technology. For example, Le Corbusier's mass housing "machines for living" were built to "human proportions," but notably lacked the humanly important elements of decoration and delight.² The apotheosis of science and technology is diminishing our humanity in significant ways so that we are becoming T. S. Eliot's "hollow men."³ C. S. Lewis warned that modern education was producing "men without chests."⁴ As quantity replaces quality, virtue is shoved aside by technique.

At the level of popular culture, the symptoms are legion. We hear people say, "I feel like a number." "I get lost in the crowd." "Nobody cares." "Whatever!" Our virtual connections have made us "alone together," longing for community, while traditional social connections are fast eroding.⁵ We are amazed to get a live person on the other end of the phone line when

¹ Originally "Reduction, Retreat, Reformation: A Christian Response to Contemporary Dehumanization," a lecture given on January 23, 1989, to the class of Dr. Dennis Roark, "Christianity and the Natural Sciences," The King's College, Briarcliff Manor, NY. This version is revised and expanded.

² First century BC Roman architect Vitruvius's three rules of good architectural design were expounded in his foundational *The Ten Books of Architecture*: firmness (*firmitas* structural integrity), commodity (*utilitas* usefulness), and delight (*venustas* beauty).

³ T. S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men" was published in 1925.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 1.

⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

we call a business or other institution. The media have so saturated us with exposure to disasters throughout the world that we become callous to suffering. Entire population groups have been liquidated: White Russians in Russia, Armenians, Jews in Germany, Mosquito Indians in Nicaragua, Kurds in Iraq, Sudanese, and the unborn daily in the Western World.

There is also a reflection of diminishing humanity in art and literature, mirrors of our culture. In Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase," man disappears almost entirely. Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman said of his film *The Silence* in 1963, "God is dead. There is only silence in the universe."⁶ Much of modern art is, as George Roche said, "the nightmares of a materialistic society."⁷ The rejection of the God of the Bible diminishes the humanity in its self-expression.

I. THE DIMINISHING OF OUR HUMANITY

Our rejection of a Christian view of humanity was the real problem as the rejection of any transcendent reality became an assumption of the modern mind. As G. K. Chesterton is believed to have said: "When people reject Christianity, it is not that they believe in nothing, but they will believe in anything."⁸ The late Jacques Barzun maintained that dehumanization is "brought about by the sway of number and quantity."⁹ "Science is an all pervasive energy, for it is at once a mode of thought, a source of strong emotion, and a faith as fanatical as any in history."¹⁰ According to Daniel & Revelation the progress of world history in its idolatry tends toward diminishing our humanity. Thus the symbolic image of beasts. Paul describes the dehumanizing effects of idolatry as it degenerates to sexual perversion:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom 1:22–25)

A. A Brief Survey of Diminishing Our Humanity

Contrary to many thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead and Francis Schaeffer, dehumanization did not begin with the twentieth century or the "line of despair" formed by the philosophers Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and the Enlightenment. Humanity began to be diminished at the point of the historic Fall of Adam. When Adam chose to worship created reality and seek meaning apart from God, his humanity became diminished. Romans 1:25 "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." This is what the Bible calls idolatry: locating ultimate loyalty and devotion in the created order rather than in the personal Trinity.

⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1976), 202.

⁷ George Roche, *A World without Heroes: The Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College Press, 1987), 71.

⁸ Émile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G. K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen, 1937), 211. The quote is actually Cammaerts's interpretation of something Father Brown says in "The Oracle of the Dog" (1923).

⁹ Jacques Barzun, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

These are the God substitutes satirized by the psalmist in Psalms 115 and 135 and by the prophets. If we deny the historic Fall, we are left with humanity the way we find it in its corrupted form.

Idolatry diminishes humanity by alienating us from the personal Creator in whose image we are made. Thus our humanity is intimately and inextricably wrapped up in our relationship with God.

[M]an's ultimate ethical commitment determines the objects of his affections and devotion. His rebellious stance is both reflected in and cultivated by the idols he constructs. "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them" (Ps. 115:8). Idolatry dehumanizes. Idolatry is at the heart of the thought forms and moral habits of a fallen culture. Media, especially electronic media, create a pervasive environment. Thus, the vast and world encompassing Babel-like project of modernity highlights the use of technology to create a culture independent of God.¹¹

Idolatry also diminishes our humanity by alienating us from other people. Immediately after the Fall in Genesis 3 and 4 we see: guilt and shame; Adam and Eve trying to cover their sin and escape from God; blaming each other; ultimately committing murder. Alienated man becomes a brutal manipulator. Our abuse of the natural world exemplifies our alienation from creation itself.

Something significant did happen with the Enlightenment. In philosophy Immanuel Kant sought to save science from the skepticism of British empiricist David Hume regarding the nature of "causality." Hume argued that all knowledge comes through the senses and saying one thing causes another is a mental habit, not a fact. In his rescue attempt Kant elevated the "phenomenal" world of space and time, and causality to the knowable; and free will, immortality, and theology to the unknowable "noumenal" world of God. G. W. F. Hegel absorbed all reality into the Absolute. History is the Absolute realizing itself in one grand inter-related evolutionary scheme. Science is essential to furthering the process. Thus began the process of elevating science and technology; man becomes the controller of his own destiny. God became an unnecessary hypothesis. The created order is subjected to manipulation in order to better human life without any overarching purpose apart from efficiency in the glorification of humanity. The idea of God, especially in Christianity, inhibits the evolutionary progress of humans liberating themselves. French sociologist Jacques Ellul defines technique—the broader motive or leitmotif behind our uses of technology—as the human quest for control through ultimate efficiency in every human endeavor.¹² Technology without *telos* is treacherous.

Darwin, Freud, and Marx declared complete independence from the Christian view in science, psychology, history, and political science. The nineteenth century declared the "Ascent of Man." The twentieth century dawned to witness the diminishment of humanity on an unimaginably brutal scale. Man is reduced to a mere aspect of the natural world, a mass of molecules, a lucky animal, easily dispensed with in order to achieve certain revolutionary ends. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer writes:

¹¹ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 24.

¹² Ellul defines technique as "the *totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency* (for a given stage of development) in *every* field of human activity." Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), xxv (emphasis in original).

Surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, Nietzsche knew the tension and despair of modern man. With no personal God, all is dead. Yet man, being truly man (no matter what he says he is), cries out for a meaning that can only be found in the existence of the infinite-personal God, who has not been silent but has spoken, and in the existence of a personal life continuing into eternity. Thus, Nietzsche's words are profound: "But all pleasure seeks eternity—a deep and profound eternity."

Without the infinite-personal God, all a person can do, as Nietzsche points out, is to make "systems." In today's speech we would call them "game plans." A person can erect some type of structure, some type of limited frame, in which he lives, shutting himself in that frame and not looking beyond it. This game plan can be one of a number of things. It can sound high and noble, such as talking in an idealistic way about the greatest good for the greatest number. Or it can be a scientist's concentrating on some small point of science so that he does not have to think of any of the big questions, such as why things exist at all. It can be a skier concentrating for years on knocking one-tenth of a second from a downhill race. Or it can as easily be a theological word game within the structure of the *existential methodology*. That is where modern people, building only on themselves, have come, and that is where they are now.¹³

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche declared "God is dead!" Man is an "instinctive animal." Ultimate reality is the "will to power."¹⁴ Hitler lived out this vision of the superman as a kind of twentieth-century Cain, another in a long line of "brutal manipulators," diminishing humanity as he was diminished himself.

In the 1960s many of us vainly attempted to reclaim our humanity by rejecting "the establishment" and the "military industrial complex." But our alternative of a modified American Eastern mysticism offered only an escape into the impersonalism of various forms of pantheism. Politically the New Left of the 1920s and 1930s fueled the countercultural movement of the 1960s. As Italian political and cultural philosopher Augusto Del Noce has astutely observed, metaphysics had to be rejected in order to implement the new empirical vision of liberated man. In analyzing the influence of Dr. Wilhelm Reich's writings on the sexual revolution, he asserts:

Indeed Reich's thought is based on the premise, which of course is taken as unquestionably true without even a hint of a proof, that there is no order of ends, no meta-empirical authority of values. Any trace not just of Christianity but of "idealism" in the broadest sense, or of a foundation of values in some objective reality, like history according to Marx, is eliminated. What is man reduced to, then, if not to a bundle of physical needs?¹⁵

B. The Technological Diminishment

Technology has become the chief god in the pantheon of idols beginning with the Enlightenment. Control over material culture is overwhelming all human concerns and

¹³ Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* 180–81.

¹⁴ Walter Kaufman, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954), 125.

¹⁵ Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. and ed. Carlo Lancellotti (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2014).

aspirations. As “extensions of man,” technology was defined by the human. Presently man is being transformed as an extension of material culture and technology. What we think we control has a way of controlling us.

The modern incarnation of the idol Narcissus is revealed in the world of screens. Narcissus, a Greek god who falls in love with his own reflection, is symbolic of ultimate self-absorption. People have abandoned their porches for their entertainment centers. Witness your town or street with its eerie blue cathode ray light radiating from your neighbors’ windows as you walk by, if you ever walk by. Public space is increasingly diminished in our communities. Witness the people who are “somewhere else” even while they are in your space on a smart phone.

Couch potatoes are not only passive observers but takers, cultivating an incapacity to give of themselves. Furthermore, they have little to give. Consumption reigns. The moral nature concerned with commitment and values is replaced by the aesthetic nature concerned with the enjoyment of the senses. God created us such that the moral nature is meant to inform and control the aesthetic.

One great ironic tragedy of the world of enhanced “communication” is the problem of loneliness. Psychologists Robert Kraut and Vicki Lundmark studied the effects of Internet use with ninety-six families over two years. They concluded that “The more time individuals spent online, the greater the degree of depression and loneliness they experienced.”¹⁶

Richard Stivers in his book, *Shades of Loneliness*, contends that modern mental disorders are not genetic or chemical in nature, but relational, and that relational breakdowns are in turn exacerbated by technology. “I think that a technological civilization provides an extremely harmful environment. The various shades of loneliness are the price we pay for living in a society dominated by technology.”¹⁷ In the nineteenth century personality supplanted character in defining the human.¹⁸ Stivers argues that public opinion motivates envy as the unifying principle of personality.¹⁹ “Technology makes human relations abstract and thus impersonal.”²⁰ TV promotes passing and shallow emotions and attachments. It becomes a substitute reality. Direct experience is lost and so is reality itself.²¹ The self is no longer defined in terms of its relationship to God and others. Thus, fear and loneliness dominate.

