



March 2019

Ordained Servant

# Pot - To Smoke or Not To Smoke

# *Ordained Servant Online*

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### **CURRENT ISSUE: POT—TO SMOKE OR NOT TO SMOKE**

**March 2019**

### *From the Editor*

On occasion I find it useful to introduce a controversial topic. With the legalization of recreational marijuana in a growing number of states, I believe that an article making a case against the Christian's use of recreational marijuana is important. This is not to say that the use of medical marijuana, which contains much less of the hallucinogen THC, is illegitimate. There is considerable evidence of its medical value. It is interesting to me that those who want to banish tobacco from the planet do not have more concerns with the physical and mental health risks of smoking recreational marijuana, that by its nature contains high amounts of THC (the potency of which has increased dramatically in recent decades). However, Allen Tomlinson's article "Does the Bible Have Anything to Teach Us Regarding a Christian Using Marijuana?" deals with the question from the spiritual perspective.

David Noe continues to add to his translation of Beza on the Trinity. Special thanks to John Fesko, professor of historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, for his help with the translation of Beza, checking to make sure that the English translation is commensurate with Trinitarian orthodoxy—help requested by David Noe. It reminds me of Michael Polanyi's insistence that true frontier science is a community effort. So, theology.

I review Andy Wilson's splendid revision of a great classic: *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: A Simplified Version of Edward Fisher's Seventeenth-Century Classic*. This carefully edited version of Thomas Boston's (1676–1732) annotated edition of Edward Fisher's (1627–1665) *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (originally published in two parts in London in 1645 and 1649) is one the best elucidations of the doctrine of justification available.

Glen J. Clary's review article, "Recovering the Spirituality of the Church," explores Alan Strange's doctoral dissertation *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*. The "question of the province of the church and the nature and limits of its power" as a "spiritual institution" is of tremendous importance to the church today.

Stephen Magee reviews Karen Swallow Prior's *On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*, helping us appreciate the value of good literature for ministry.

Finally, our poem this month is by George Herbert (1593–1633) from his magnum opus, *The Temple* (1633), "The Altar." This poem is a fine example of concrete poetry, in which the printed poem is in the shape of the poem's subject—in this instance a church altar. "Easter Wings" is another example in Herbert's work. I hope this will whet your appetite to read more of this prince of the Metaphysical poets.

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.

# ServantLiving

## Does the Bible Have Anything to Teach Us Regarding a Christian Using Marijuana?

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by Allen C. Tomlinson

As a Christian and pastor in the Reformed Protestant tradition, I do not believe we have studied and applied the Scriptures properly when we interpret the biblical text in a “surface” manner only.<sup>1</sup> For example, when people reject the doctrine of the Trinity because the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, I believe they are reading the Bible in a very superficial manner. If all the elements of the doctrine of the Trinity are found in the Bible, (and they are), then the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity even though it does not use the word “Trinity.” The Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, in the New Testament documents, interpret the Old Testament in a doctrinal or theological manner, that is, “connecting the dots” of the various affirmations in the Word of God to arrive at “the big picture,” i.e., major conclusions. For example, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that if the Sadducees had “connected the dots” correctly, they would have known that God’s people rise again physically, even though there may not have been a direct Old Testament statement to that effect in those specific terms (Matt. 22:29–32).<sup>2</sup> Though the word “marijuana” does not occur in the Bible, and the people who lived during the biblical times may or may not have made use of this particular plant to achieve a “high” or even a “buzz,” I believe the Bible does speak very directly to the question, “Should a Christian use marijuana?”

### **Marijuana and Health Issues**

This article is not primarily concerned with the possible physical health issues, or even with the more serious long-term mental issues that have been connected with using marijuana. Such matters should be a concern to the Christian who desires to live in a way that pleases the God of the Bible. Our physical bodies and our minds are wonderful gifts from God, of which we are stewards. It is a sin to be poor stewards of God’s gifts; it is to show ourselves horrible ingrates, and it runs against the command to do all to God’s glory, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do (1 Cor. 10:31). There is research that indicates physical and mental long-term health issues in the use of this drug.<sup>3</sup> So if I did choose to come at this subject from the viewpoint of the Christian’s stewardship of his physical and mental health, I could build a very strong case for the Christian not using marijuana, as far as recreational use is concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written for the congregation that I have been blessed to shepherd for thirty years, First Church of Merrimack, Merrimack, NH (OPC).

