

The Peter Principle



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From the Editor

Very early in my Christian life, while still considering a call to the ministry, I came across a little booklet first published in 1962 by Eerdmans entitled *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* by Helmut Thielicke (1908–86) (see my editorial, *Ordained Servant Online*, February 2012; *Ordained Servant* 21 (2012): 12–14). Douglas Felch’s “The ‘Peter Principle’ of Church Leadership” is another little exercise, not just to tame the hubris of young ministers, but to remind all church officers and members that humility is one of the chief virtues of a disciple, and must be exemplary in church leaders. This fundamental attitude is essential to the gospel of our crucified Savior and thus to the ministry of that gospel.

David C. Noe offers the final part of “Beza on the Trinity, Part 6.” This reminds us how much more central the doctrine of the Trinity should be in our worship and lives. In October Noe will offer Beza’s theses on the Trinity.

Meredith M. Kline reviews two books on *Ecclesiastes*. The first is a review article, “Ecclesiastes: Musings of an Unfaithful Solomon?” on an important new commentary, *Ecclesiastes*, by Richard P. Belcher Jr. Kline expands the meaning of his title: “The commentary consistently supports its overall interpretative approach to Ecclesiastes of understanding Qohelet’s ‘under the sun’ perspective as a presentation of deviant ‘speculative wisdom,’ which is corrected in the epilogue (12:9–14).” Kline’s interpretive approach is that Qohelet is looking through the eyes of a biblical realist, an important difference.

Meredith M. Kline also reviews Randy Jaeggli’s *Embrace Life Under the Sun: God’s Wisdom for Today from Ecclesiastes*. This topical treatment also suffers from the same problem in Belcher’s commentary: a failure to understand Qohelet as a biblical realist.

Charles Wingard reviews Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God’s Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653*. The assembly’s creation of doctrinal standards often eclipses their focus on the reformation of preaching. Van Dixhoorn’s detailed description and analysis of their work on this topic will help fortify a high view of Scripture and the way it is communicated.

Gordon Cook reviews a very practical aid to pastors in Bill Davis’s *Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision Making at the End of Life*. This is a book on advanced directives for healthcare and will provide an up-to-date guide on dealing with practical matters surrounding death.

Finally, Henry Vaughn’s (1621–1695) “The Star” rekindles a youthful sense of wonder at the beauty of nature, combining it with mature faith. The best of the Metaphysical poets achieved this with great skill.

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 Leadership

The “Peter Principle” of Church Leadership

Douglas A. Felch

Good morning!¹ It is a double honor to be with you this morning. First, I am honored to have been asked to lead in devotions during the concurrent meetings of the United Reformed Church Synod and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church General Assembly. Second, I am an alumnus of Wheaton College (1973), and after waiting at the phone and pining away for forty-five years, this is the first time that I have been asked to preach in Edman Chapel! So, thanks!

Let me direct your attention to three short passages from Luke 22 and then three verses from John 21.

Luke 22:24–27

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Luke 22:31–34

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

Luke 22:54–62

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter

¹ This was originally a sermon preached at the Eighty-Fifth General Assembly (2018) at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, on June 14, 2018.

remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

John 21:15–17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Introduction to the “Peter Principle” of Church Leadership

Several decades ago a popular book took the business and management community by storm. The title of the book was *The Peter Principle* named after Dr. Laurence Peter who authored it.² Its basic thesis was quite simple and rather devastating. Dr. Peter argued that, in the field of management, a person tended to become promoted to the level of his or her incompetence.

For example, a man is an excellent mechanic in the shop. Therefore, he gets promoted to general manager. But he does poorly. It is a desk job and he is a “hands-on” mechanic. Therefore, he is not promoted. Yet he cannot be “demoted”—that would involve a loss of status and salary. Therefore he remains stuck at the level of his own incompetence.

In the passage before us this morning, we have another management principle—the principle of leadership in the church. We could also title this a “Peter Principle,” for not only is it delivered to Peter and the other disciples, it is also profoundly illustrated in the life of Simon Peter himself. But this Christian “Peter Principle” differs markedly from the first: The *worldly* Peter Principle of leadership argues that humans will rise to the level of their own incompetence. The *Christian* Peter Principle of leadership suggests that we will grow as leaders only as we humbly embrace our incompetence and seek to serve others. Thus, in the kingdom of God, leadership is defined by service and humility. This principle is demonstrated in Jesus’s ministry to Peter in both Peter’s failure and restoration.

The Principle Illustrated in Peter’s Betrayal and Humiliation

Throughout the Gospels, Peter is again and again presented to us as one who has tremendous natural leadership ability. He is frequently a spokesman for the disciples as in Matthew 16, where in response to Jesus’s question he declares, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” He is often self-confident, as in Luke 22:33 where Peter insists, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” He is also forceful. When the women report to the disciples that the body of Jesus has disappeared and they have spoken to angels, the disciples go immediately to the tomb, but pause at the door. However, Peter goes right on through (John 20:6).

²Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle* (New York: William Morrow, 1969).

But being a natural leader does not mean that you have the gifts of spiritual leadership any more than being a school teacher means that you have a spiritual gift of teaching, or being a carpenter gives you the gift of edification!

Jesus makes this clear in his words to all the disciples in Luke 22:24–27. In the world, leaders lord it over others and are given patronage. But Jesus’s disciples are not to be like that. They are to be clothed in humility and willing to put others first. Peter had to receive this humility, and the way he was going to receive it was by humiliation: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 21:31–32).

The point is clear. Jesus tells Peter that he is going to go through a devastating experience. He will deny the Lord three times. But after the experience is over, Peter will be enabled to serve his brothers, and Jesus charges him to do so. In humiliation Peter would learn humility. It happens just as Jesus said it would (Luke 22: 54–62). After Jesus is taken, Peter follows. Three times he denies knowing the Lord. The third time, as the cock crows, the eyes of Jesus and Peter meet. The account tells us that Peter wept “bitter tears.”

I can hardly begin to fathom the sorrow that must have wracked Peter’s body as he sobbed uncontrollably over his denial of the Lord. I have had some dark nights of the soul, as we all have, but they do not hold a candle to Peter’s experience. Surely no more bitter tears were ever shed than those of Peter. And the reason is not hard to see. Peter *really* loved Jesus. I don’t think Peter was being arrogant or presumptuous when he told the Lord that he was ready to die with him. He said those things because he really loved Jesus. He was absolutely committed to him. But here is the sober reality that Peter experienced. We can genuinely love the Lord and still horribly betray him.

But while his weeping was bitter, at the same time, no more beneficial tears were ever shed. For through humiliation comes humility, through failure and sorrow, encouragement. Having been forgiven much, Peter loves much.

The Principle Realized in Peter’s Restoration and Service

A sequel to this story makes this point in a dramatic way. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples, including Peter, from the shoreline. Peter, being Peter, does not wait to get to shore, but plunges into the water and swims to Jesus who has breakfast prepared. Then Jesus has the exchange with Peter that is recorded in John 21:15–17, in which he asks Peter repeatedly if he loves him. Some commentators focus on differing words for love that Jesus uses. However, most current commentators agree that the words are synonyms. What is more significant is that he asks him *three times*: Do you *love* me.

And here we see a different Peter: Peter was grieved because Jesus said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, *you know everything; you know that I love you.*” Then Jesus restores him: “Feed my sheep.”

And of course, Peter will. Having been restored, he will strengthen his brothers. He will provide premiere leadership on the day of Pentecost and in the early days of the church. Having been instructed by the Lord and after his ministry to Cornelius, he will encourage the church to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. And, finally, as also revealed in John 21, he will lay down his life for the sake of the gospel.