Humans are meant to live in relationship to God and others. The superficial tendency of modern technologies is alienating. We are historically lonely because TV is an anti-narrative with no context, only the present. Those who have no past, have no future—and thus no hope.

Technology fosters Gnosticism, as if humans are disembodied spirits living in the virtual rather than the real world. Marshall McLuhan warned of the “disincarnating” tendency of the electronic environment.²²

¹⁶ Richard Stivers, *Shades of Loneliness: Pathologies of a Technological Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²² Marshall McLuhan, “The Brain and the Media,” in George Sanderson and Frank Macdonald, eds. *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1989), 184.

The Electronic Revolution displays a strong tendency toward what Os Guinness calls “Cybergnosticism.” [*Fit Bodies Fat Minds*, 1994, 129] McLuhan feared that the great tendency of the global village would be “discarnate man. . . . The discarnate TV user, with a strong bias toward fantasy, dispenses with the real world . . .” [“A Last Look at the Tube,” in *Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message* 1989, 197] In *Understanding Media* McLuhan observes: “Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the ‘Tower of Babel’ by which men sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity” [*Understanding Media*, 1965, 80].²³

The body is essential to being made in God’s image, and thus our humanity.

II. THE RETREAT OF THE CULTURE AND THE CHURCH FROM DEFINING THE HUMAN

A. The Plague of Anti-intellectualism

The Romantic ideal of the authentic experience of the liberated individual has left us thoughtless. Harry Blamires says it well in *The Christian Mind* (1963):

Of course the very fact that nowadays we look upon convictions as personal possessions is a symptom of the disappearance of the Christian mind. It is precisely in such odd and scarcely graspable notions that the full extent of the secularization of the modern mind is glimpsed. One of the crucial tasks in reconstituting the Christian mind will be to re-establish the status of objective truth as distinct from personal opinions; to rehabilitate knowledge and wisdom in contradistinction from predilection and whim.²⁴

Anti-intellectualism deprives us of the ability to define the meaning of the human. At best secular thought has left us with an evolutionary notion that man is simply a sophisticated animal, who now has the ability to shape his own destiny and nature through bio-technology.

In the report of the President’s Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*,²⁵ Leon Kass, the report’s principal author, defines it as an “ethical inquiry.”²⁶ He distinguishes between “therapy,” which helps alleviate disease and injury, and “enhancement,” which seeks to improve humanity through bio-engineering to yield better children, superior performance, ageless bodies, and happy souls. Technology without ethics is a dangerous reality. Albert Borgmann observed that the “root of the technological promise—[is] the eradication of trouble from the human condition.”²⁷

B. The Failure to Understand Media and Technology

²³ Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*, 57.

²⁴ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 40.

²⁵ *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness*, a report of the President’s Council on Bioethics (New York: Regan, 2003). Dr. Leon Kass is the principal author.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xx.

²⁷ Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 78.

Electronic media are altering the way we think, view the world, and the structure of culture. Naïveté regarding the dehumanizing tendencies of media is a major problem for both the culture and the church. “Every technological innovation is hailed as the final stride toward that universally rich and satisfying life.”²⁸

A culture informed and dominated by technology in general and electronic media in particular is deeply inhospitable to God’s Word, grace, and the sacraments, as well as the community of faith. We are coming to theological and spiritual conclusions outside the discipline of the church and the communion of saints.

III. THE HOPE OF REFORMATION: RECLAIMING THE HUMAN

A. Develop Clear Thinking about Humanity with the Biblical Doctrine of Man

As Harry Blamires encourages us:

The sphere of the intellectual, the sphere of knowledge and understanding, is not a sphere in which the Christian gives ground, or even tolerates vagueness and confusion. There is no charity without clarity and firmness.”²⁹

B. Articulate a Christian View of Humanity: Five Key Assertions

1. The infinite-personal Triune Creator has made everyone in his image.

Personality and purpose are ultimate, not impersonality and chance. The inter-Trinitarian love and glory is shared through eternal communication in the mysterious interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of the divine Persons. God made humanity in his image so that we could communicate with God personally (Gen. 1:26; 2:7).

2. God has spoken a personal Word to mankind in the Bible.

Silence is not ultimate. Thus, from the beginning human communication was not only imitative of Trinitarian communication, but it was covenantal in nature as God spoke to Adam in the garden. The very first human experience of communication was not social, but between God and man; and God was the first to speak. His speech was always by way of the sovereignly initiated and defined arrangement of his relationship with man, which the Bible calls a *covenant*. We were created with dignity and worth.

Humans are unique among the creatures, in contrast to the materialist biological reduction of Darwin. Barzun declares “Man alone has a biography and he but shares a zoology.”³⁰ J. Gresham Machen in *The Christian View of Man* asserts that man as distinct from animal creation “is capable of personal companionship with the infinite and eternal God.”³¹ Scripture gives us a true view of God’s world and God’s image bearer, human kind.

3. God has sent the True Man, Jesus Christ, to save us from our dehumanizing idols.

The most significant declaration of Scripture is the startling statement with which John begins his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 40.

³⁰ Barzun, *Science*, 306

³¹ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 145.

Word was God” (John 1:1). The phrase “In the beginning” hearkens back to Genesis 1:1. There, as the name of the Son (Word) implies, was communication par excellence. In John 5:20 we read, “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.” The verb “shows” (δείκνυσιν) means reveal, explain, and in the present tense indicates a continuous activity. In Christ’s high priestly prayer in John 17, we are told that there was a covenant made in eternity between the Father and the Son to save his elect people. “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (v. 4). Here is communication of the profoundest sort.

The quest for human perfection without Christ is a futile effort, but also an understandable aspiration. It represents the original deceit that man can live without God, and reflects the original intention of creation: glorious perfection in Jesus Christ.

4. As God’s image-bearers, humanity is gifted with the ability to explore and draw out the potentialities of God’s creation.

Our inventions must be employed in service to our fellow man. Because of sin, we must understand the ways that our inventions are both blessings and liabilities. All our inventions must be employed, above all, in service to God. Christians need to demonstrate the new humanity in Christ in every sphere and endeavor of life. Paul calls us to this complete consecration in Romans 12:1–2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

5. Exhibit true humanity in genuine community in the family, the church, and the world.

Christians need to be better stewards of our electronic devices so that we may focus more on face-to-face relationships. In writing my 2012 article on this topic, I was amazed to discover that this theme of the importance of face-to-face communication and fellowship is pervasive in the Bible.³²

CONCLUSION

Ken Myers, the host of Mars Hill Audio, was once asked, “Can modern technological man alter human nature?” He wisely responded “No, but we can do a lot of damage trying.” While Christians cannot control the damage that dehumanization inflicts, we can promote and model a Christian view of who we are as God’s image, but especially as that image is restored in the true and final man, the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

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

³² Gregory E. Reynolds, “Face to Face: The Importance of Personal Presence in Ministry and Life,” *Ordained Servant Online* (Dec. 2012), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=340; *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 20–26.

Servant Thoughts

The Pulley: A Theological Reflection

by Gregory E. Reynolds

The Pulley

by George Herbert

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.”

“Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

Imagine going back to God’s thoughts in Eden; this is where Herbert’s *The Pulley* was born—in the biblical creation text, describing the creation of humankind. Herbert displays profound insight into Sabbath rest without ever using the word Sabbath. So, the image of the pulley is named only in the title, but gives metaphorical movement to the entire poem. Such is the intricate skill of George Herbert. However, his theological acumen is not inferior to his poetic ability. For Herbert truth trumped wit—a critical feature of the Metaphysical poets—though he was a master of the latter. In this poem he exhibits penetrating insight into the nature of man and his quest for rest. Herbert explores Pascal’s “God-shaped vacuum” in every human heart, which, if not filled with God himself will not

yield rest. The poem is made up of four quintets (five line stanzas). They move from the creation of man to the answer to the question of why God withheld rest from him. He concludes with the way God moves us to find true rest.

The first stanza reveals God's intention to bless his image-bearer with the "world's riches" poured out of a heavenly glass to concentrate all of the world's wonders in the consciousness and possession of his first human creation in the Paradise garden. A "span" is the short distance between the tips of the thumb and little finger of an outstretched hand. Perhaps Herbert had Psalm 8 in mind: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). Man is small in the context of the vast universe; and yet he is made "a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned . . . with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5), and given dominion over the entire created order. He is unique among God's creatures.

So in stanza two the blessings are poured out. "Strength" is first, implying not only physical power, but also mental and moral ability to create culture and rule the world with integrity. Then "beauty flowed," gives the impression of beauty's presence everywhere and uniquely perceived by man. The entire creation reveals the beauty of its Creator, but only mankind appreciates that beauty. "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). Then "wisdom, honor, pleasure" paint a portrait of man being given the highest dignity of all creatures, equipped to rule the world for the glory of God and everlasting enjoyment of him. But wait, God knows something about man that would ruin his design: Sabbath rest is a unique blessing at the bottom of God's treasure chest. So "God made a stay," withholding this single blessing.

Stanza three explains why. The subtlety of Herbert's theological acumen is revealed in these lines: "For if I should," said he, "Bestow this jewel also on my creature . . ." "Also"? Yes, God has entered *his* rest upon completing his creation on the sixth day. Remember, rest here is enjoyment of a completed task, not sleep. But God recognizes a special danger in giving this gift to man at creation: "He would adore my gifts instead of me" and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Mankind would seek Sabbath rest in the created order: "And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature," eliminating him from human life, a temptation amplified in modernity. "So both should losers be." God created man to worship and serve him above all, to glorify God and enjoy him forever in true Sabbath rest. Without such worship there can be no lasting enjoyment of God or his world, only outer darkness; God's purpose in creating man would be frustrated. Complete rest is an eschatological gift that would come, not with the first creation, but the second creation in the second Adam. "Thus it is written [Gen. 2:7], 'The first man Adam became a living being;' the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).

Stanza four envisions the ultimate purpose of withholding rest from man. It begins with a beautiful, adroit pun: "Yet let him keep the rest." Everything but rest he may keep and vainly seek rest in those very blessings. Also rest rests in the glass. The built-in frustration of this vain quest for rest without God will leave man in a state of "repining restlessness," perpetual discontent, yet with a "pining," longing for fulfillment. Man is constantly seeking satisfying rest in every endeavor and, even when it seems attainable, death ends the delusion, as Ecclesiastes teaches.

There can be no spiritual repose without God. So, “rich and weary” man may learn this lesson: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

When Herbert says, “If goodness lead him not,” he no doubt had Romans 2:4 from his King James Bible in mind: “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” In other words, if God’s goodness in providence doesn’t move people to turn to him, “weariness” may. There are, of course, in the Bible and church history, examples of God using both these means to bring people to himself.