<sup>2</sup> I wrote my doctoral dissertation on this subject, in which I especially concentrated on the interpretive method of the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles. “The Analogy of Faith: The Biblical, Logical and Reformed Rule of Bible Interpretation” (Whitefield Theological Seminary, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, “Drug Facts,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/marijuana>.

This article is not dealing with doctor-prescribed medical use of marijuana, for I am not qualified to speak to the subject. There are some medical uses of marijuana though, interestingly, it appears that at least many medical benefits can be experienced without the hallucinogenic affect by using the prescription drug Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). However, this article is concerned with recreational use of marijuana, not the doctor-prescribed use.

### **Marijuana and the Law of the Land**

I am also not primarily considering this subject from the viewpoint of human law. A Christian is to obey the law of the land (Rom. 13:1–7; 2 Pet. 2:13–17). Even if the punishment for a crime is minimal, we are not to obey the law of the land only because we are afraid of it, but “for conscience sake” (Rom. 13:5). The law of the land can change almost overnight, for the nations of this earth are, for the most part, directed by the sinful whims of human rulers and not by the unchangeable Law of the Lord. Though an argument can be made for not using marijuana because it violates the law of the land at a given time, that cannot be the most important argument for the believer.

My primary concern regarding professing Christians using marijuana is a biblical and directly spiritual one. From this point of view, I believe there is an issue with an intentional or unintentional connection with the occult and idolatry in the use of marijuana. The use of marijuana also violates the spirit of the prohibitions against drunkenness. Finally, the use of marijuana and other mind-altering drugs leads to other sins, especially against other people, but also against God and his moral Law. The practice of using marijuana is not appropriate for the Christian.

### **Marijuana and the Occult**

The occult, or the use of “magic arts,” has historically and in nearly every place made use of natural products to produce a “high” or a sense of heightened consciousness, which many practitioners have even considered a “religious experience.” When I was a graduate student at Indiana Wesleyan University, a theology professor showed us a film documenting the “religious experience” that those who use hallucinogenic drugs often describe. Some users even go so far as to affirm, “I find God when I smoke weed” or use some other drug. Such statements can be found online today.

Some may say in response to this, “But even if some users are doing this as a religious experience, that does not mean all of us do.” However, the Bible addresses the occult and, in its use of language to refer to the occult, appears to be addressing the use of a drug-induced “high” in contrast to the genuine spirituality of the gospel and as a contrast to joy in the Holy Spirit, which is experienced only in Jesus Christ. In Revelation 22:15, “sorcerers” are among those who are forever outside the City of God, i.e., those in the Lake of Fire. The word we translate “sorcerer” is the plural form of φάρμακος (*pharmakos*), which is part of a “family” of words in *Koine* Greek meaning, “Sorcerer,” “poison,” or “drugs.” This is the word from which we get our word “pharmaceutical,” because one of its meanings historically was “drugs.” Magicians would (and still do?) make use of various drugs from nature to manifest their “power.” These drugs would give a “high” and a sense of being “oracles of supernatural truth.” These drugs could be used to give others a sense of having connected with a higher realm through the administration by the “powerful” sorcerer. This would be a potion. These drugs could also be used to destroy enemies with “supernatural power,” from the viewpoint of the onlookers of that time who were unaware of the involvement of drugs. Hence the related meaning of *pharmakos*, “poison.”

It seems to me that the Holy Spirit's use of this word for "sorcerer," which emphasizes among other things a drug-induced "spirituality" or "connection to the supernatural," should give a committed believer in Jesus Christ pause. It should create a concern to avoid a practice and a product historically and practically connected to the occult: Satan's false religion which tries to imitate the one true religion of the gospel.<sup>4</sup>

## **Marijuana and Drunkenness**

God never forbids the drinking of wine or even of stronger drink in his Word, but even commends it as a gift from him to his people, to be received with thankfulness. For example, Deuteronomy 14:26 states: "spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household." This legislation concerns God's people giving the LORD their tithes. They were to take them to Jerusalem, but if the journey was too long to take their actual tithes, they could purchase replacements in Jerusalem themselves, to offer to the LORD, as they rejoiced before him. This tithe would be used to provide for the earthly needs of the priests and Levites, including "wine and strong drink." This would make no sense if alcoholic consumption was wrong in itself.