Summary and Takeaways

At the beginning of this devotional I drew a contrast between the worldly and Christian Peter principles: The *worldly* Peter Principle of leadership argues that humans will rise to the level of their own incompetence. The *Christian* Peter Principle of leadership set forth by Jesus and illustrated in the life of Simon Peter suggests that we will grow as leaders only as we humbly embrace our incompetence and seek to serve others.

Of course, this requires humility and compassion, a humility and compassion that is often obtained by passing through a valley of sorrow or humiliation. For example, brash seminary students oftentimes experience difficulties in their life, health, or marriage. These experiences are hard, yet they are frequently the means that the Lord uses to prepare these men to become compassionate pastors. There are other trials as well.

On the southeast narthex door of Edman Chapel, where many of you came in, there is the portrait of a man. I invite you some time while you are here to take a moment to gaze at it. The portrait is that of Evan Welsh, who was chaplain here at Wheaton College. I knew him well when I was a student here. He was one of the most godly and loving men that I have ever known. But this heart of compassion came at great personal cost. In 1941 his first wife was killed in a car accident. The event left him to care for his two young daughters alone. Yet out of that deep sorrow came great humility and a compassionate heart. This profoundly struck me even when I was a student here, and even back then I began to reflect on the relationship between personal hardship and pastoral warmth.

I have also witnessed the opposite. I have seen men in high positions who lost their spirit of servanthood. I have observed young pastors who have longed for the power of ministerial office, or who have soaked up being at the center of attention and made shipwreck of their ministries.

Let's admit it. There are difficult temptations connected with being a church officer: temptations to pride, discouragement, to lord it over others, to become impatient; the painfulness of criticism coupled with the likelihood of it because we are public figures; the stress of endless demands (because there is always more to do); and the temptation to make odious comparisons of our ministries with others that appear to be either more, or even less, successful than our own.

We must resist these temptations, and instead we must be servants. We must put others before ourselves; we must set an example of godliness and patience; we must let our failures not embitter us, but rather humble us to depend upon the Lord all the more. This is not easy. But it is our stewardship and our greatest privilege. We need to discharge it faithfully.

In closing let me suggest three brief takeaways from the passages we have read. First, even those who really love Jesus are capable of betraying him. A sobering thought. Let anyone who thinks he stands, beware lest he fall. Second, we should seek to use our failures to humble us to better serve God's flock. Here the "Peter Principle" clearly stands out. Out of humiliation comes humility, out of humility service.

This does not require some type of gross sin. We don't need to explicitly betray Jesus or commit adultery or provoke a public scandal to be humbled by our sin. Each day, despite our love for Jesus, we are capable of betraying him—and frequently do. Let us use these day-to-day failures to promote humble service. Finally, and we don't have time to give this the attention it deserves, remember that Jesus is praying for us in the midst of

all our weakness: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but *I have prayed for you* that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32). None of what happens to us is accidental. Jesus knows our circumstances and our weaknesses, and he prays for us. This is very comforting and hopeful.

I close with the exhortation of Peter himself to all of us who are elders of the church of God. This exhortation drips with the Christian Peter Principle:

I Peter 5:1-4:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

AMEN.

* * *

Closing Prayer Hymn of Response: #500 (Trinity Psalter Hymnal):

1. Father, I know that all my life is portioned out for me;
The changes that are sure to come, I do not fear to see;
I ask thee for a present mind, intent on pleasing thee.
2. I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do, or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go.
3. I ask thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied,
A mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at thy side,
Content to fill a little space, if thou be glorified.
4. In service which thy will appoints there are no bonds for me;
My secret heart is taught the truth that makes thy children free;
A life of self-renouncing love is one of liberty.

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ServantClassics

Beza on the Trinity, part 6 (final part)

by David C. Noe

The following was translated from Theodore Beza's *The Unity of the Divine Essence and the Three Persons Subsisting in It, Against the Arians' Homoiousios*, published in Geneva, March 19, 1565 (the fourteenth day before the calends of April). It is a five-page introduction to his *Theses or Axioms on the Trinity of the Persons and Unity of the Essence*, with which it was published. The text is from *Tractationes Theologicae Bezae, Volumen I*, Jean Crespin, Geneva 1570, 646–50.

A letter to the most illustrious Prince Nicholas Radzvilas,¹ the supreme Marszałek² of the great Duchy of Lithuania.

Most illustrious Prince, I received two letters from your Excellency at the same time: one addressed to Mr. John Calvin of blessed memory, and the other to myself. Both of them were written beautifully and with refinement. Because I am replying so tardily, I ask your Excellency not to think this is due to any disregard, nor to any other reason than that there was a shortage of couriers traveling from here to Tubingen, the place where your letters to us originated. These are the reasons why my reply is so brief even though this is a quite serious and urgent matter.

I have read, and not without absolute terror, some comments which Gregorius Pauli,³ Casanonius, and several others who have been enchanted by Biandrata and Gentile⁴ wrote in different treatises. They are converting⁵ the three persons or ὑποστάσεις into three numerically distinct⁶ οὐσίαι or essences. In their writings I have found so many things that are both opaque and even contradictory that not even at present do I have full clarity as to their doctrinal positions and arguments.

But your letters, although they were written far more lucidly, nevertheless—if I may speak frankly with your Excellency—do not fully make up for my simple mindedness.⁷ This is especially the case in your explanation of that third conciliatory statement which, if I understand it correctly, I think is hardly at all different from the position of either Gentile or Pauli.

¹ Cf. *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, by Anatol Lieven (Yale University Press, 1994), 47–48.

² This is the title of a very high-ranking official in the Polish court, a top adviser to the king.

³ d. 1591.

⁴ Giorgio Biandrata (1515–1588) and Giovanni Valentino Gentile (c.1520–1566), two famous, Italian born anti-Trinitarians.

⁵ *transformantes*.

⁶ *numero*.

⁷ *ruditati*.

And so, because there is not yet much agreement between us concerning the substance of these issues, and far less even with respect to the arguments of our opponents, we can't help but be legitimately afraid that we could seem to be working in vain over these much disputed topics.⁸ Or that we are not adequately precise in attacking our opponents' position. This circumstance could inflame these already unfortunate debates rather than extinguish them. And furthermore, even the debate itself shows, with so many written documents flying back and forth, that the controversy is increasing rather than diminishing, while each man does not allow what he has just written to be adequately grasped.

Therefore, before I publish a fitting answer to the individual arguments, I demand⁹ this from you, your Excellency, in the name of Christ: you must compel¹⁰ those who do not agree with this proposition—Father, Son, Holy Spirit¹¹ are one and the same God—to do as follows. They must write out, point by point, clearly and distinctly, their own entire dogma both on the essence and on the hypostases,¹² in definite and clear theses. Then they must provide their own positions as derived both from the Word of God and from the writings of the Greek and Latin fathers. Finally, if you have no objection, they must supply refutations of our arguments, which they know full well.

Now I shall finally have the opportunity to answer both more candidly and more concisely. This is something that we would have done voluntarily even if your Excellency, in keeping with your own zeal for your country and even more for the whole church, had not petitioned us. But now, since your Excellency has specifically appealed to us, we have decided without reservation to complete this task much more willingly and carefully, with the small measure of grace granted us by the most great and mighty God.

Yet in the meantime, so that some people do not conclude that we have delayed our response because we have retreated from our position or because of duplicity, we assert openly before your Excellency, most illustrious Prince, that by God's grace we persist in the true and orthodox position. Not only that, we have also been greatly strengthened in our position by reading their falsehoods. We hold that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three truly distinct persons, and nevertheless one and the same God according to essence. For what could be more inappropriate, no, what could be more irreligious than to multiply in number the most simple¹³ infinity? And so we must recoil from the blindness of the Jews, who removed the distinction between persons, and likewise abhor Sabellius's insolence. He recognizes the persons but only distinguishes between them verbally, not in fact. The Arians' blasphemy is also reprehensible. Some of them regard Christ as of a different substance, others as of like substance.¹⁴ The Macedonians are similarly detestable for attacking the deity of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ The syntax here is deliberately convoluted as Beza seeks to come to the point without offending the Prince. I have broken up a very long and hypotactically beautiful sentence into manageable English portions.