The loveliest line of all is the last: “May toss him to my breast.” God has sent weariness on this great errand, to achieve intimate communion between mankind and the true and living God. This is the great end of humankind. The image of leaning on the breast of God reminds us of John’s reclining in this personal fashion (John 13:25, 21:20). So much Scripture envisions this goal: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10). “My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Ps. 84:2).

So, what is the significance of the pulley? It is a metaphor that frames the poem. The simple image of a rope running over a suspended wheel yields the paradox that pulling down lifts up. We need such to draw us to God.

[H]uman depression and restlessness will lead to aspirations for eternal rest. The notion of a pulley is not unconnected to the central idea of ‘rest’ in the poem: . . . it is the weight of ‘rest’ on one rope which will hoist or ‘toss’ the individual to God’s level, and . . . when the believer has achieved ‘a final sabbath rest within the bosom of a loving God, then the motion ceases and the pulley reaches a point of stasis, or final rest’ (Hunter, 1976).¹

“In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most humans persist in the delusion that a person who *has everything* will be happy.”² As I have been memorizing and reciting this poem on my walks for the past year, I always end with a prayer for my unbelieving children, relatives, and friends. Thank God we have this promise: “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it (Heb. 4:1).” And, we are encouraged to pursue Sabbath rest by the one who has won it for us, the Lord Jesus Christ: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

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

¹ Hellen Wilcox, ed., *The English Poems of George Herbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 549. The image of a pulley was used before Herbert by Nicol Burne in *Disputation* (1581), and Thomas Nashe *Red Herring* (1599). I owe several insights to Wilcox’s commentary, which is a compilation from many writers.

² Jim Scott Orrick, *A Year with George Herbert: A Guide to Fifty-Two of His Best Loved Poems* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 123.

ServantHistory

Reformed Confessions:

Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619)

by John R. Muether

When Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), a student of Theodore Beza at Geneva, joined the faculty at the University of Leiden, his lectures on predestination became a center of controversy. His supporters (Arminians) sought to revise the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism to accommodate his teaching, while efforts to discipline Arminius failed. A year after his death, his followers published a Remonstrance which summarized his views in five articles.

Facing the prospect of a divided church and perhaps even a civil war, the States-General of the Netherlands called (and funded) a synod to settle the controversy in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. The synod conducted 180 sessions from November 1618 to May 1619, meeting in Dort (or Dordrecht). Fifty-eight Dutch ministers and elders, five professors of theology, and eighteen civil delegates (who supervised the proceedings and reported to the States-General) were joined by twenty-six representatives from eight foreign churches (including England, the Palatinate, and Switzerland), establishing an international synod. Also summoned to the synod were thirteen prominent Remonstrant theologians, led by Simon Episcopius. Their disruption of meetings led to their eventual dismissal.

The synod proceeded, in the Canons of Dort, to condemn Arminianism and affirm the doctrine of double predestination, while urging care in how the doctrine was preached (see the excerpt below from the conclusion). The affirmations under five heads of doctrine would become popularly summarized as the “five points of Calvinism”: total depravity, unconditional election, limited (or definite) atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. The fifth head of doctrine underscored the assurance that came from the doctrine of predestination: the Holy Spirit preserves God’s people so that they are kept in the body of Christ throughout their earthly pilgrimage.

The Canons of Dort are arguably the least studied and most misunderstood of the Reformed standards today. Far from an extreme expression of rigid Calvinism, the synod reached a remarkable consensus. Different viewpoints on matters such as infra- and supralapsarianism and different formulations on the sufficiency of the atonement did not keep delegates from forging a statement, signed by all delegates, that united international Calvinism. According to Robert Godfrey, the moderation of the Canons succeeded in “drawing Calvinists together around the essentials of the faith and preventing the movement from fragmenting over peripheral issues.”¹ It served to highlight the doctrines of sovereign grace that safeguard the heart of the Reformation, as well as the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In its firm pastoral response to the Arminian challenge, Dort proved to be “the least provincial or national of all of the Reformed doctrinal standards.”²

¹ W. Robert Godfrey, *Reformed Sketches: Insights into Luther, Calvin, and the Confessions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 130.

² *Ibid.*, 126.

Before adjourning, the synod approved the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession as doctrinal standards for the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, and it established a church order that would shape the churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition, on both sides of the Atlantic, for centuries.

An Excerpt (from the conclusion):

[T]his Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities—statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning—but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of all the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod earnestly warns the false accusers themselves to consider how heavy a judgment of God awaits those who give false testimony against so many churches and their confessions, trouble the consciences of the weak, and seek to prejudice the minds of many against the fellowship of true believers.

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches; to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls; to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally, to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of his Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

The Sequence of Confessions

Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli (1523)
Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)
First Helvetic Confession (1536)
French Confession of Faith (1559)
Scots Confession (1560)
Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)
Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
Second Helvetic Confession (1566)
Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619)
Westminster Confession & Catechisms (1643)

John R. Muether serves as a ruling elder at Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Oviedo, Florida, dean of libraries at Reformed Theological Seminary, and historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

ServantHistory

Geerhardus Vos: Grace and Glory

by Danny E. Olinger

Geerhardus Vos wrote out his sermons in full manuscript form. At the top of the page of the start of each new sermon, he penciled in the date or dates when he preached it and the church or chapel in which he preached it.¹ In his last recorded sermon delivered at Princeton's Miller Chapel on the Lord's Day of October 12, 1913, he preached on the topic "Christ's Deliberate Work" from Mark 10:45. Seventeen years earlier in 1896 at Miller Chapel, he preached on the topic "Our Holy and Gracious God" from Isaiah 57:15. During this period from 1896 to 1913, he preached a new sermon at Princeton, on average, once every fifteen months.²

It had to be a curious decision then to some that in 1922 the Reformed Press of Grand Rapids, Michigan, decided to publish *Grace and Glory*, a volume of six sermons that Vos had preached at Miller Chapel.³ Not only did Vos rarely preach, he was not a native English speaker. He never pastored a church, and he did not lecture in the homiletics department at Princeton. And yet, Vos's sermons in *Grace and Glory* gained a reputation among many as models of Christ-centered preaching.

Sinclair Ferguson in the "Introduction" to the expanded 1994 edition of *Grace and Glory* explained why he believed that Vos's sermons were so valuable.⁴ "[Vos] wishes to speak to his hearers about God. He wants to instill in them precisely the sense that God is gracious and God is glorious."⁵ Ferguson then added, "Nothing short of an eloquence which is both gracious and glorious will suffice him."⁶ The combination of these two qualities, penetrating biblical-theological understanding and soaring heights of eloquence, led Ferguson to exclaim that Vos's sermons would have a stunning effect on the reader.

Still, Ferguson acknowledged that in a world obsessed with "sound-bites," Vos's sermons cannot be reduced to alliterated ten-minute homilies. Vos packed so much biblical content into his sermons that one might be tempted to ask, "What group of people—even of theological students—could have taken in the substance of any of these sermons at one

¹ One of his sermon notebooks is in the Heritage Hall Archive of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

² In his last year at Princeton in 1931–1932, Vos preached a final time at Miller Chapel. According to student Ray Lindquist, "Prof. Vos took out of his Bible a pensioned manuscript, worn, torn and discolored. 'Perhaps' he said, 'this sermon can be preached one more time.'" It was not recorded which sermon Vos preached. Letter, Ray Lindquist to Frederick W. Cassell, May 5, 1989. Geerhardus Vos, Box 3, Special Collection at Princeton Theological Seminary.

³ Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Grand Rapids: Reformed, 1922).

⁴ In 1994 the Banner of Truth Trust published an updated edition of *Grace and Glory* that included ten additional Vos sermons. Two sermons were from the book of Hebrews and two from 1 Corinthians. Single sermons were from the Psalms and the books of Isaiah, Matthew, Mark, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994).

⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

⁶ *Ibid.*

hearing?”⁷ Ferguson answered that, for those who follow Vos as spiritual mountaineers, there are life-changing panoramic views of the wonders of God. “Having been taken to such mountain peaks, the vision of God we have beheld in Scripture will produce in us a new and more holy and heavenly perspective on the whole of life.”⁸

Grace and Glory

In the minimalist fashion that was typical of Vos, there was no introduction or preface to the 1922 Reformed Press original edition of *Grace and Glory*. There was also no explanation on why Vos chose this title. It is reasonable to conclude that he drew it from Psalm 84:11, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”⁹

It is also likely that Vos deliberately selected and ordered the sermons in *Grace and Glory* to match the movement of the history of special revelation. Read consecutively, the sermons move from Old Testament (“The Wonderful Tree,” Hosea 14:8) to the Gospels of Matthew (“Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness,” Matthew 5:6), Luke (“Seeking and Saving the Lost,” Luke 19:10), and John (“Rabboni!” John 20:16), to the Pauline Epistle of 2 Corinthians (“The More Excellent Ministry,” 2 Corinthians 3:18), and conclude with the book of Hebrews (“Heavenly-Mindedness,” Hebrews 11:9–10).

The Wonderful Tree¹⁰

Although it appeared first in the ordering of the sermons in *Grace and Glory*, “The Wonderful Tree,” should not be considered Vos’s ideal sermon, but his foundational Old Testament sermon with its emphasis upon the covenantal nature of biblical religion. He declared that the Lord’s utterance in Hosea 14:8, “I am like a green-fir tree; from me is thy fruit found,” represents one of the two sides that comprise the covenant relationship, what God is for man. The other side of the covenant is what man is for God.

Hosea taught that “the possession of Jehovah himself by his people will be of all the delights of the world to come the chief and most satisfying, the paradise within the paradise of God.”¹¹ The great marvel, “the heart-miracle of all true religion, the great paradox underlying all God’s concern with us” is that the all-sufficient God, forever rich and blessed in himself, should give himself to fallen creatures without reserve.¹² The covenant relation into which it pleases God to receive Israel to himself “has in it a sublime abandon; it knows neither restraint nor reserve.”¹³

⁷ Ibid., xi.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ All biblical quotes from this point on are from the King James Version.

¹⁰ At nearly 7,500 words, which if delivered at a rate of 100 words per minute would be a one-hour-and-fifteen-minute sermon, “The Wonderful Tree” is the longest published Vos sermon. It shares themes from his 1891 address, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology” (in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* [Shorter Writings], ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. [Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980], 234–67) and his 1898 article dealing with Hosea, “The Modern Hypothesis and Recent Criticism of the Early Prophets” (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 9, no. 34 [1898]: 231–38).