We find the same thing in other parts of God's Word. For example, the Lord Jesus turned the water into wine in John chapter 2. The text makes it clear that he made somewhere between 120 to 130 gallons of wine. And it was the best wine according to the wine taster! It was not unfermented wine as has been suggested by some who reject all alcoholic consumption by the Christian. It was the really "good stuff." We see the same word used in regard to the so-called "Good Samaritan" pouring "oil and wine" into the open wounds of the poor man who had been left for dead. Why wine? Because it was fermented, and the alcohol was used with the oil as "medicine." Plain grape juice would not have the same advantage at all.

Wine and strong drink, like the other earthly gifts of God, are to be received and used according to his rules, and we are to be thankful, setting them apart by God's Word and prayer (1 Tim. 4:3–4). That is, we are to use them in accordance with the Scriptures while setting them apart in prayer by giving thanks for them.

So why is drunkenness always forbidden in God's Word? Abraham's nephew Lot sins by getting drunk, even though he is a "just," that is, "justified" man. The Christian is not to live contrary to God's standard by "revelry and drunkenness" or by "lewdness and lust" (Rom. 13:13 NKJV). Instead, by way of contrast, he is to live in the light of the gospel (v. 12) by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 14). "Drunkenness" is a work of the flesh and, unless there is repentance by the grace of Jesus Christ, those who practice it "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 6:9–11).

Why, if strong drink and wine are among God's good gifts, is drunkenness itself so wrong? Drunkenness involves a lack of moderation in the use of alcoholic beverages; it is drinking too much. However, we are never condemned for drinking too much water in Scripture. It is not just the lack of moderation, but the fact that in drinking too much alcohol one loses control of his own thinking and bodily use so that he is controlled by the alcohol instead of controlling it. The drunk loses perspective, even though often at the time he is drinking overmuch he thinks that he is getting perspective. The drunk considers himself in a joyful state and as having a

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<sup>4</sup> As a pastor of nearly forty years, this author has noted the relationship between occult experiences and the use of drugs that lessen normal inhibitions. The devil seems to find a mind that is "high" easier prey. Why give the Devil an open door into one's mind and life?

good time, even though he is really being pulled down and losing control, and will suffer for it afterwards.

Bringing in too much alcohol can be compared to smoking marijuana or using other hallucinogens. Thinking one has a heightened sense of reality, a bigger perspective, and that here is true joy, the user actually is losing perspective on reality, is losing control, and often suffers for it afterwards. The suffering can be an effect of the drug itself, as in worse depression after the artificial “high,” or suffering can come about because of the breaking down of relationships caused by the wrong, erratic, and indolent life of the user while under the influence.

Again, surely the parallel between drunkenness and getting “high” (or even “a buzz”) should concern the true Christian who does not want to live for himself but for the one who died for him and rose again to enable his people to live for God (2 Cor. 5:15).

### **Marijuana and Idolatry**

Bringing together the sin involved in the occult (including the use of drugs to make one “high”) and the sin involved in drunkenness, we find the Bible condemns false approaches to getting “high” or becoming “spiritual” in such a way as idolatry. This is in contrast to the experience of the Christian finding new life in the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:2). The Bible contrasts drunkenness to being filled or controlled by God’s Spirit and Word because both ways of life lay claim to elevating the inner person. However, one of these ways gives true and eternal life, while the other destroys earthly life in the long run and eventually, if the sinner remains impenitent, results in hell fire for eternity.