⁹ *flagitamus*, a very strong word.

¹⁰ *adigas*.

¹¹ The conjunction here is omitted, a figure of speech called asyndeton, to stress the unity of the persons in the Godhead.

¹² Here Beza uses Latin instead of Greek, which he employs interchangeably.

¹³ *simplicissimam infinitatem*; simple here means "uncompounded," without "parts or passions" as WCF 2.1 states.

¹⁴ Beza uses Greek here without Latin gloss, ἑτεροούσιον (*heteroousion*) and ὁμοιούσιον (*homoiousion*) respectively.

But we think that all these, however loathsome they are, have nevertheless said things less absurd than the Severians¹⁵ once did and those with whom we are now dealing. For they retain the fundamental point that God is one as his essence is one, since the Word of God alone declares the real distinction of the essence into three persons without any division. But they have refused to reason soundly from that foundation. Thus it is no wonder that they have not held onto the distinction of persons. But what in the end will they leave intact in the foundation of religion if the divine essence has been torn apart into three gods?

Nevertheless, they would readily persuade us that they avoid a multiplicity of gods if they would only say that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, i.e., in one divine nature or essence. But even if, for example, Peter, John, and James should be described as one in *species*, they are not for that reason constituted as three men. So what value is there in retreating from their position? Why have they not instead freely and sincerely maintained what directly follows from their dogma, namely that yes, there is one deity but three gods? And that they are not equal to one another, because to exist from a separate origin¹⁶ is greater than to possess one's own existence from another's existence,¹⁷ or to be God transiently?¹⁸

Certainly they must hold that God is either one in number or many. If one, then why are they fighting so fiercely? But if many—and evidently they believe that the Son's essence has been propagated from the Father's essence so that there are in number two essences—how will they so boldly dare to deny that they posit numerically multiple gods? Therefore, if we believe them, then those ancient idolaters¹⁹ should not have been charged with merely worshiping multiple gods, but with worshiping multiple gods in three persons, and indeed false gods. This multiplication of the divine essence into two gods (for we have also heard that some of them erase the Holy Spirit) or into three gods, how is this consistent with their other dogma, that whatever things are predicated in the Scriptures of the one and only God must not be understood of the Son or Holy Spirit? For if the Father is the one and only God, it follows that the Son either is not God, or that he is God by another *genus* of deity than the Father. That is the Arians' error. If when Abel was born Adam was the one and only man, his son Abel either was not man or was endowed with another human nature than his father's, and thereby differed from him in *species*.

As for their reply, that the Father alone is “very God,”²⁰ i.e., according to their interpretation that he has his being from himself and for that reason can alone be called God, is this not an absurd expression? For the fact that one's existence derives from oneself or from another does not constitute a separate species of nature. And therefore the Father cannot nor ought to be designated the one and only God for the reason they offer, but rather the one and only Father. Just as the Son is designated the one and only Son because he is only begotten. Nor did anything like what these men invent ever occur to the Apostle when he called the Father the one and only God, and Jesus Christ the one and only Lord.²¹ And we will, God helping us, explain this more fully on some other occasion.

Now, moving on to their accusation that we are Sabellians, what justification do they really have for doing this? Sabellius, who confounded the terms essence and person, held

¹⁵ This is a second century gnostic sect also known as Encratites.

¹⁶ *esse aliunde*, as the Father on this theory.

¹⁷ *habere suum esse ab alterius esse*, as the Son on this theory derives his existence from the Father.

¹⁸ *precario esse Deum*, as the Holy Spirit, on this theory.

¹⁹ I.e., the Trinitarian orthodox.

²⁰ ἀυτόθεος (*autotheos*).

²¹ I Corinthians 8:4.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one, while we hold that there are three, truly and really distinct by their incommunicable properties. So what similarity is there really between him and us? I would say the same as exists between darkness and light, since these two statements are not synonymous: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one; and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. The first statement confounds the persons, and that is Sabellian. But the second teaches that the persons are distinct in such a way that the individual persons are one, and the same is the whole divine essence. And likewise, the individual persons are not only one deity but also the one and same God. Of this threefold subsistence in the one God the order begins from the Father and ends in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, since these men mock us as though we were saying things that are contradictory—because we maintain that the three are one—they barely deserve a reply. For we do not with Sabellius hold that the three persons are one, but we distinguish the hypostases in one essence according to the Word of God by their properties and numerically.

“All the same,” our opponents reply, “you do not say ‘one thing’ but ‘one God.’”²² Quite the contrary! We do not simply say “one” but “one God.” This is plainly with reference to the one and same essence, in all which these three²³ so subsist that they are neither divided, nor at all conjoined or *synousioi*.²⁴ Instead, they are really distinct in their own incommunicable properties such that any one of the three according to hypostasis is different than the other two. And nevertheless, because the one subsists in the entire and same essence, therefore he is the one and same God as the other two.

The understanding of the Council of Nicea was no different when it wrote “God from God,” even though the phrase is somewhat vague. This was done not in order to establish two Gods or to derive any kind of deity from deity. Rather, it was simply to establish against Arius the identity of essence in two persons. Thus John writes that “the Word which was God was with God in the beginning.”²⁵ So he makes plain not that there are two numerical essences but two persons subsisting in the one and same essence. Hilary forcibly emphasizes the same sense in his well-known statement “One from One, Whole from Whole, Perfect from Perfect,” though he is the one author these men approve.²⁶ But Hilary’s purpose is not only to deny the existence of a twofold deity, but also to deny the existence of two gods numerically. Because obviously the Son is other than the Father, and therefore second in order (but not in degree of Godhead)²⁷ with respect to the fact that he is begotten. And yet because the Son wholly subsists in the one and same essence, he is one and same as the Father with respect to the fact that he is God.

But as for the reason why the same relationship does not obtain among created species, Your Excellency should also consider the following. Created species, like a person, although they cannot be divided as to form, nevertheless because they are constituted of quantitative

²² The distinction here is between *unum*, neuter and referring to one entity, and *unus*, which as masculine refers to Deus, i.e., God.

²³ Not persons (the form is masculine), but Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

²⁴ συνοῦσιοι, i.e., unity of substance that does not admit distinction.

²⁵ John 1.1; Beza uses his own Latin paraphrase here, not the Vulgate.

²⁶ I.e., of Poitiers, c. 310–367 AD. The quote is taken from his work *De Synodis Fidei Catholicae Contra Arianos*, chapters 12 and 13. Beza may well have consulted Erasmus’ 1523 edition of Hilary, though the phrase was commonplace.

²⁷ Beza writes simply *gradu*, which I have interpreted.

individuated elements (as I would express it), they are in fact divided according to their quantitative extension.²⁸

Consequently, let us use the following as an example: although Peter, John, and James are one in terms of both their universal and specific²⁹ form, they are not, however, one individual but are referred to as three. There can really be no doubt that they are not only distinguished by their incommunicable properties but also divided by their quantitative extension. Similarly, we not only say that Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael are three distinct hypostases of one angelic nature. We also hold that they are three spirits. Even though they are not limited by corporeal extension, still, bound by the peculiar quality of their substance they are truly separated one from another. But in the divine essence that is most simple in every respect, and most infinite in act,³⁰ there can be no place for either division or composition, but for distinction only. This is something that neither flesh nor blood has revealed to us but the Son himself. Moreover, the same logic that applies to a subject's nature also holds with respect to those things that are predicated of that nature absolutely. And so likewise, the individual Persons are the one and same eternal, immeasurable, infinite, and omnipotent God.