¹¹ Vos, *Grace and Glory* (1994), 3.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

This redemptive self-communication of God is what Hosea had in mind in recording the promise of the text. Vos declared:

When Jehovah, entering into covenant with Israel, says, “I will be unto you a God, and ye shall be unto me a people,” this means infinitely more than the trite idea: henceforth ye shall worship me and I will cultivate you. It is the mutual surrender of person to person.¹⁴

What Hosea saw as in a glass darkly through the imagery of the green olive tree will one day resolve itself into the spiritual realities of the life to come. Then, “every sacrament shall fall away, and our fruition shall be of God within God; we shall at last be like him, because we know him as he is.”¹⁵

Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness¹⁶

In “Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness” from Matthew 5:3, Vos challenged the liberal belief that Jesus taught a religion of ethics devoid of redemptive significance. The sermon caught the eye of his junior colleague at Princeton, J. Gresham Machen. In Machen’s personal copy of *Grace and Glory*, he penciled in margin notes throughout the sermon.¹⁷ He took notice of Vos’s declaration that the Sermon on the Mount in liberal hands has become the creed of the creedless. Next to Vos’s statement, “Although the religious atmosphere in his day was surcharged with the notions of law-keeping and merit and retribution, there was lacking the vivid consciousness of God as a perpetual witness and interested participant in every moral transaction,”¹⁸ Machen wrote, “Good.” When Vos said, “It is God’s inalienable right as God to impress his character upon us, to make and keep us reflectors of his infinite glory,”¹⁹ Machen marked, “law as school master.”

Vos asked the rhetorical question whether the Lord could have meant that it was possible for the disciple by his own strength to attain righteousness. He answered, “No, not the possession of such a righteousness is characteristic of the members of the kingdom, but that they hunger and thirst after it.”²⁰ Machen penciled in next to the beginning of Vos’s answer, “not the possession” and at the end, “passion after.”

Machen also highlighted Vos’s statement that hungering and thirsting after righteousness lies in the birth of the conviction of sin. Vos emphasized that the beatitudes taught that believers are not received by Jesus into a school of ethics but into a kingdom of redemption.²¹ The word that Jesus proclaimed was not to the self-satisfied. Rather, he spoke

¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶ “Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness” and the sermon which followed, “Seeking and Saving the Lost,” recount many of the themes that can be found in Vos’s 1903 book, *The Kingdom of God and the Church*.

¹⁷ The copy is in the Montgomery Library of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

¹⁸ Vos, *Grace and Glory* (1922), 44.

¹⁹ Ibid., 46.

²⁰ Ibid., 49.

²¹ In his book *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen expanded upon the truth that the redemptive precedes the ethical in Christianity. He wrote, “Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with a triumphant

to the poor in spirit, those that mourn, the meek and the hungry, namely, to those who are utterly dependent upon the grace of God.

Vos stated that sin must be undone if God is to remain the God of sinners. He concluded that, as Machen noted in his copy, the truth taught by Jesus leads directly to Paul's doctrine of the atonement.

Machen also agreed with Vos that hungering and thirsting after righteousness includes a desire to exhibit the righteousness of discipleship in a sanctified life. God, and God alone, can produce this desire in the heart of man. No sinner can give it to himself. "If we feel it at all, to however slight a degree, it is from no other cause than that the love of God has found us, and the breath of the Spirit Creator has blown upon us, quickening us into newness of life."²²

The one who gives the thirst is the one who also provides the water. It is not the will of the Heavenly Father that any who sincerely seek after him shall perish unsatisfied. Since the sinner is devoid of all righteousness, this satisfying righteousness for the people of God must be provided from without. The chief of all blessings in the coming order of things, the new kingdom of God, is the gift of God of perfect righteousness. "What is true of the kingdom that no human merit can deserve, no human effort call it into being, applies with equal force to the righteousness that forms its center. It is God's creation, not man's."²³ Machen wrote, "very important—the kingdom of God & righteousness."

Vos proclaimed in finishing the sermon that Jesus alone fulfilled the law, and yet bore the curse that our sins deserved.

His human nature was an altar from which the incense of perfect consecration rose ceaselessly day and night. He submitted to the cross and endured the shame, not merely on our behalf, but first of all that not one jot or one tittle of the divine justice should fall to the ground.²⁴

Through justification we are filled with the fullness of his merit. Through sanctification his holy character is impressed upon our souls.

On the last day the Lord Jesus shall satisfy himself in us by perfectly presenting us to God. "Then shall come to pass the word that is written: 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.' For we shall behold God's face in righteousness and be satisfied, when we awake, with his image."²⁵

Seeking and Saving the Lost

In the third sermon, "Seeking and Saving the Lost," from Luke 19, Vos focused on Jesus as Savior. Jesus entered Zacchaeus's house and called Zacchaeus by name. Vos asked, "How many of us would have been saved, if the Lord had waited till we sought him out?"²⁶ Jesus pursues us until his grace and the sovereign power of his Word overtake us.

indicative; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God." J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 47.

²² Vos, *Grace and Glory* (1922), 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁶ Vos, "Seeking and Saving the Lost," *Grace and Glory* (1994), 52.

“It is a call like the voice of God at the first creation, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light: ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must abide in thy house.’”²⁷

Vos finished with two lessons that he believed future preachers should draw from this incident in Jesus’s life. The first lesson was the specialized character of the ministry of the Word. It should not be the promotion of the social gospel, but preaching Christ as the only remedy for sin. He proclaimed:

The goal of seeking and saving were for our Lord pronouncedly religious. Seeking and saving meant for him, before anything else, seeking and saving for God. It had no humanitarian or world-improving purpose apart from this. It began with the thought of God and ended there. For that he came. And at that we should aim.²⁸

The second lesson was the specific religious task of saving, bringing Christ to men and men to Christ. It sounds simple, but it is a most delicate task to delineate

the face of Christ as to make him look out with his immortal Saviour-eyes straight and deep into the heart of sinners. Let your one concern be to bring the two together in the house where salvation is needed, and having led the Saviour in, go thou out and shut the door silently behind thee.²⁹

Rabboni!³⁰

In the spring of 1904 Machen wrote his mother about hearing Vos preach about Jesus’s appearance to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection. Machen told her it was “one of the finest expository sermons I ever heard.”³¹ The sermon was “Rabboni!” based on John 20. In it, Vos showed how the religious goal of communion with God as described in “The Wonderful Tree” has been realized through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the one and only Savior pictured in “Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness” and “Seeking and Saving the Lost.”

Vos said that ultimately the question that everyone must face is, “What does Christ mean to me?” If we know ourselves as guilty sinners, devoid of all hope and life in ourselves, then Jesus means everything for our pardon, peace, and strength. “Will it not

²⁷ Ibid., 53.

²⁸ Ibid., 64–65.

²⁹ Ibid., 65–66.

³⁰ In the original *Grace and Glory* it was the shortest sermon at 4,480 words. Vos’s daughter Marianne said that this was her father’s Easter sermon. Interview, Marianne Vos Radius by Charles G. Dennison, February 27, 1992, at the Raybrook Assisted Living Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Archives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

³¹ See Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen* (Willow Grove, PA: OPC Committee for the Historian, 2004), 52. Interestingly, twenty years later Machen was thinking again about Vos and preaching. In Machen’s sermon manuscript, “Church of the Living God, pillar and ground of Truth,” preached at Princeton’s Miller Chapel on March 30, 1924, Machen wrote, “The church of Christ is here described in exalted terms; but it is not regarded here or elsewhere in the New Testament, as an end in itself; on the contrary it is regarded as an agency for the propagation of the gospel.” Machen added in the margin, “Vos says this is wrong.” Archives of Westminster Theological Seminary. Thanks to Eric B. Watkins, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, St. Augustine, Florida, for this reference.

sound like mockery in our ears if somebody tells us that it does not matter whether Jesus rose from the dead on the third day?”³²

At the empty tomb, Mary told the angels that they have taken “my Lord,” which reveals a personal element. The angels “might hail him as their matchless King, but to Mary he was even more than this, her Lord, her Saviour, the one who had sought, saved, and owned her in her sins.”³³

Raised from death, Jesus himself experienced the joy of entering an endless life in the possession of new power such as human nature had never known before. But, Vos observed what he did first. The risen Christ appeared to Mary, “a weeping woman, who had no greater claim upon him than any simply penitent sinner has.”³⁴

With a single word, “Mary,” Jesus revealed himself, and Mary’s world was changed; she turned and said to him, “Rabboni!” Vos wrote that Mary “in that instant made the transition from hopelessness because Jesus was absent, to fullness of joy because Christ was there.”³⁵

But, even in that unique moment, Jesus instructed Mary not to touch him. Jesus did not mean that touch was too close a contact to be henceforth permissible. Rather, Jesus meant that the provision for the highest, the ideal kind of touch had not been completed. The great event of which the resurrection of Jesus is the first step requires the ascension of Jesus to the Father. When that is accomplished, then every restriction will fall away and the desire to touch Jesus shall be fully gratified.

This is what Mary was to repeat to the brethren that they also might know this new life of glory. But, it was not just the brethren in Mary’s day. Vos exclaimed:

May we not suitably close our study by reminding ourselves that we too are included among the brethren to whom he desired these tidings be brought? Before this he had never called the disciples by this name, as he had never until now so suggestively identified himself with them by speaking of “your Father and my Father” and “your God and my God.” We are once more assured that the new life of glory, instead of taking him from us, has made us in a profounder sense his brethren and his Father our Father.³⁶

In light of this reality, Vos commanded, “Let us not linger at the tomb, but turn our faces and stretch out our hands upwards into heaven, where our life is hid with him in God.”³⁷ It is from heaven that Jesus will come again to show himself to us as he did to Mary, that we might speak “Rabboni” in meeting our Savior in the early dawn of the eternal Sabbath that awaits the people of God.

³² Vos, *Grace and Glory* (1994), 71. Vos preferred to use the first person plural pronouns “we” and “us” when preaching. In the six sermons in *Grace and Glory*, he used “we” an average of forty times per sermon and “us” an average of twenty-six times per sermon. In the same sermons, he used the pronoun “you” an average of three times per sermon.

³³ *Ibid.*, 74–75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 75–76.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

The More Excellent Ministry³⁸

In the fifth sermon, “The More Excellent Ministry,” based on 2 Corinthians 3, Vos explained the situation at Corinth, then the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and finally declared the superiority of Christ and those who minister in Christ’s name in the new day. At Corinth the opponents of Paul believed that he preached a Christ devoid of glory. Added to this accusation was a demand for a Messiah who in his make-up matched the palpable institutions of the Mosaic covenant.