In Acts 2:1–17 the apostles and other faithful disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit in that unique event of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit in a new covenant fullness was given to the blood-bought church. All of the observers recognized this as an unusual and powerful event. Some claimed it was the result of drunkenness. The Apostle Peter rebutted such an evaluation, saying that it was the Holy Spirit. Effects of the one experience had something in common, at least outwardly, with the effects of the other experience. What is common, outwardly, to both drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit? *An outside factor is entering the person that controls the person’s thinking and actions.*

The Apostle Paul picks up on this same point in Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” There is a pattern found in Ephesians 5:18 through 6:9 which is repeated in the same order in Colossians 3:16–4:1. In Ephesians being controlled by the Spirit leads to the proper self-control as far as public worship, daily gratitude to God, and personal relationships. In Colossians being controlled by God’s Word as we keep bringing it into our minds and hearts leads to the proper self-control as far as public worship, daily gratitude to God, and personal relationships. To be filled with the Spirit takes place as we seek the power and grace of God by hiding God’s Word in our hearts. All of this is contrasted to “being drunk with wine.”

The sin involved in drunkenness is ultimately the sin of idolatry. It is trying to find joy and experience reality on a higher level by this natural substance instead of by the gospel. When either drunkenness or hallucinogenic drugs are used for a “high,” this is an alternate approach to reality and wholeness, to that approach which we call the gospel. It is in Jesus Christ that the Christian finds help in times of discouragement; it is in Jesus Christ that the Christian experiences the joy of salvation and renewal of one’s thinking and life; it is in Jesus Christ that the Christian finds wholeness. Any other approach, including that of mind-altering drugs, is a form of idolatry. “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

## **Marijuana and Sinning against Others**

The Bible commands the Christian not to practice anything that gives unnecessary offense to either a fellow Christian, contrary to the law of love (Rom. 14:13), or to the unbeliever who will be offended by behavior that is at the very least questionable (1 Cor. 10:31–33). As a Christian I do not live to please myself, but to please God and to serve others by encouraging fellow believers and being a positive testimony to unbelievers.

The ill effects of using mind-altering drugs are usually in themselves sins against God and others. Driving under the influence, stealing for the purpose of buying drugs, misusing provided funds for drugs instead of their intended purpose, violent or indolent behavior that violates God's Word and harms others, and lying to cover up one's actions, are all sinful consequences of such use. All of this is sin and the gospel believer should distance himself as far as possible from anything that leads to such sins.

## **Marijuana and the Bible-Believing Christian**

The Church of Jesus Christ has rejected the use of any mind-altering drug as a means of experiencing joy, of finding wholeness, or of finding God. It represents another solution to our problems as fallen people than the one solution approved by our Savior, which is his gospel. Thus, the church has been properly concerned with:

- 1) the legality/illegality of using mind-altering drugs and of the wrong (and usually illegal) behavior that flows out of such usage;
- 2) the lack of good stewardship of one's mind and body in light of dangers imposed by the drugs themselves or by the negative effects upon one's mind and actions (thinking especially of recreational versus doctor-prescribed use);
- 3) the historic connection of such drugs with the occult approach to "spirituality," suggested even by language used in Revelation 22:15;
- 4) the exact parallel between what is wrong with drunkenness and what is happening in getting "high"
- 5) the proper categorizing of such drug usage under the more general sin of "idolatry," as opposed to using such drugs as an alternative to what is promised to us in the gospel;
- 6) the sinful effects in our relationships with others caused by the use of such drugs.

If a believer in Jesus Christ, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will seek God's will in his Word, and make an honest examination of the facts surrounding the use of marijuana and all mind-altering drugs, he will be able to "discern between good and evil" (Heb.5:14). He will find his joy, his wholeness, and his life, in God's truth and not in any drug-induced "high."

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# ServantClassics

## Beza on the Trinity, part 3

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by David C. Noe

The following excerpt 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,<sup>1</sup> the supreme Marszałek<sup>2</sup> 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 Tübingen, 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,<sup>3</sup> Casanionius, and several others who have been enchanted by Biandrata and Gentile<sup>4</sup> wrote in different treatises. They are converting<sup>5</sup> the three persons or ὑποστάσεις into three numerically distinct<sup>6</sup> οὐσίας 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence*, by Anatol Lieven (Yale University Press, 1994), 47–8.

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

<sup>3</sup> d. 1591.

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

<sup>5</sup> *transformantes*

<sup>6</sup> *numero*

<sup>7</sup> *ruditati*

help but be legitimately afraid that we could seem to be working in vain over these much disputed topics.<sup>8</sup> 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 demand<sup>9</sup> this from you, your Excellency, in the name of Christ: you must compel<sup>10</sup> those who do not agree with this proposition—Father, Son, Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup> 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,<sup>12</sup> 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.