And so, when we read in the work of that man who is both in substance and name "Gentile,"³¹ i.e., in his pamphlet against Athanasius, that there are multiple "eternals and omnipotents," we realized that what the Apostle had foretold had been fulfilled in him. I mean that men of this type were given over to a reprobate mind, to a mind devoid of all reason and judgment.³² Now we must take a different position on those properties that are predicated by relation, and that one in particular which they describe as ὑφισταμένην ιδιότητα (*hyphistamenēn idiotēta*).³³ Because, as Tertullian correctly explains in his work *Against Praxeas*, the nature of the relations³⁴ is that they can be neither the same nor can one differ from another.

Finally, how can they be so outrageous as to ascribe to us what they call a "quaternity"? For they dream that we posit that God exists in himself (and this is a topic that Hilary discusses at length yet without clarity in book 4 of his work) by some unknown kind of separate οὐσία (*ousia*) anterior to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, they claim, we hold that there is a kind of fourth "shared" God³⁵ to whom those three persons are adjoined, leaving four gods as the result. Or, at the least, that we hold that those three persons like parts of a whole constitute that one "shared" being.

But the basic experience common to the created order teaches us just how stupid their invention is. For those things that are called universals do not exist in themselves but only the hypostases that subsist in them exist. Unless perhaps these men count human nature apart

²⁸ *secundum quantitatem*.

²⁹ This is to be taken in the derivative sense, i.e., relating to species, and not in the colloquial way used today.

³⁰ *actu infinitissima*.

³¹ Giovanni Valentino Gentile. Beza here, for polemical purposes, is calling him gentile in the sense of barbarian or reprobate.

³² Romans 1:28.

³³ Underlying quality of individuation.

³⁴ *relativorum*, scilicet, in the godhead.

³⁵ *communis Deus*.

from its own individuated properties as a singular entity.³⁶ Applying this concept to individuated properties results in an increase in the number of such singular entities.³⁷

And so these men should know that when we speak of the divine essence we conceive in the mind not of some shared or conglomerate God, but that in which those individual persons subsist distinctly—as we said before—by their own unique properties, in the whole and same being. By the term “Trinity” we understand not one shared God separately, but three persons subsisting in one essence. This is because, as Gregory Nazianzus has correctly written, we cannot in the mind conceive the one essence apart from the three persons, nor the three persons apart from that whole same and singular essence. It also follows from this, as my father of blessed memory John Calvin, the true defender of this truth, properly wrote, that the prayer “Holy Trinity, One God” smacks of barbarism. For if the expression is not softened by a skillful interpretation, it seems to suggest either that there is something that subsists outside the three persons or aggregates the three persons themselves, guiding the invocation toward some universal (though this universal is not per se beyond the persons, but those three³⁸ subsist in it).

I do not doubt that those who first spoke this way³⁹ meant something different. But they who have adopted this position, as Your Excellency writes, are causing great harm to a very good man and openly revealing their own irreverence. From our perspective, these men demand that we fight not with arguments that they call merely human but from the Word of God. As though it were some kind of philosophical invention to hold that there are truly three persons, while of these same persons there is in number only one essence! But while I wait for a more full response from your Excellency, I shall at the same time do the following, in order to explain more precisely the particular relevant passages of God’s Word. I shall set against these men whatever the Scriptures state in defense of the one God, and against a multiplicity of gods. And because we, though we are commanded to adore one God, nevertheless worship the Son and the Holy Spirit no differently than we do the Father, therefore we believe and confess that the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Father are individually the one God who alone must be worshiped, though from the Father, as from a foundation, the distinctions of the persons derives.

Moses in his song bears witness that Jehovah alone was Israel’s guide.⁴⁰ But Paul plainly calls him Christ.⁴¹ And so they must acknowledge that there are not two gods but that the one in number, who alone was called the guide, is Jehovah, even though one is the person of the Father, the other that of the great Angel himself.⁴² Yet I will say more about these matters on a later occasion when what I am asking for from your Excellency becomes available. As it is, I direct my attention to your Majesty. I plead with you, Most Noble Prince, that you compel

³⁶ *unum quidpiam*; the idea is that human nature does not exist except as realized in individual persons. It makes no sense, therefore, to talk of a human nature and predicable properties apart from individuals, even though the shared qualities of all human beings considered conjointly constitute human nature. Beza is asking if his opponents want to deny this point.

³⁷ For example, saying that a man is wise does not mean that the quality of wisdom exists as *unum quidpiam* (a separate, individuated entity) apart from particular individuals. Such a position leads to the absurd expansion of meaningless, unpopulated metaphysical categories.

³⁸ *tria illa* is neuter, therefore it cannot refer to the persons of the Trinity.

³⁹ I.e., using the phrase *Sancta Trinitas unus Deus*.

⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 32.

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10.

⁴² *magni ipsius Angeli*, by which Beza means a theophany of Christ.

those men to acknowledge openly the blasphemy that they have for some time now entertained: that there are numerically many gods.

They must, I say, admit along with us either that there is one and the same God or that many gods are derived from one. Furthermore, they must acknowledge that they are becoming detestable to this one true God and all his saints. Come on, let them own up to their own doctrine openly, the teaching they have swallowed from Philoponus, Severus, Damian, and other monsters of unhappy memory.⁴³ And if they can, they must prove it with arguments, or from the Scriptures, or from the consensus of the Fathers and the ancient church. We in our turn accept the same constraint. And if we cannot make their blasphemy as obvious as the sun at noon, then, Most Noble Prince, we do not at all object to being considered and treated as false prophets.

They praise Hilary alone more than all others, not of course because no one is more confusing or vague than he!⁴⁴ Still, we do not by this statement intend any insult to him. But why do they not acknowledge without argument that Augustine is the best and most learned writer? Obviously it is because they consider him a sophist, and so they toss around the phrase “some Augustinian God” as a joke. And yet even that phrase, Most Noble Prince, is so offensive to the minds of all godly people (and rightly so) that I am not in the least surprised that all such godly people who now live flee from these men no less than from the devil himself. For who could persuade a man of good judgment that Augustine taught anything different on the subject of the Trinity than the churches of Africa? And could believe that these churches held a position that was any different than what the Catholic consensus maintained? I do indeed acknowledge that the Fathers have their warts (who could deny that?); but they are the kind of blemishes that still reveal a solid foundation. When this has been removed, what will we conclude their faith was, and what will we think of their church?

And so, most Illustrious Prince, we⁴⁵ neither can nor ought to pretend before your Highness that anybody who has granted men like this access can be excused. This is especially so when we have verified time and time again by written public statements what kind of man Biandrata is, as well as the nature of Gentile’s notorious and perjurious pollution. Likewise, although this particular topic is weighty and especially difficult, it nevertheless belongs to that class of subjects into which inquiry is no more appropriate, after all the countless struggles waged against heretics, than is doubt whether divinity and eternal life exist at all! Consequently, I now mourn with heartfelt grief not only that this brilliant work of the Lord is so miserably hampered, but also that the whole kingdom of Poland is torn asunder by such woeful dissensions. And I weep over it with endless tears. Still, we are compelled both to acknowledge and adore the righteous judgment of God, who punishes with deserved blindness the curiosity and pride of men who had least reason for it (I say this without rancor).

We approve, moreover, and commend to you quite precisely the holy edicts of Hezekiah, Josiah, Asa, and several other righteous kings of Judah. These constitute a pious and sound plan for your Royal Majesty to root out blasphemies, in keeping with both your sovereign

⁴³ John Philoponus (c. 490–c. 570), Severus of Antioch (d. 583), Damian of Alexandria (578–605).

⁴⁴ Beza is being facetious. Hilary’s orthodoxy is not in question but the obscurity of his writing makes him an easy ally for the anti-Trinitarians.