What Moses stood for was glorious, but like the reflection of the glory on his face, it lacked permanence. Both Moses and Paul were aware of this. Moses put the veil on his face to hide the disappearance of the glory. In contrast Paul professed to minister with open face.

In redemptive history, every preparatory stage, as the Old Covenant was, can only understand its purpose in light of what fulfills it. “The veil of the Old Covenant is only lifted in Christ. The Christian standpoint alone furnishes the necessary perspective for apprehending its place and function in the organism of the whole.”³⁹ Tragically, when Israel came face-to-face with Jesus, the one true interpreter, the meaning of Moses’s words was veiled because their minds were blinded. Paul’s “entire task, both on its communicative and on its receptive side, can be summed up in his reflecting back the Christ-glory, caught by himself unto others. To behold Christ and to make others behold him is the substance of his ministry.”⁴⁰

Vos declared that the enemies of Paul still confront the church but wear modern apparel. These modern enemies present a subtle form of legalism. They rob Jesus of his crown of glory, earned by the cross. Vos poetically exclaimed, “Oh the pity and shame of it, the Jesus that is being preached but too often is a Christ after the flesh, a religious genius, the product of evolution, powerless to save!”⁴¹ He then implored his listeners, “Let us pray that it may be given to the church to repudiate and cast out this error with the resoluteness of Paul.”⁴²

Heavenly-Mindedness⁴³

Vos’s last sermon in *Grace and Glory*, “Heavenly-mindedness,” from Hebrews 11:9–10, set forth the biblical disposition of the believer. The Christian is a pilgrim who longs to be with God in heaven because that is where the risen Christ dwells bodily.

The Patriarchs exhibited this heavenly-minded type of faith. Knowing that they were the predestined inhabitants of the eternal city that had been prepared for them, the Patriarchs refused to build an abiding habitation on the earth as their goal. “The adherence

³⁸ “The More Excellent Ministry” shared many of the same themes as Vos’s 1912 article, “The Eschatological Aspects of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit” (in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary [NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912]) and his 1930 book, *The Pauline Eschatology* (repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979).

³⁹ Ibid., 91–92.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁴¹ Ibid., 102.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Heavenly-mindedness” reflected Vos’s insights from the Epistle to the Hebrews that can be found in his 1907 article “The Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews” and his 1915 article “Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diatheke” in *Shorter Writings*.

to the tent-life in the sight and amidst the scenes of the promised land fixes the aspiration of the patriarchs as aiming at the highest conceivable heavenly goal.”⁴⁴

The author of Hebrews holds the Patriarchs up as models, and yet what new Covenant believers possess in Christ is better. “To the saints of the New Covenant life and immortality and all the powers of the world to come have been opened up by Christ. The Christian state is as truly part and foretaste of the things above as a portal forms part of the house.”⁴⁵

This hope in another world was planted by God in the soul of man. “Ever since the goal set by the covenant of works came within his ken, man carries with him in all his converse with this world the sense of belonging to another.”⁴⁶ But, it is the will of God that man works out his heavenly destiny on the basis of, and in contact with, the earthly sphere.

Still, the lower may never supplant the higher, for the heart of man calls for eternity. In words that revealed his poetic skill, Vos said:

A perfect communion in a perfect society is promised. In the city of the living God believers are joined to the general assembly and church of the first-born, and mingle with the saints of just men made perfect. And all this faith recognizes. It does not first need the storms and stress that invade to quicken its desire for such things. Being the sum and substance of all the positive gifts of God to us in their highest form, heaven is of itself able to evoke in our hearts positive love, such absorbing love as can render us at times forgetful of the earthly strife. In such moments the transcendent beauty of the other shore and the irresistible current of our deepest life lift us above every regard of wind or wave. We know that through weather fair or foul our ship is bound straight for its eternal port.⁴⁷

Vos sounded the warning note that some in the Presbyterian Church had ceased to set their face towards the celestial city and aimed for the transformation of this world. Such a religion was bound sooner or later to discard all the supernatural resources available to it. Prophetically, Vos declared:

The days are perhaps not far distant when we shall find ourselves confronted with a quasi-form of Christianity professing openly to place its dependence on and to work for the present life alone, a religion, to use the language of Hebrews, become profane and a fornicator like Esau, selling for a mess of earthly pottage its heavenly birthright.⁴⁸

Vos finished telling his hearers about the reality and joys of heaven. Faith deals with heaven as it exists. Hope seizes upon it as it will be in the end. Hope soars to the goal of God’s work in history, the finished heaven of redemption filled with the glory of Christ.

Heaven is the goal of redemption, religion being older than redemption. But, redemption is the summit of religion. The vision of God as God and the vision of God our Savior melt into one. “The life above will be a ceaseless coming to Jesus, the Mediator of a

⁴⁴ Geerhardus Vos, “Heavenly-mindedness,” in *Grace and Glory* (1994), 109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

better covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than Abel. The Lamb slain for our sins will be all the glory of Emmanuel's land."⁴⁹

The highest thing that can be said of the promised city above is that it is the city of God. He dwells in the midst of it, and this is ultimately why believers are heavenly-minded. Believers long to be with God in fullness. "A heaven that was not illuminated by the light of God, and not a place for closest embrace of him, would be less than heaven."⁵⁰

John DeWaard

When the Presbyterian Church of America was formed in 1936, one of its first leaders was John DeWaard, pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin.⁵¹ In the December 12, 1936 issue of the Machen-edited *Presbyterian Guardian*, DeWaard encouraged ministers in the new church to follow Vos's exegetically-based, Christ-centered preaching. Reflecting upon his time as a student at Princeton under Vos, DeWaard said that he loved Vos for teaching the students to love God's Word and to proclaim that Word with joy. "We did not leave class with four or five outlines for sermons we could use in the pulpit later, but we did leave class with the desire to show the people what joy and pleasure there is in the study of the Word."⁵²

DeWaard acknowledged that "perhaps there is no one in our fellowship who can do what Dr. Vos succeeded so well in doing."⁵³ But if the preachers in the new church could attempt to do the same thing in a small way, their spiritual lives would be enhanced. He concluded,

Unless by the help of the Holy Spirit we can send our people back to the Bible to see for themselves whether these things which we teach them are true, our building is in vain and our efforts will go down in history as an illustration of how men ought not to use the Holy Bible.⁵⁴

Edmund Clowney

In 1961 Orthodox Presbyterian minister and Westminster Seminary professor Edmund Clowney published *Preaching and Biblical Theology*,⁵⁵ which advocated applying the biblical-theological insights of Vos to preaching.⁵⁶ Clowney defined biblical theology using

⁴⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 122–23.

⁵¹ The Presbyterian Church of America was renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1939.

⁵² John J. DeWaard, "Higher Ground," *Presbyterian Guardian* 3, no. 5 (December 12, 1936): 97.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

⁵⁶ In his 2003 book, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway), Clowney revealed in part how he was introduced to Vos and biblical-theological preaching. He wrote, "Before Geerhardus Vos at Princeton Theological Seminary brought into American Calvinism the history of redemption and revelation, classical Reformed theology used separate proof-texts to establish biblical doctrines. John Murray at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, however, had studied under Vos at Princeton. Murray taught a course in biblical theology. He proceeded through the periods of the history of redemption; creation to fall; fall to flood; flood to the call of Abraham; Abraham to Moses; Moses to Christ" (17). Clowney and Murray's colleague at

Vos's definition ("that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible"), then moved to questions of the authority of preaching, the perspective of preaching, and the relationship of biblical theology to the content of sermons. Clowney argued that the essential presuppositions of biblical theology "are the principles of revelation and inspiration claimed and assumed by the Bible itself. This is clearly seen and stoutly asserted by Geerhardus Vos in the introduction to his *Biblical Theology*."⁵⁷

Clowney recognized with Vos that the discipline of biblical theology could not rightly exist apart from a recognition of the objectivity of revelation. When critics deny the objectivity of revelation, they inevitably undermine theology in the name of history. Biblical theology, rightly understood, does justice to the unity of divine counsel and the diversity that recognizes the historical and progressive character of revelation.

According to Clowney, then, "the preacher who takes up Vos's *Biblical Theology* for the first time enters a new world, a world which lifts up his heart because he is a preacher. Biblical theology, truly conceived, is a labor of worship."⁵⁸ Clowney then added:

Beside Vos's *Biblical Theology* should be set his little book of sermons, *Grace and Glory*. There we hear a scholar preaching to theological students (the sermons were delivered in Princeton Seminary), but with a burning tenderness and awesome realism that springs from the grace and glory of God's revelation, the historical actualization of the eternal counsel of redemption.⁵⁹

In his discussion of biblical theology and the character of preaching in the section, "The Time in Which We Preach," Clowney affirmed Vos's belief that believers living between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ are joined in the same redemptive setting, no matter how many years they might be separated in time and by the advancement of technology and culture.⁶⁰ Clowney illustrated this truth from the perspective of the Apostle Peter. By faith, Peter recognizes that, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "he stands in the new age, the time of fulfillment, the time of the coming in of the kingdom of God with power."⁶¹ This eschatological perspective, namely, that he ministers in the time of the ascended Christ with the power of Christ's Spirit, gives both urgency and joy to Peter's preaching.

But, most importantly for Clowney, biblical theology's value as taught by Vos was that it centered preaching on its essential message, Jesus Christ. "Salvation is of the Lord, and the message of the gospel is the theocentric message of the unfolding of the plan of God for our salvation in Jesus Christ. He who would preach the Word must preach Christ."⁶²

Westminster, Cornelius Van Til, also advocated preaching in a biblical-theological way along the lines of what Vos promoted. See, John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 215.

⁵⁷ Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ The classic expression of this in Vos's teaching is found in the *Biblical Theology* where he declared, "Still, we know full well that we ourselves live just as much in the New Testament as did Peter and Paul and John." Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA.: Banner of Truth, 1987), 303.