## Part 2

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 simple<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> The Macedonians are similarly detestable for attacking the deity of the Holy Spirit.

But we think that all these, however loathsome they are, have nevertheless said things less absurd than the Severians<sup>15</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> *flagitamus*, a very strong word.

<sup>10</sup> *adigas*

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

<sup>12</sup> Here Beza uses Latin instead of Greek, which he employs interchangeably.

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

<sup>14</sup> Beza uses Greek here without Latin gloss, ἑτεροούσιον and ὁμοιούσιον respectively.

<sup>15</sup> This is a second century gnostic sect also known as Encratites.

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 origin<sup>16</sup> is greater than to possess one's own existence from another's existence,<sup>17</sup> or to be God transiently?<sup>18</sup>

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 idolaters<sup>19</sup> 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*.

### Part 3

As for their reply, that the Father alone is “very God,”<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one, while we hold that there are three, truly and really

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<sup>16</sup> *esse aliunde*, as the Father on this theory.

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

<sup>18</sup> *precario esse Deum*, as the Holy Spirit, on this theory.

<sup>19</sup> I.e., the Trinitarian orthodox.

<sup>20</sup> αὐτόθεος

<sup>21</sup> I Corinthians 8:4.

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.’”<sup>22</sup> 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 three<sup>23</sup> so subsist that they are neither divided, nor at all conjoined or *synousioi*.<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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)<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>24</sup> *συνούσιοι*, i.e., unity of substance that does not admit distinction.

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

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

<sup>27</sup> Beza writes simply *gradu*, which I have interpreted.

# The Marrow of Modern Divinity: A Simplified Version of Edward Fisher's Seventeenth-Century Classic, *edited and revised by Andy Wilson*

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by Gregory E. Reynolds

*The Marrow of Modern Divinity: A Simplified Version of Edward Fisher's Seventeenth-Century Classic*, edited and revised by Andy Wilson. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: Andy Wilson, 2018, iv + 196 pages, \$13.99.

I have rarely reviewed self-published books due to the lack of critical review and editing, and I am not a fan of abridgments, because they often mar the quality of the original. On both counts this book is a rare exception.

Editor Andy Wilson explains his reason for publishing the book:

*The Marrow of Modern Divinity* has been one of the most important books that I have ever read. While I wish that every Christian would read *The Marrow*, I realize that its antiquity, intricacy, and format can make it daunting for many readers. This is why I decided to undertake the task of producing a simplified version that would make the book's message accessible to a wider audience. (iii)

The 1978 Reiner edition of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is 370 pages. So, Wilson has almost cut half of the original. But unlike most abridgments the essential content is not marred, especially since the editor is wholly sympathetic with the original.

*The Marrow* is, as Wilson states in his introduction, an inoculation against the two common religious errors of legalism and antinomianism. Hence, the dialogical format of the book features four characters: Nomista the legalist, Antinomista the antinomian, Neophytus the new untaught Christian, and Evangelista the orthodox minister of the gospel.

This edited version covers only Part I of the original, which was published separately in 1645. Part II was published four years later, making the first part truly a stand-alone work. Wilson has kept the first three divisions of the original: 1) The Law of Works, 2) The Law of Faith, and 3) The Law of Christ. The fourth section of the original dealing with the soul's rest becomes the conclusion of Wilson's version. Wilson artfully distills thirty-five chapters of the original into twelve. Boston's notes are helpfully brought into the main text and distinguished by italics.

In place of the single appendix in the original by John Brown of Haddington, Wilson provides six appendices, the first and last of which are a "Glossary of Names Cited by Fisher and Boston" and "How the Reformed Confessions Distinguish between Law and Gospel." Appendix 2 articulates the gist of the *The Marrow*, while setting the work in the context of the theological controversy of Thomas Boston's day: "A Righteousness Apart from the Law That Is Not Against the Law: The Story and Message of *The Marrow of*

*Modern Divinity.*” This appeared originally in *Ordained Servant*.<sup>1</sup> The other three appendices are sermons preached by Pastor Wilson, germane to the main themes of *The Marrow*. These should be of considerable help to preachers in bringing the power of the gospel home to their congregations through the biblical themes enunciated in *The Marrow*.