⁴⁵ Most of the verbs in this letter are first person plural. Beza is the chief author, and but it is sent in the name of the Pastors and Professors (cf. *infra*) and thus a joint document. I have varied usage *ad libitum*.

authority and, at the same time, sound judgment. But be careful that some men do not craftily use this as a pretext to condemn true religion. Similarly, be sure to distinguish, as is appropriate, those who have been ensnared by such men and drawn into error from the actual authors and defenders of blasphemy.

We exhort, moreover, the individual Christian brothers among you and especially orthodox pastors of churches to resist stoutly the discord and sedition that flow from reckless zeal. So, remembering that the sword⁴⁶ has been granted to the Magistrate, not to them, they must fight with inexhaustible effort—by the Spirit from God’s mouth,⁴⁷ by faith, patience, and prayers—against those who would overthrow their souls.

As for the fact that some men have twisted Calvin’s words from a letter published to the Polish brethren after his death, as though he were urging them to retaliatory carnage, this is such shameless and unbearable slander!

Finally, we beseech the Polish aristocracy, known for its great bravery, and especially your exalted highness, most illustrious Prince, which I hear surpasses the whole realm of Poland in piety and moral worth, we beseech you both by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our one God, to protect yourself and your country against these destroyers,⁴⁸ and to do so with much more zeal and resolve than you do against the Turks and the Moscow threat.⁴⁹ If you should do so, then I predict that the kingdom of Poland will enjoy the very best and greatest blessings with all success. But if not—and may God for his goodness prevent this from happening—then I, with the most heart-wrenching sorrow, foresee this outcome: our heavenly Father will use the same disasters he once employed to avenge the terrifying blasphemies of first Arius, then Nestorius, Eutychus, and others like them, to catch these men who sin in a way not that different. Relying on God’s grace, I freely devote not only my effort but also my life to disentangle us from these threatening evils.

In conclusion, most illustrious Prince, we pray that our Lord and God, pitying his church in distress, may quell Satan’s rage, establish and strengthen all churches and most of all those in Poland in the true concord of sound faith, and go on to crown Your Highness more and more with all gifts needful for the peace and tranquility of so great a kingdom.

Written at Geneva, March 19, 1565.

The Pastors and Professors of the Genevan Church, most devoted to your Highness.

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⁴⁶ Cf. Rom. 13.1

⁴⁷ I.e., Scripture.

⁴⁸ I.e., Biandrata, Gentile, and other anti-Trinitarians.

⁴⁹ *Tartaris ac Moscovitis*.

ServantReading

Ecclesiastes: Musings of an Unfaithful Solomon? A Review Article

by Meredith M. Kline

Ecclesiastes: A Mentor Commentary, Richard P. Belcher Jr. Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2017, 438 pages, \$29.99.

Belcher, an Old Testament professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, and an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church of America, has written a commentary on Ecclesiastes from a Reformed perspective. The book has a standard format with an introduction (covering authorship, genre, interpretational approaches, significant themes, and ways to preach and teach Ecclesiastes) followed by eight sections, most with multiple parts, sequentially covering the text of Ecclesiastes. Many parts are followed by brief “homiletical implications.” The book ends with Scripture and subject indexes. Unfortunately, there is no bibliography and full citations for most items are only given in the introduction; since there are frequent abbreviated references to many books and articles on Ecclesiastes throughout the commentary, this could be annoying.

The commentary is useful for those who want detailed discussions of the translation of Ecclesiastes and of the multiple interpretational options for particular passages that have been presented in the scholarly literature. The author’s footnoted translation begins each of the units he identifies in Ecclesiastes. Discussions of the organization of each unit and its relation to the flow of the book’s thought provide frequent orientation. The commentary consistently supports its overall interpretative approach to Ecclesiastes of understanding Qohelet’s “under the sun” perspective as a presentation of deviant “speculative wisdom,” which is corrected in the epilogue (12:9–14).

Various interpretations exist for Ecclesiastes, differing on whether they understand the book’s negative and positive ideas as similar to, complementing, or contradicting Old Testament and New Testament ideas. Determining the book’s message is difficult because critical vocabulary have multiple senses, which means context is crucial. Since discussions of the major topics of Ecclesiastes, such as labor, wisdom, the fear of God, divine retribution, and belief in an afterlife, are integrally tied to theological issues such as the relation of the Old Testament theocracy to the church and the relation of the cultural mandate to the Great Commission, even the translation of words can depend on feedback from other levels involved in the interpretative process.

Even Reformed interpreters vary on whether they understand Qohelet as cynical or realistic about the success of labor, resigned or thankful in enjoying life’s benefits, and fearful or reverent in relating to God, as well as whether or not they think Qohelet believes in an afterlife with a divine judgment, or whether an editor (if one is posited) differs or agrees with Qohelet. Belcher argues that Qohelet represents Solomon when he was unfaithful to his covenant Lord, and Ecclesiastes contains his negative ideas during that period. Thus, in Ecclesiastes Solomon denies the existence of an afterlife with a final judgment, so death means earthly labor is

ultimately useless and wisdom is frustratingly limited; any joy should be accepted with resignation; a dreaded, unpredictable deity should be related to cautiously; and an editor corrects Solomon by appending an admonition to obey God.

Translations

Thus, Belcher chooses to translate *hebel* (הֶבֶל) as “senseless” rather than “transient,” or “enigmatic,” or “futile,” or “vanity.” He also translates *‘et u.mishpat* (וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט) in 8:5–6 as “proper time and right action” rather than “judgment time.” Belcher’s interpretative perspective is also evident in how he understands the use of “fear God” in Ecclesiastes. When the orthodox ending of the book uses the phrase (12:13), it refers to the traditional OT wisdom view found in Proverbs, but when Qohelet uses the same phrase and emphatic syntax in 5:6 [Hebrew v.7], it refers to dread of a deistic despot rather than to reverential awe of God. In 3:9–14 one fears God because of the immense distance between humans and an inscrutable deity.

Interpretations

For Belcher, a backslidden Solomon, whose ideas are based solely on personal experience and not on divine revelation or the wisdom of traditional Israelite sages, is the author of the body of the book, to which a correcting section has been appended by an editor. Belcher’s introduction counters arguments against Solomonic authorship. The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to warn readers that if even the wise Solomon arrived at unorthodox conclusions, then all are susceptible to entertaining false notions about earthly existence. The introduction presents other interpretative options, which are interacted with throughout the commentary.

In Belcher’s view, Qohelet perceives the “under the sun” realm as a dark place of problems and God is not considered when seeking their solutions. Sagacity and joy may have ephemeral advantages but they are not ultimate answers to Qohelet’s questions, especially since he sees no hope of changing the failure of retributive justice to appear “under the sun.” Fortunately, in the book’s last verse the editor tacks the orthodox solution onto Qohelet’s circuitous intellectual perambulations. For Belcher, Qohelet’s wrong-minded “under the sun” perspective should be contrasted with an “above the sun,” heavenly viewpoint. Instead, if Qohelet is a realist, then one can perceive in Ecclesiastes not a contrast between Qohelet’s misguided view and genuine biblical wisdom but a complementarity of the not-yet experience of divine retribution evident in resurrection to glorification. This is a movement from degradation to a hope that enables endurance of the common curse and delight in common blessing, based on the already inauguration of Christ’s heavenly kingdom, which guarantees the existence of righteous and wise humans.

In 2:12–17, for Belcher, the fact that the wise dies as well as and like the fool is an ultimate tragedy for misguided Qohelet, which should be contrasted with a New Testament understanding that believers can find comfort from redemption even while enduring earthly tragedies. In addition, Qohelet supposedly denies both the possibility of guaranteed long-life for the wise and of the afterlife for anyone (2:15–16; 3:21; 9:1–6). However, if one interprets Qohelet as a realist, the believer simultaneously experiences the common-curse effects of the imputed unrighteousness of Adam, which Qohelet appropriately recognizes, along with relishing the common-blessing joys, which he also recommends. At the same time, the redeemed know the divine, saving response to desperate vows, and even their Lord’s redemptive grace. This grace is evident in the actual existence of any righteous and wise, those dressed in the imputed righteousness of Christ and graced by the Spirit’s sanctifying wisdom.