⁶¹ Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 66.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 74. Dennis Johnson and Eric B. Watkins have built upon Clowney's advocacy of redemptive-historical preaching in a Vosian manner in their respective books, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from*

Jay Adams

Jay Adams was not as complimentary of Vos's preaching. Although Adams states that he does not wish to impugn the use of biblical theology as it helps the preacher avoid moralizing and makes a sermon Christian, he believes that Vos's sermons lacked a proper application. In his book *Truth Applied*, he writes, "Conservative biblical-theological preachers, sailing in the wake of Geerhardus Vos, tend to ignore (or even oppose) the use of application in a sermon."⁶³ Adams was even more forceful in "Reflections on Westminster Theology and Homiletics." He states, "Vos's *Grace and Glory* is an interesting and helpful volume, but what you find there are not sermons but excellent essays. Yet, there were students [at Westminster Seminary] who took this book as exemplary of what preaching ought to be."⁶⁴ In a word, Adams saw Vos's sermons as being Christ-centered, but not practical, and, thus, not really sermons at all.⁶⁵

Adam's complaint that Vos's sermons lack application brings into view two prominent questions: 1) How did Vos understand the relationship of doctrine and practice in his preaching; and 2) What is "practical" in his preaching?

In "Running the Race," his sermon on Hebrews 12:1–3, Vos addressed the relationship between exhortation and practical application in his opening words.⁶⁶ He declared:

These verses stand at the beginning of one of the five hortatory sections which are so characteristic of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is perhaps no other book in the New Testament in which the two elements of theological exposition and practical application are so clearly distinguishable and yet so organically related as in this epistle.⁶⁷

Vos lauded the writer to the Hebrews for keeping right doctrine and right practice together. "The writer never made exhortation a substitute for doctrine."⁶⁸ This is why in Hebrews 5:12–13 the writer lamented the lack of spiritual progress of the Hebrew Christians. "He has just as much in mind their failure to make progress in the doctrinal apprehension of Christianity as the lack of development in the more practical province of their religious life."⁶⁹

It is clear from this passage in the sermon that Vos believed that failure in doctrine is failure in practice. The two are interrelated. The preacher, like the writer to the Hebrews, relies upon the inherent power of the truth to commend itself and work its way as applied by the Holy Spirit. The preacher knows that the Word of God is living and active and

all the Scriptures (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007) and *The Drama of Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

⁶³ Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 20–21.

⁶⁴ Jay E. Adams, "Reflections on Westminster Theology and Homiletics," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 263.

⁶⁵ For a helpful analysis of Adam's preaching methodology, see Dennis Johnson's *Him We Proclaim*, Kindle location 688–809.

⁶⁶ "Running the Race" was published in the 1994 edition of *Grace and Glory*. Consequently, it appeared after Adams's remarks in *Truth Applied* in 1990, but before his chapter "Reflections on Westminster Theology and Homiletics" in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine* in 2004.

⁶⁷ Vos, "Running the Race," in *Grace and Glory* (1994), 124.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces the soul and becomes the judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

As Vos continued in the sermon, what he saw as “practical” for the believer from the text became clear. It was a heavenly-mindedness that sought the cultivation of one’s communion with the living God. As a runner would lay aside that which would endanger his success, so a “believer who has set his face towards the future, heavenly life must divest himself of every concern with the present world which would retard his steady progress towards the higher kingdom.”⁷⁰

This does not mean that the Christian should be indifferent to his natural environment on the earth. What it does mean is the Christian should not have his portion in this present life in the same manner that the children of this world have it. The believer who casts his lot with the world and not with the spiritual world resembles the fornicator Esau who for a mess of pottage sold his birthright.

Charles Dennison

Charles Dennison commented on Adam’s complaint that Vos’s preaching lacked application. At root, according to Dennison, this was a complaint about Vos’s failure to promote cultural involvement in preaching. “Adams makes a transition from the neo-Puritan mindset to the laws of counseling to the laws by which you maintain new life,”⁷¹ said Dennison. In that model, Vos’s redemptive-historical exegesis with its emphasis upon Christ and the heavenly, self-denial, and suffering, becomes an abstraction.

If Dennison was correct, then the question is not about Vos’s use of imperatives, or if his sermons had “application,” but the nature and form of the imperatives Vos did use. Dennison contended that Vos’s imperatives were run through the cross of Jesus Christ. Rather than promoting the transformation of society through activism, or therapy in which one learns to cope with life in this world, Vos urged believers to have the mind of Christ, looking not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Dennison also saw Vos’s understanding of Pauline eschatology as fueling Vos’s vigorous opposition to liberal theology’s approach to preaching and life. Liberalism’s disregard of the supernatural in Christianity made eschatology, in Vos’s words, “a large mountain of offense.”⁷² This was reflected in preaching that was non-redemptive and thoroughly moralistic. Paul taught, however, that faith lays hold of the eschatological Christ as life-giving Spirit. The distinctiveness of Christianity as it is lived by those who embrace it comes from this connection with the realm of the Spirit, which is the supernatural realm.⁷³

Even though Vos ceased preaching in 1913, he did not cease his opposition to the spread of liberal theology in the Presbyterian Church or at Princeton. That same year, however, brought Francis Patton’s retirement as president of the seminary. The question soon would become whether the institution thought the same way about the destructiveness of modern critical thought as Vos did.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁷¹ Comments to author, May 22, 1994.

⁷² Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, vii.

⁷³ Comments to the “Vos Group” meeting in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, May 17, 1993.

Danny E. Olinger is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as the General Secretary of the Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

ServantReading

The Crisis of Modernity *by Augusto Del Noce*

by Carl Trueman

The Crisis of Modernity, by Augusto Del Noce. Edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2014, xxiv + 312 pages, \$34.95, paper.

Few if any of the readers of *Ordained Servant* are likely to have heard of Augusto Del Noce. An Italian political and cultural philosopher whose life spanned the years 1910 to 1989, much of his work was preoccupied with philosophical debates in his homeland, and little of it has been translated into English. Which is what makes this volume, translated by Carlo Lancellotti, professor of mathematics at the City University of New York, so important.

Del Noce's interest was modernity, its causes, its pathologies, its impact. And the essays collected in this book are representative of that, dealing with such matters as secularism, revolution, psychology, and pornography. A certain amount of the material deals with thinkers who have had little influence outside of Italy, but many of his concerns and ideas have universal relevance to the modern West. Specifically, Del Noce saw that the collapse of classical metaphysics was lethal to theism and consequently to humanity's self-understanding, and also therefore utterly destructive to the moral structure of life.

The central essay in the collection—and worth the price of the volume in itself—is his article from 1970, “The Ascendance of Eroticism.” This is a stunning piece of work. For a start, with prophetic insight he highlights the importance of gay marriage for the reconfiguring of traditional social structures and mores—long before anyone of any significance was talking about the subject.

I suspect many Christians are staggered both at the ferocity of the LGBTQ lobby and at the failure to carry any cultural weight of traditional arguments which we regard as setting our objections to gay sex in a broader ethical context (“We Christians don't agree with sex outside of marriage, straight or gay, and so we should not be dismissed as homophobic”). Reading “The Ascendance of Eroticism” should help. What we need to understand is that the sexual revolution is deeply political at every level. Del Noce uncovers this politicizing of sex through the failure of classical Marxism and its rebirth through a fusion with some of the ideas of Freud. He highlights the writings of Wilhelm Reich and the cultural activism of the Surrealist Movement as key. Traditional sexual morality had to be destroyed because the Left regarded (and still regards) the family unit as inimical to political liberation.

As Del Noce points out, the family is the means by which morality and identity is passed on from generation to generation, and its very existence relativizes individual loyalty to the state. And the family depends upon carefully structured sexual behavior. The abolition of sexual morality is, in effect, the abolition of the family, and Reich and

later the thinkers of the New Left, such as Herbert Marcuse, knew this. Here is how Del Noce describes the issue:

[W]hat is the repressive social institution *par excellence*? To Reich it is the traditional monogamous family; and, from his standpoint, certainly he cannot be said to be wrong. Indeed, the idea of family is inseparable from the idea of *tradition*, from a heritage of truth that we must *tradere, hand on*. Thus, the abolition of every meta-empirical order of truth requires that the family be dissolved. No merely sociological consideration can justify keeping it. (161)

In support of this thesis, Del Noce notes that Reich argued that the state should penalize those parents who would not enable the free sexual expression of their children. Sound familiar? What Reich desired in the 1930s and what Del Noce predicted in the 1970s has come to fruition in our day and generation. And it is surely interesting that, at the very moment Del Noce was arguing that the real agenda of the New Left was revolution via destruction of the morality that protected the family, the feminist theorist, Shulamith Firestone, was arguing that case explicitly. In her widely influential book, *The Dialectic of Sex*, she also called for the abolition of gender differences as being vital to the revolution's success. The politicizing of sex was a self-conscious, strategic decision by the New Left which is now bearing much foul fruit.

There are other aspects of Del Noce's work which are very thought-provoking. For example, he points out that the movement for sexual liberation does not aim at redefining the bounds of modesty. What it really wants to do is abolish the concept of modesty all together. That is a fascinating thought and explains much of what we see around us. Of course, Del Noce was mercifully spared the rise of Internet pornography, the normalization of perversion, and the pornification of pop culture. But it is hard not to see all around us the world exactly as he predicted it—nearly fifty years ago.

In the essay "The Death of the Sacred," Del Noce raises the problem of secularism as the basis for any kind of political cohesion. Speaking of the West-Soviet conflict, he says this:

[W]e face the greatest paradox of contemporary history: whereas Russia's official atheism "guards" an explicitly sacral myth—which must necessarily bear the mark of its origins and act accordingly, regardless of the intention of the rulers—the non-atheist West (at least officially) can stand against it only as a democracy "devoid of the sacred." (119)

Again, this is a remarkably perceptive and prescient point. More recently, conservative commentator Rod Dreher has argued that the problem the West faces when confronted by militant Islam is that one cannot fight something with nothing. It is very clear that the lack of transcendent meaning upon which postmodern democracy is predicated is, to put it simply, not enough to inspire devotion or to imbue life with any meaning. Myths—whether Marxist or Muslim—have a power which the metaphysically empty consumerism of the West cannot command or, more significantly, resist.

Del Noce also ties this to the long war against authority in the West. In the fascinating essay "Authority versus Power," he again focuses on Surrealism and argues that it was

not so much an artistic movement as an assault upon traditional categories and as the establishment of new, totalitarian ones. Authority he sees as something historical, rooted in tradition and communicated from age to age by culture. In this, he sounds remarkably similar to Edmund Burke. Power is established, by contrast, on the basis of a break, a radical rejection of the past. Marxism and Surrealism represent two forms of the revolutionary phenomenon. And again, the family as the basic cultural mechanism for transmission of the past to the future is at the center of these two movements' iconoclasm.

There is much more to this collection of essays than can be communicated in a short review. As an important thinker on the origins and fate of modernity, Del Noce has few peers. His writing is at times abstruse, but his conclusions are always thought-provoking.

Of course, some might ask why an Italian Roman Catholic philosopher should be of interest to an American Reformed audience. The answer is simple. First, he is trying to explain why the modern world is descending into moral and political chaos. Whether one agrees entirely with his analysis is beside the point: To follow the thinking of a great mind wrestling with the great issues of modernity is in itself a worthwhile and educative task. Second, in his identification of tradition, the family, and sex as three primary areas of confrontation between Christianity and modernity, he surely speaks truth. Those wanting to learn how we have arrived at our current cultural malaise and why things like militant Islam and resurgent nationalism are beginning to threaten the old liberal consensus can hardly do better than pick up Del Noce and read.

Carl Trueman *is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and serves as pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Ambler, Pennsylvania, and as a professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania.*

ServantReading

Morality after Calvin *by Kirk Summers*

A Review Article

by David C. Noe

Morality after Calvin: Theodore Beza's Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics, by Kirk Summers. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 432 pages, \$94.10.

The *Oxford Studies in Historical Theology* series, formerly edited by the late David C. Steinmetz and now helmed by Richard A. Muller, has produced many fine volumes for the benefit of the church and academy. Scott Manetsch's *Calvin's Company of Pastors*, Amy Nelson Burnett's *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy*, and John Owen and English Puritanism by Crawford Gribben are just three noteworthy titles.¹ To these, Orthodox Presbyterian officers should quickly add a fourth, Kirk Summers's *Morality after Calvin*. Released in the fall of 2016, the work is a *tour de force* of classical scholarship, historical and social research, philology, and theological reflection. It is also very edifying.

Before discussing some of the more interesting portions of the volume, I would like to begin with its final page. Here Summers writes:

Through the years some have characterized [Beza] as a sort of Reformed pope, a self-appointed tyrant of mores, the scowling, judgmental face on the Genevan landscape. This reading of Beza seems superficial, however, when we take into account the richness of his ethical convictions. His confident belief in the possibility of mankind's renewal through the recovery of a certain divinely sanctioned mode of life shaped every facet of his ministry: the controversies, the correspondence and scholarship, the sermons and poems, the daily interactions in Geneva are all expressions of this one central hope. (378)

It is this central insight—that most previous judgments have been superficial, ignoring Beza's commitment to divine revelation—that animates the whole of Summers's work in its careful research, sympathetic expression, and conclusive proofs. In many ways this volume, with its core observation, is a companion to the parallel resuscitation of Calvin's life and work, by placing them both in their proper historical context, that has been recently effected by Richard Muller (*The Unaccommodated Calvin*), Scott

¹ Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Manetsch (*Calvin's Company of Pastors*), and Bruce Gordon (*John Calvin: A Biography*), among others.² And as students of Beza know, such a resuscitation is long overdue.

The introduction and chapter 1, "Cato, God, and Natural Law," set the stage by explaining to the reader the character of the Roman orator and statesman Cato the Elder (239–149 BC). Appointed to the constitutionally established office of *censor* of morals, it was Cato's responsibility to conform Roman society to the traditions of their ancestors. In a clever appropriation and imitation, Beza, as a seasoned poet, published his *Cato Censorius Christianus* in 1591, a collection of poems modeled after Greek and Roman precedents. This collection was intended to teach morals by lampooning various vices with incisive wit and vituperation. A host of different kinds of men of bad behavior come under scrutiny, including the proud (*In Superbos*, 82), the ambitious (*In Ambitiosos*, p. 93), flatterers (*In Assentatores*, 139), the idle (*In Otiosos*, 165), the garrulous (*In Garrulos*, p. 193), and many more. For representations of Beza's flawlessly executed poems, presented in a variety of meters both familiar (elegiac couplet, *In Adulteros*, p. 270) and recondite (iambic distich, *In Epicureos*, p. 323), Summers draws from Beza's *Poemata* (two editions, 1597 and 1599) and the *Emblemata* (1580). He also gives properly idiomatic, and in places compelling English, translations of these gems.

As Summers moves through his various topics, "An Ethos of Listening" (ch. 2), "Living Sincerely" (ch. 3), "The Execution of One's Calling" (ch. 4), "Usury and the Rhetoric of Mutuality" (ch. 5), "Sanctifying Physical Relationships" (ch. 6), "Outliers" (ch. 7), and "A Retrospective View of Life's Journey" (ch. 8), it is clear that his erudition is profound and does full justice to his subject. Take page 86, fn 17, for example, in which Summers cites Beza's translation of James and 1 Peter from his *Annotationes* to the New Testament. Here he notes how Beza has replaced from his 1582 version the word *modestia* (which he construes as modesty) with *summissione* (submissiveness) in the final edition of 1598. And Summers notes that the concept was present in Aquinas, *Summa* 2,1,q.84. This depth of research and deftness with primary sources is, in the reviewer's experience, unparalleled in works of this type (note 38 on page 94 is an additional, shining example). I hardly need to mention that Summers's skill with French, German, and Greek are equally impressive.

Although the work is very even in quality and range of ambition, some chapters stand out more than others for their interest. In chapter 4 on vocation Summers develops the interesting point that Beza and his contemporaries among the Reformed were eager almost above all else to redeem the time:

On the flipside of the vice of idleness one finds the virtue of punctuality, which Engammare views as an original contribution of the Reformed movement. For example, Mathurin Cordier's pedagogical treatise *Colloques* emphasizes the need for punctuality in the careful use of time, as did the keen interest in the ringing of bells, clocks, and timekeeping around Geneva. (210)

² Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bruce Gordon, (*John Calvin: A Biography* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009).

Nuggets like this abound throughout the lengthy work, and add a great deal of liveliness to Summers's central argument.

Chapter 5 on usury, for example, is especially helpful in understanding the times and the issues. Summers sets the stage well by taking us back to Ambrose and even before that to the Cappadocian fathers. On page 220 he explains the Ambrosian stance toward moneylending: "a loan is evil that aims at interest," and shortly thereafter tells us how the Cappadocian fathers din moneylenders for their hypocrisy (232).³ Their "giving has the appearance of helping but in reality has the purpose of enriching the giver at the expense of the receiver." From that point Summers develops his argument in the Genevan context, noting especially an apparent discrepancy between Beza and his mentor Calvin on this point. While Beza was (surprisingly?) more stringent than Calvin about acceptable rates of interest, Summers explains this as a consequence of the circumstances in which the former found himself:

[T]he historical realities in Geneva during Beza's lifetime should mitigate our understanding of his seemingly hardline stance. In practice, Beza did not prevent a market economy from moving forward in Geneva. He and the Company of Pastors understood that Geneva's financial system required the availability of credit; they were willing to accept this so long as the rate was measured and balanced against the needs of the most vulnerable citizens. When Beza arrived in Geneva in 1559, the rate of interest in private loans already stood around 6.6 percent by law, which he in no way condemned or tried to overturn. (240)

Though canvassing a wide array of sociological and historical sources both primary and secondary for the development of his argument, Summers goes beyond generalities and uses a number of particular cases to maintain his central point of Beza's unified vision and consistency. The story of Nicholas Colladon, for example, is presented as an illustration of the flexibility Beza could demonstrate while still pursuing his principles. Colladon left Geneva because he thought the 10 percent rate of interest that Beza supported was too high, and because Beza had forced his hand. Both men were given the opportunity to present their case to the city Council, and Beza—as in most things—won out. Although his defense of a 10 percent rate of interest may seem contradictory when read in light of his attack on usurers in the Cato poem (*In Foeneratores*), Summers shows that this is primarily a matter of genre and circumstance: "Beza represents his Cato censuring sinners, not scrutinizing the problem of usury with the subtleties of scholastic reasoning" (242).

Chapter 6, "Sanctifying Physical Relationships," is one of the shorter treatments and yet satisfying in its thoroughness. Here as well Summers deals with particulars and relies heavily on the recent work of Robert Kingdon and Philip Benedict, as well as the nineteenth-century efforts of Paul Henry. He also gives us an extensive look at the work of one of Beza's most important contemporaries, the pastor and jurist Lambert Daneau. Daneau's *Ethices Christianae* were more influential than any work of Beza himself for Reformed thinking on practical ethics, and Daneau's inclusion serves to bring this

³ His citation of Ambrose from *De Tobia* 3.9–11 as a "for example" gives us the impression that he considers Ambrose a Cappadocian, though I'm sure he does not.

important scholar to a broader audience.⁴ Throughout the chapter, Summers is keen to demonstrate Beza's highlighting of the natural law basis of the need for fidelity and monogamy, and how fornicators (*scortatores*) were considered "dangerous to the human race as a whole, because they ignore the institutional order and mutual faith through which God gives increase" (277). Earlier in the same chapter, Summers tells us of the case of Jean Bietrix, who in 1557 sought divorce from his patrician wife Marie de la Maisonneuve. Though they had been married only three years at that point, Jean knew from

numerous witnesses [that] Marie [had] committed adultery with a servant named Rollet des Noyers from the house of the wealthy Mme. de Chamoix. The Consistory and Council exerted much effort on prying these two apart, and the two countered with equally impassioned efforts to continue their communication. In the trial dossier are letters that had been discovered in which the two can be seen engaging in an inversion of social roles, with Marie playing subservient and Rollet assuming the position of master. In some letters she complains about her husband to Rollet. Even though there were lingering doubts about sexual misconduct, her disobedience toward her husband and subversion of domestic order seemed to be evidence enough of her guilt. She was sentenced [sic] to imprisonment for life. (265)

Summers is careful to present such cases in a way sympathetic to differing perspectives on such a practice, and not through the insular lenses of twenty-first century prejudices. In other words, he shows admirable restraint in presenting the issues evenhandedly: Beza is neither blamed for every questionable decision in which he had a part nor exonerated blithely through special pleading.

In the chapter on "Outliers" (ch. 6), we receive a thorough explanation of Beza's attitude and practical approach toward Geneva's societal ills of monasticism, gluttony, drunkenness, and other persistent problems. Summers describes persons beset with such woes as

those who abuse their bodies and dull their capacity for reason through the excess consumption of wine. They give themselves over to the appetites within them, like animals or something even more monstrous and demeaning, and ignore their potential to share in the divine image. A more dangerous segment of this class is the Jesuit monks. (294)

The discussion of the relationship between Beza and the Jesuit Counter-Reformation movement as a whole (306–22), and that of the Jesuit pilgrim to Geneva Luca Pinelli (306–10), is itself worth the price of the book.

Though Beza is the work's central figure, and therefore his perspective on ethics and their cultivation in a society leaving several hundred years of Roman Catholic control is featured, the reader can also gain much knowledge of Daneau and Goulart (already mentioned), Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and a host of other Swiss Reformers of that time.