On 2:18–23 Belcher states that the Fall did not remove the cultural mandate to be fruitful and fill the earth, that current labor still fulfills the original Edenic commission. On a realist interpretation, however, the Fall did eliminate the possibility of achieving the goal of the cultural mandate, which was to produce ever-living humans and guard the garden of God from evil. Only under the Great Commission does that goal continue. Believers share the responsibility with unbelievers of producing and sustaining new members of Adam-like beings, but only believers pursue the goal of working to see spiritually reborn members of the body of the Second Adam. Ecclesiastes is about the effort and results of the common vocations that believers share with unbelievers, which entail a real frustration.

On 2:24–26, where Qohelet first introduces the concept of enjoyment in cultural endeavors, Belcher perceives a resigned acceptance of random, unpredictable benefit that one cannot integrate with a Christian perspective of laboring with success to the glory of God. Rather, we should understand these verses to indicate that God gives the burden (or “business”) to all sinful humans of leaving the fruit of their efforts to others at death, yet gives some the wisdom to appropriately appreciate any divine benefits they enjoy.

On the central passage of the book about relating to God (5:1–7 [Hebrew 4:17–5:6]), Belcher perceives a fool who makes rash vows and is uncertain whether God will respond with wrath instead of the requested salvation from a desperate situation. But the passage is about the fact that God *has* responded favorably to a vow. The uncertainty is whether the person making the vow will pay or not pay the required promise made in case God responds favorably to the vow, not how God will respond after the vow is made.

Belcher presents Qohelet as holding that wisdom is ineffective because God’s providence is unpredictable, so humans cannot figure out what is good to do (7:1–14; 8:16–17) or the right time to do something (8:7–8). Since Qohelet cannot see how the negative aspects of life can fulfill God’s purposes, he resigns himself to a human wisdom that has limited value for engaging in life. Rather, though a believer’s wisdom may be limited by divine, inscrutable providence, it should rely on a vow-answering God’s grace in the face of life’s obstacles.

Structures

Belcher did a Westminster Seminary-Philadelphia dissertation on the idea of retribution in Ecclesiastes 8:12–14, so that concept is prominent in his commentary. How he deals with the passage indicates that the structure of texts is important. He believes that the facts that a traditional view of retribution in 8:12–13 is surrounded by counter observations of Qohelet (in 8:12a and 8:14) and that 8:14 ends the unit indicate Qohelet discredits traditional Israelite wisdom. Here Belcher works with a linear model in which conclusions or highlighted materials come at the end of a unit.

But the last word is not the final word when concentric patterns are utilized to construct the text. So, in actuality, Qohelet makes prominent the traditional wisdom ideas of retribution in 8:12–14. On Belcher’s view, there appears to be no interpretative issue, since Qohelet’s supposed unorthodox conclusions on retribution indicate his thinking is suspect and they fit the idea that Qohelet does not believe in an afterlife where divine justice would be demonstrated (3:17 “God will judge the righteous and the wicked,” then, cannot refer to an eschatological judgment). In contrast, an interpretation that accepts the tension Qohelet points out, namely, the tension between the hope that divine justice will be demonstrated and the legitimate observation that such is not evident under the sun before death, as well as recognizing that the center of a concentric pattern is emphasized, should understand that Qohelet implies there is a post-mortem accounting before the divine Judge. Belcher’s interpretation says Qohelet retains

the lack of resolution to the problem he notices. However, if there is no ultimate retribution during or after life, then the tension really has been resolved negatively.

Even though Ecclesiastes has an overall concentric artistic configuration, the sequential arrangement of conceptual material does have a linear progression. What Belcher fails to appreciate is the parallel, two-track nature of the linear organization. He does not recognize the separation of the work and wisdom themes when it first appears in 1:12–18, since he focuses only on the wisdom topic. He also does not appreciate the significance of the programmatic questions in 3:9 and 6:8 for contributing to the work plus wisdom parallel structuring of Qohelet's words.

Preaching

What difference does Belcher's interpretation make when preaching from Ecclesiastes?

Do Qohelet's statements that labor is vanity or useless indicate a view that is to be avoided in favor of work being purposeful and God glorifying? Or does Qohelet's perspective refer to the common curse where death means that the cultural mandate of producing ever-living members of a human family is undermined, so that even though through God's common blessing work can produce relative success, nevertheless, it does not eventuate in the glorification of the human race but in the earthly death of every human?

Is the joy that Qohelet refers to a resigned attempt to grasp whatever benefit can accrue to the exercise of mental and physical energy before you expire? Or is it a contentment with any benefit divine providence permits from human endeavor?

Is the fear of God in 5:7 the wrong outlook of a pagan who dreads the wrath of an unpredictable deity? Or is it the respectful reverence of a believer who thankfully obeys a covenant Lord despite having to deal with the common divine curse, the opposition of demonic forces, or the folly and hate of humans?

When preaching from Ecclesiastes is one always contrasting Qohelet's view with a traditional, orthodox Old Testament wisdom perspective and with New Testament teaching? Or does one present Qohelet's negative and positive as a realistic understanding of how to live with both the common curse and common blessing experienced during earthly existence, even if unpredictably in terms of human behavior, while simultaneously laboring for the honor of the Redeemer and patiently waiting for an eschatological vindication?

Does the teaching of Qohelet contrast with that of his editor, the rest of the Old Testament, and the New Testament? Or does it agree with the editor's view and complement other Old Testament texts and New Testament teaching?

Belcher's homiletical directions side with the former rather than the latter options on these questions.

For the preacher who understands Qohelet's "under the sun" perspective as a presentation of deviant "speculative wisdom," which is corrected in the epilogue (12:9–14), Belcher's commentary is an excellent resource. For a pastor holding to the view that Qohelet is a believing realist, it becomes a question whether Belcher's perspective on Ecclesiastes so pervades his commentary that it is counterproductive to wade through all his details in order to arrive at an appropriate expository sermon.

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ServantReading

Embrace Life Under the Sun: God's Wisdom for Today from Ecclesiastes by Randy Jaeggli

by Meredith M. Kline

Embrace Life Under the Sun: God's Wisdom for Today from Ecclesiastes, by Randy Jaeggli. Greenville, SC: Journey Forth Academic, 2015, 245 pages, \$19.00.

The author is professor of Old Testament at Bob Jones University. Rather than being a commentary that moves sequentially through the text of Ecclesiastes, the book is arranged topically. The prominent topics of the book are appropriately chosen, each discussed in terms of existence in a fallen world: the doctrine of God; vanity, or the negative aspects of life; enjoying life as a gift of God; the fear of God as essential; and the limits of wisdom. The book includes an index of scriptural verses and a bibliography, though there are minimal references to academic scholarship in the body of the book. There are many personal and pastoral illustrations that apply the author's interpretation of passages.

Conservative positions are espoused throughout the book. Solomonic authorship of all of Ecclesiastes is defended. The "fear of God" is used with an orthodox understanding throughout Ecclesiastes. Since Jaeggli has written "an extended defense of abstinence from alcoholic beverages," his discussion of 9:7 is longer than on most passages. He also holds to "creation in six literal twenty-four-hour days."

In Jaeggli's chapter on *hebel* (הֶבֶל), traditionally translated as "vanity," he transliterates the term until concluding that in Ecclesiastes it usually should be translated as "frustration," but a few times as "transitory" or "emptiness."