⁴ Summers does the same for Simon Goulart (1543–1628), whose ideas are carefully and responsibly assessed.

Before offering a slight word of criticism and concluding, as well as mentioning a few errors, this reviewer wishes to highlight a remarkable example of Summers's skill as a translator. On page 317, fn 64, the Latin word *Satan* is separated by seven lines from the personal pronoun *tu* with which it is used in apposition. Summers astutely places them together in his English construal for maximum clarity and effect. A lesser translator would never have been able to accomplish such a feat in a way that is both true to the sense and pleasing to the ear. And it is important to note that this is not the main point of the book, i.e., translation of Beza. But Summers's work here aptly suits the larger argument he is making.

Nevertheless, there are places in the work where Summers's profound philological erudition likely exceeds the interest and ability of his readers. For example, when Summers is discussing (342–43) the proper understanding of the phrase *Ah! quam* in Beza's poem on the hen that produced fifteen chicks (itself a moving comparison of Beza and his unproductive old age to the chicken that surprisingly still lays eggs), those without extensive training in Latin and the tools of philology will soon feel bogged down. Similarly, an argument could easily be made that this work should have been divided into two smaller volumes: one on Beza as poet, theologian of ethics, and continuator of Calvin, and a second on less well-known figures like Daneau and Goulart, and the general social climate of Geneva. It is tempting to think that the scope of Summers's ambition and skill exceeded editorial restraint.

In closing, that the reader may come away with a good understanding of the importance of this book and the author's skill in its execution, we return to the conclusion, worth quoting at length:

Beza's moral indignation is unambiguous and profound. This book has sought to uncover the ideas giving shape to it. What ethical theory organizes and sustains this indignation? What gives it internal cohesion? As we noted in the introduction, the editors of Beza's correspondence describe his ethics as a "delicate and little-known subject." Their statement assumes that a set of guiding principles, or what Beza called "heavenly wisdom" lies behind the flurry of disciplinarian moralizing activity at Geneva in this period. Numerous studies have demonstrated the practical mechanisms at work: they have examined, among other things, the functioning of the Reformed consistories, the sociological and political forces behind discipline at Geneva and elsewhere, and the struggles between ecclesiastical and civil authorities throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century. The studies have provided a valuable foundation for our own. Our investigation into the theological and ethical underpinnings of the disciplinary activities of Beza and his colleagues have led us to ask a different set of questions of the evidence available to us. Driving their discussions about discipline and morality are not political theory per se, but a well-conceived theoretical rationale based on their reading of God's Word. This rationale informs everything these reformed leaders do. If they harbored other motives or what they were trying to accomplish, they never express them, either openly or by implication. (362–63)

This is a well-researched and charitable conclusion. We ought not to read the lives of these men through rose-colored spectacles. But because we understand that they were not

congenitally more stupid than we, and indeed in Beza's case and most of the men of that generation their learning surpasses our own by a laughable margin, we should have the courtesy of saying nothing but good about the dead (*nil nisi bonum dicendum est*) except when the evidence clearly demands a pointed critique. In the case of Beza, contrary to many years of slander, it does not.

Readers of this review will likely come away thinking that there is almost nothing but good to say about Summers's work and that they should promptly acquire a copy for themselves and read it. That is the correct conclusion.

However, a number of small errors mar the work, most of which are the fault of the editor. These include: page 85, fn 13, Apoc. 6. c. [sic] 10; page 126, fn 7 *imagiariae* for *imaginariae*; page 133, fn 24 "*Peccatum Linguae* the and . . ."; page 134 "But Daneau also follows denounces dutiful lying . . ."; page 159, fn 79 *scararum* for *sacrarum*; page 178, 42 *furest* for *fures*; page 268, "Nevertheless, Beza adds, the Pharisees were not asking about divorces on account of adultery specifically, nor was Christ responding to that; they were asking whether divorced [sic] was permissible no matter what the reason"; page 270, "Since adultery deserves death, and God's law, it follows that adultery can be used used [sic] to dissolve the marriage"; page 333, "In reality, the [sic] say, the so-called creation continues on as it always has, and God never comes; he is not paying attention to it at all"; page 358, "He therefore throws himself on the mercy of the omnipotent, omniscient [sic] God, praying that he will forgive his mistakes and direct his future."

Other errors, as they concern matters of Latinity, translation, and comprehension, are probably to be laid at the author's feet. These include: page 81, fn 3 *agistis* for *egistis*; page 88, fn 26, irregular comma placement before and after *humilitas*; page 97, fn 48 *potuisse* wrongly translated as a present tense, i.e., 'can'; page 257, fn 116, ἀπόγραφειν for ἀπόγραφειν, while *apografein* is in the text on page 256; page 350, fn 30: Summers quotes from Beza *Tractationes Theologicae*, 15: "quoniam electionem necessario consequitur fides Christum apprehendens, per quem iustificati et sanctificati." This he translates in the body of the text as: ". . . for a faith apprehending Christ necessarily follows election, through which we are justified and sanctified." He has misconstrued the antecedent of "quem" as *fides*, which is a feminine noun. The actual antecedent is the masculine noun *Christum*. This changes the meaning somewhat.

David C. Noe is a member of Hillsdale OPC and serves as an associate professor of classics at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He also serves on the Committee for the Historian.

ServantReading

Meet the Puritans

by William B. Kessler

Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints, by Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015, xxvi + 896 pages, \$31.23.

A Puritan Theology Study Guide, by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016, vi + 121 pages, \$8.00, paper.

Impressive is the word that not only comes to mind but is felt in the soul when reading Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson's book, *Meet the Puritans*. Similar to the scope of another big book of Puritan studies, *A Puritan Theology* by Beeke and Mark Jones, *Meet the Puritans* is a deep chest filled with pertinent information about the Puritans. It is a book primarily of biographical sketches, nearly 150 (146 to be exact). These brief biographies are divided into three categories: the English and American Puritans (with most material devoted to them), and then in Appendices 2 and 3, the Scottish Divines and the Dutch Second Reformation divines, respectively. Furthermore, and what gives the volume its depth, with each biography there are summaries and reviews of reprinted Puritan titles covering "books reprinted for half a century, from 1956 through 2005," including comments "on close to 700 volumes from more than 75 publishers." This is an impressive book!

But there is more. As with an old deep chest, there are various pockets and compartments that hold treasures. The preface is a gratifying and stimulating opening to the book which includes: a brief definition of Puritanism (no easy task); five major concerns the Puritans addressed; and then a succinct section on how to profit from reading the Puritans. I was very motivated to read through the volume after reading the preface.

When I explored the book, I found other sections that were informative. There is a brief history of English Puritanism, always a helpful reminder. In addition, there is Appendix 1 that contains fifteen pages recording various collections of Puritan writings. Appendix 4 contains secondary sources on the Puritans, with an extended bibliography coming later in the book. Appendix 5, a concluding excerpt by J. I. Packer, is followed by a useful feature, a glossary of terms and events. The book as a whole is encyclopedic, a virtual library, truly a guide through a vast country of Puritan literature.

The scope, range, and variety of subjects in the biographical review material is striking. As expected, there are expanded treatments of the better-known Puritans, such as William Ames, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, John Flavel, Cotton Mather, John Owen, William Perkins. The Puritan who receives the most attention is Jonathan

Edwards, referred to as “the last Puritan.” In reading about Henry Airay (a Puritan of whom I knew nothing), I found that the authors included a book reprinted in 2001 of lectures on Philippians given by Airay. As I am presently preaching through Philippians, I would like to add his lectures to my list of resources.

There were various surprises in the list of biographies. I was delighted to read the entry on Anne Bradstreet, early Colonial poet. The authors mention two volumes of her poetry, *The Completed Works of Anne Bradstreet*, published by Belknap, 1981, and *To My Husband and Other Poems*, published by Dover, 2000.

To make good observations, you need to take into consideration the framework. At the beginning of the book, after the title page, I noticed that the book was published in 2006. Then I noticed that it had gone through five printings, the fifth published in August 2015. At the end of the book, after the fifth appendix, the authors include a prayer that the Holy Spirit may bless the book and give the readers discernment.

Let me include in this review the small workbook entitled *A Puritan Theology Study Guide* by Joel Beeke and Mark Jones. It is a workbook in which each chapter corresponds to the chapters in their 1060-page book, *A Puritan Theology*.¹ This is a helpful topical guide that makes a massive work more accessible. I especially appreciated questions in chapter 52 concerning a pilgrim’s attitude, questions on the subject of meditation in chapter 55, and in chapter 56 questions exploring metaphors that the Puritans used to describe the conscience.

Though I am grateful for the work and material presented by Beeke, Pederson and Jones, and though I am humbled, instructed, and richly edified when I read Puritan literature, I continue to have questions that arise out of the tensions felt when reading the Puritans, and especially when reading such strong advocates of Puritanism. One question is: How are we to commend, or imitate, Puritanism in a society that has vilified it? Surely, much ignorant prejudice and stereotyping are at play in our society when it comes to the Puritans. There are perceived Puritan social convictions and conventions that are strongly criticized, such as the hanging of witches, the banishing of dissenters, the attitudes of paternalism and ethnocentrism towards native Americans. These criticisms run deep in the American psyche. A similar question is: How does the church, representing and proclaiming Christ as Savior and Lord, address the bigotry towards our Puritan forefathers and the historical baggage that follows them? Should the emphasis on Puritanism remain a subject solely for the church?

There is so much good in studying the Puritans and learning from them. However, when declaring and defending the gospel in the American context, romantic attachment to the Puritans may create more confusion than clarity.

William B. Kessler serves as the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Columbus, Ohio.

¹ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012).

Servant Poetry

John Bunyan (1628–1688)

The Shepherd Boy's Song in the Valley of Humiliation ¹

HE that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much;
And, Lord, contentment still I crave
Because thou savest such.

Fulness to such a burden is
That go on to pilgrimage;
Here little and hereafter bliss
Is best from age to age.

¹ Henry Charles Beeching, ed. (1859–1919), *Lyra Sacra: A Book of Religious Verse*, 1903. From “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” Part II. This sweet little song has no less sweet a setting. “Now as they were going along and talking, they espied a Boy feeding his Father’s Sheep. The Boy was in very mean Cloaths, but of a very fresh and well-favoured Countenance, and as he sate by himself he sung. Hark, said *Mr Greatheart*, to what the Shepherd’s boy saith. So they hearkened, and he said—“He that is down needs fear no fall,” etc.