Jaeggli describes his interpretational perspective as counsel for believers about how to live in a fallen world. He uses the term "realist" to characterize his view, by which he means a believer experiences the frustrations that unbelievers do but only the believer can enjoy the gifts of God. The common curse is shared with unbelievers but Qohelet's positive promotion of joy is not common blessing, but instead is treated as special, redemptive blessing. So, on 2:24–26 he takes "apart from him" as "apart from a saving relationship with him" rather than as "apart from the common blessing of him." This, however, would assume a retributive providence under the sun, which Qohelet denies. For Jaeggli, 6:1–2 indicates that a believer, one with a [saving] relationship with God, can enjoy life even during a calamity, but an unbeliever is always frustrated. The way the phrase "relationship with God" is used, it applies only to believers. But all humans have a relationship with God. Both believer and unbeliever share a common, if unpredictable, providence during earthly life. Ecclesiastes is about admonishing youth to have a wise, rather than foolish, relationship with God.

There are some inadequate discussions of texts in this volume. Jaeggli does not really deal with the tension in 8:12–14 on retribution. He assumes that there is retribution in an

afterlife, without indicating how that is derived from Ecclesiastes, which focuses on the lack of divine retribution under the sun. He also confuses modern promises with biblical vows in a discussion of 5:4–6. A biblical vow was not a modern-day promise; biblical vows were based on a response to what God would do, not on how God might respond to what was done. Jaeggli's chapter on the limits of wisdom is strange because it does not include discussion of the major passage on the topic, 8:16–17. It also exhibits some confusion. Negative aspects of wisdom include “no guarantee that a wise person's endeavors will always be successful” (9:11). This, however, is less a negative aspect of wisdom itself, than a reality of sovereign providence shared by people, whether they demonstrate wisdom or folly. On 1:17, wisdom is limited, since it eludes the quester. The goal, however, of attaining comprehension, not wisdom itself, is wind-chasing. Total comprehension is an un-wise expectation of wisdom (the point of 8:16–17, the highlighted passage of Qohelet's words on wisdom).

For busy pastors, who understand Qohelet/Solomon as a “realist” believer who experiences both common curse and common blessing, panning for sermonic gold in Jaeggli's book might prove frustrating.

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ServantReading

God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653, *by Chad Van Dixhoorn*

by Charles M. Wingard

God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653, by Chad Van Dixhoorn. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2017, xxi + 215 pages, \$40.00.

The mere convening of the Westminster Assembly in 1643 is a wonder. Since the days of Edward VI, reform efforts in the church of England had stalled or been reversed under his Protestant successors, Elizabeth, James, and Charles I. The eruption of the English Civil War, with its political and military tumult, made the convening even more unlikely.

But convene it did, and over the next decade, the fruits of its labors were prodigious. General histories and expositions of the assembly's Confession of Faith and Catechisms are many. What distinguishes *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643–1653* is its concentration upon the value that the Westminster Assembly placed upon preaching and its efforts to reform England's preachers and preaching. With skill, Chad Van Dixhoorn, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, professor of church history, and the director of the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards at Westminster Theological Seminary, guides readers through the assembly's debates, theological examinations, journals, minutes, and formal documents.

The author arranges his work in three sections.

Section 1 places the assembly's work in its historical context. Attention is given to previous attempts at and opposition to pulpit reformation, and the views of preaching held by those pursuing reform as well as earlier reformers.

Section 2 recounts and assesses the actual work of the assembly as it examined and certified ordinands and ministers, and as it formulated processes to safeguard the English pulpit.

Section 3 probes the diversity of opinions among the Westminster divines on a wide range of topics. These include ministerial training and ordination; the value of reading sermons and note taking; the difference between private exhortation and public preaching; the relationship between law and gospel; the connection between exegesis and preaching; whether to preach from manuscripts, notes, or extemporaneously; and what it means to preach Christ.

The assembly's high esteem of preaching is indissolubly linked to its high view of Scripture as the Word of God proclaimed "for the gathering and perfecting of believers" (5). Preachers can approach their work confident that, "for purposes of persuasion, the most effective weapon in the Spirit's arsenal is the Word of God preached" (9). Van Dixhoorn maintains that among the Westminster divines, it was a given that people "are not only saved by Christ, they are saved by Christ through the means of preaching Christ" (126).

A high view of preaching demands that the church take a hard look at the character and skills of those seeking admission to the ministerial office. To that end, as many as 5,000 ordinands and ministers were examined between 1643 and 1653 (xv–xvi, 42, 101). Aware that the time would come when examining every ordinand would become impossible, the assembly drafted The Directory for Ordination, to be used by presbyteries (75, 77, Appendix 2).

The need for pulpit reform was acute. The assembly's first petition requested Parliament to launch proceedings to remove "scandalous ministers." Also troubling were ministers who couldn't preach but were only able to read the homilies of others (17–19). Reformation of the pulpit demanded reformation of the preacher (10).

The assembly was determined that only ordained and educated Bible expositors should fill English pulpits. But pulpit reformers faced strong headwinds; skeptical attitudes were not uncommon. The well-educated frequently deemed a trained ministry unnecessary; the uneducated failed to value the rigors of ministerial preparation and examination (35).

Making the situation worse was the disturbing "disconnection of preaching from ordination" in the episcopal system (49). Ministerial positions were sought as a source of income but without the responsibilities of ministering Word and sacrament, a situation the assembly found intolerable. During examinations, one of the questions it put to ministers demanded their commitment to preach and observe the sacraments (53–54). Ministers must preach.

Examinations played a central role in approving men for ministry. They were the instrument by which ordinands and ministers were judged to be spiritually, educationally, and morally fit.

The examination process will sound familiar to contemporary Presbyterians. Included in it were character testimonials, a trial sermon, and approval of the candidate by the assembly (50–51).

The criteria of testimonials are noteworthy. The candidate must supply testimonials from men who were known to the assembly. At times, an additional stipulation required that the endorser live in proximity to the candidate. Van Dixhoorn observes: "If a man was unacquainted with a godly minister known to the assembly who could testify to his good character, he was not running with the right crowd" (51–52).

Examinations were comprehensive, and included questions about his doctrine, knowledge of the biblical languages and Latin (the language in which theological texts were written and debated), range of theological reading, motivations for ministry, and practical theology. The Directory for Worship added examinations in biblical knowledge and church history (83–84).

With regard to practical theology, the candidate was expected to demonstrate that he knew how to visit the sick, catechize, and appeal to consciences. For whatever reason, the

statement of views on visitation of the sick and catechizing were not required in The Directory for Worship (55, 83).

Trial sermons by ordinands were optional at the assembly, a requirement at presbyteries (84).

In a break with tradition, no candidate could become a congregation's minister without the flock's "consent and approbation." Prior to his ordination, a candidate was required to spend time with his prospective congregation so as to make "trial of his gifts for their edification" and to familiarize the congregation with his manner of life. So momentous was the calling of a new pastor that congregations were admonished to fast and pray (85–86, 188). The diligent support of the new minister in his preaching must be ongoing. In its subdirectory for the sanctification of the Lord's Day, heads of households are exhorted to review sermons in their homes (92–93).

In another change from previous ecclesial practice—and one with far-reaching consequences—ordination services were moved from cathedrals to local congregations. The solemnity of the action was impressed upon both candidate and congregation (86, 188).

Beyond question, rigorous examinations placed a heavy burden on the candidate, and it was the responsibility of the examining committees to keep the process from becoming oppressive. Examiners must treat him with "all mildness and gravity" (53). Later, The Directory for Ordination counseled examining bodies that the candidate must "be dealt with in a Brotherly way." "Familial language is used," Van Dixhoorn notes, "to remind ministers that this potential peer and colleague is not to be treated as a student before his teachers but as a brother before his brethren" (82–83, 187).

The work of the assembly was not without its flaws. One given special attention is its failure to provide "any system of remedial education for deficient pastors." Seventy years earlier, Puritans sought to reform the Anglican pulpit by training existing pastors who were insufficiently prepared for their work; the assembly sought their removal. "The closest the assembly ever came to offering supplementary helps to ministers was in its directory, and as their forefathers recognized, if preaching were to be improved, something more personal and practical than a directory would be needed" (100–101, 175–77). This is a good reminder to modern pastors whose first response to someone with a problem is to hand him a book.

With admirable succinctness, Van Dixhoorn introduces the Westminster Assembly's characters, debates, and documents on the critical area of preaching and preachers. Reformation of the pulpit then and now is not primarily an individual pursuit. Instead, it is the coordinated work of the church through its various courts. Those longing for reformation of today's pulpit will do well to read this book with care.

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ServantReading

Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision-Making at the End of Life, *by Bill Davis*

by Gordon H. Cook Jr.

Departing in Peace: Biblical Decision-Making at the End of Life, by Bill Davis. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017, xx + 300 pages, \$19.99 (\$15.00 direct from P&R).

Most of the readers of *Ordained Servant* are interested in redemptive-historical biblical interpretation, Reformed theological issues, and Presbyterian polity. A book on advanced directives for healthcare probably does not fall within your normal reading list. But this book is not only worth adding to your list, it's worth reading! If you or a loved one is facing end-of-life issues, you should read this book now!

An advanced directive is “a legal document (as a living will) signed by a living, competent person in order to provide guidance for medical and health care decisions . . . if the person becomes incapable of making such decisions” (275). All of you should have an advanced directive (a living will or a durable power of attorney for healthcare) on file. These documents identify the person or persons you select to make decisions for you when you are no longer able to do so for yourself. They also give indications of what you might want when it comes to difficult decisions concerning the end of your earthly life.

Dr. Davis, a professor of philosophy at Covenant College and adjunct professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, not only makes a compelling case for filling out such a document, but also guides us through the biblical principles for making these important decisions. At many points this is Reformed apologetics put into practice in the real world.

Davis builds upon the study committee *Report on Heroic Measures* by the Presbyterian Church in America in 1988, an excellent report, though now somewhat dated. He illustrates his points with lessons drawn from the death of his father and his work on an ethics committee and as an ethics consultant for a local hospital. These case studies are clear, pertinent, and quite poignant. His reflections on these cases are insightful and allow us to see the possible consequences of the various decisions we are asked to make when filling out an advanced directive or when facing similar situations in our own lives or the lives of someone about whom we care.

In chapter 6, “Money and End-of-Life Decisions,” Davis deals with the thorny issue of the costs of healthcare and our ability (or inability) to pay for the treatments that may be offered to us. Often this important subject is omitted from discussions of decision-making at the end of life. Who can possibly figure out what our insurance policies will cover, or foresee the consequences of going without adequate health insurance? He calls for Christian accountability for the promises we make regarding these matters (legally laid out for us on the documents we glibly sign as we are being admitted to a hospital).

He speaks with gentleness and compassion about the challenging impact finances should have on medical decision-making.

If you want glowing reviews of Davis's book, the endorsements inside the front cover and on the back cover read like a who's who of Reformed scholars and medical professionals. I would add my whole-hearted endorsement to this list.

Thus, I am reluctant to say anything that might be construed as negative about an excellent book that is well worth your attention. But just as Davis notes how the PCA Report on *Heroic Measures* is now dated, so also his own work is quickly becoming the same. While all of us should have an advanced directive, which addresses our desires at the end of our lives, persons who are approaching the end of their lives should also fill out a POLST.¹ POLST forms are medical orders signed by a physician that deal with end-of-life treatments. Because it is signed by a physician, the POLST form has far greater authority in medical circles than an advanced directive. It is also more broadly accepted by other states and nations, though not completely so. For me, the most important advantage of a POLST form is that you (or your loved one) are having these important conversations with a medical professional, ideally your family physician, a person who knows you well and knows how to translate your desires into the language of healthcare professionals in a way that will gain their attention and compliance. Most people approaching the end of their life should have both an advanced directive and a POLST form (or your state's equivalent). The POLST will focus sharply on the end-of-life treatments that you want or don't want under various circumstances. The advanced directive can, and often does, include a broader range of desires, including how you would like your body interred after death, funeral planning, and similar concerns not addressed by a POLST.

Another minor concern is Davis's handling of the subject of hospice, something he mentions only a couple of times. Recognizing that hospice availability varies considerably from location to location, it is still an important and underused benefit for those approaching the end of their lives. Hospice is not primarily about a facility for the provision of terminal care. It is rather a Medicare benefit to which you or your loved one are most likely entitled. This benefit can help you financially, as well as medically, in the final six months of your life. Hospice ideally involves a well-established team of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains, and volunteers) who are all focused on keeping you comfortable and helping you to live as full and satisfying a life as

¹ POLST stands for Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment. US federal agencies often refer to this as a SAPO (State Authorized Portable Orders). Regretfully different states use different titles for these orders. Some states are still in the process of adopting a POLST standard form. POLST (Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) CA FL GA IL HI ME MI MT ND NE NH NJ NV OR WA WI; POST (Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment) ID IN MI MS SC TN VA WV; MOLST (Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) AK MA MD NY OH RI; MOST (Medical Orders for Scope of Treatment) DC KY NC NM TX; TPOPP (Transportable Physician Orders for Patient Preference) KA; COLST (Clinician Order for Life Sustaining Treatment) VT; DMOST (Delaware Medical Orders for Scope of Treatment) DE; IPOST (Iowa Physician Order for Scope of Treatment) IA; TOPP (Transportable Orders for Patient Preferences) MO; AzPOLST (Arizona Provider Orders for Life Sustaining Treatments) AZ; LaPOST (Louisiana Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment) LA; OkPOLST (Oklahoma Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) OK; PAPOLST (Pennsylvania Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) PA; WyoPOLST (Wyoming Providers Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) WY; For additional information please visit www.polst.org.

is possible right up to the moment that God calls you home. They also support your family or care providers to make their efforts more successful. Sometimes this does involve an inpatient stay at a hospital or hospice facility to address certain symptoms. But more often, hospice supports patients so that they can die peacefully in their own homes. There were several illustrations offered by Davis, particularly involving financial issues, that could have been resolved far more favorably by at least considering how dying at home on hospice provides a more affordable and comfortable end of life. It can assist you or your loved one in glorifying God right up to the final breath.

Please do not construe the two concerns that I have expressed as in any way lessening the importance or quality of Davis's treatment of decision-making regarding the end of life. You will find his book helpful, even if you are not yet ready to fill out an advanced directive for yourself. It will help you to be more sensitive to and supportive of the decisions of others in your congregation or family who are experiencing these end-of-life issues.

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Servant Poetry

The Star

by Henry Vaughn (1621–1695)

Whatever 'tis, whose beauty here below
Attracts thee thus and makes thee stream and flow,
And wind and curl, and wink and smile,
Shifting thy gate and guile;

Though thy close commerce nought at all imbars
My present search, for eagles eye not stars,
And still the lesser by the best
And highest good is blest;

Yet, seeing all things that subsist and be,
Have their commissions from divinity,
And teach us duty, I will see
What man may learn from thee.

First, I am sure, the subject so respected
Is well dispos'd, for bodies once infected,
Deprav'd, or dead, can have with thee
No hold, nor sympathy.

Next, there's in it a restless, pure desire
And longing for thy bright and vital fire,
Desire that never will be quench'd,
Nor can be with'd, nor wrench'd.

These are the magnets which so strongly move
And work all night upon thy light and love,
As beauteous shapes, we know not why,
Command and guide the eye.

For where desire, celestial, pure desire
Hath taken root, and grows, and doth not tire,
There God a commerce states, and sheds
His secret on their heads.

This is the heart he craves, and who so will
But give it him, and grudge not, he shall feel
That God is true, as herbs unseen
Put on their youth and green.