A few pithy examples of the content of *The Marrow* will suffice. Regarding the Sinai covenant Boston notes:

In short, while the Sinai covenant was primarily an administration of the covenant of grace, the covenant of works was added to it so that men might see what kind of righteousness is needed to be justified in God’s sight. The law showed them that they were destitute of that righteousness so that they might be moved to embrace the covenant of grace, in which that righteousness is held forth to be received by faith. (33)

Wilson comments in a footnote:

The same idea is succinctly expressed in this quote from the Reformed theologian Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) . . . “At Sinai it was not the ‘bare’ law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.” (33)

An example of the tender pastoral concern of Fisher, Evangelista, the minister of the gospel, comforts the troubled young convert Neophytus:

So, my dear Neophytus, to turn my speech directly to you (because I see that you are so disturbed), I urge you to be persuaded that here you are to work nothing, here you are to do nothing, here you are to render nothing to God, but only to receive the treasure, which is Jesus Christ, and lay hold of him in your heart by faith. (66)

I highly recommend this book as I do the original. It would make an excellent text for an adult Sunday school class.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Wilson, “A Righteousness Apart from the Law That Is Not Against the Law: The Story and Message of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*,” *Ordained Servant* 24 (2015): 63–67.

# ServantReading

## Recovering the Spirituality of the Church A Review Article

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by Glen J. Clary

*The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge*, by Alan D. Strange. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017, 432 pages, \$48.00, paper.

The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is of particular interest to Orthodox Presbyterians because it has fundamentally shaped our history and identity. In the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the 1920s and '30s, both sides had lost sight of the church's spiritual mission in pursuit of a social utopia. Machen repudiated the church's efforts to improve society (whether those efforts conformed to the ideals of modernism or fundamentalism) and called for a return to the true spiritual mission of the church.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the spirituality of the church is critical for a proper understanding the church's nature, province, and mission, but how exactly is that doctrine to be defined? What is its theological basis? And historically, how have American Presbyterians understood it and used (or abused!) it?

Strange explains that the doctrine of the spirituality of the church

has to do with the question of the province of the church and the nature and limits of its power—specifically, the contention that since the church is a spiritual institution, a kingdom “not of this world,” its concern and focus should be spiritual and not civil or political. (xix)

Even though the confessional standards of the Presbyterian church clearly distinguish the power, province, and purposes of the church from those of the state (cf. WCF 23.3, 31.4), the church's relationship to the state—particularly its responsibility to support the Union—was fiercely debated in the years surrounding the American Civil War. The intense debates over the church's involvement in the affairs of the state afforded Old School Presbyterians (like James Henley Thornwell, Robert Lewis Dabney, Stuart Robinson, and Charles Hodge) an opportunity to refine, clarify, improve, and defend their doctrines of the spirituality of the church.

In the mid-nineteenth century Charles Hodge (America's premier Old School Presbyterian theologian) advanced his doctrine of the spirituality of the church in light of several ecclesiastical disputes concerning matters such as the church's endorsement of voluntary societies, the warrant for ecclesiastical boards, the abolition of slavery, and the church's right to decide political questions. Hodge defined the spirituality of the church

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 127–28, 179–80; and “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, D. G. Hart, ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 364–76).

over against the state, on the one hand, and ritualism, on the other. For Hodge, the spirituality of the church meant that:

1. The Holy Spirit constitutes the true church—that invisible body of believers gathered across the ages and found in a variety of particular visible churches.
2. The church is a spiritual kingdom, whose power is moral and suasive—as opposed to the state, a physical kingdom whose power is legal and coercive. The state itself is not atheistic, however, and though separate from the church, and not over the church, should provide the atmosphere in which the church can thrive (Sabbath observance, Christian teaching in schools, etc.).
3. The church, over against the Roman Catholic Church or any other ritualist churches, exercises power in a fashion that is ministerial and declarative as opposed to power that is magisterial and legislative.
4. Thus the spirituality of the church, in this sense, means that the church is the Spirit-composed communion of saints, who dwell in a variety of particular churches across the earth, who are called to a specific task, the gathering and perfecting of the saints. It is to that task and not mere ritualism ecclesiastically or politics civilly that this true church is called (173–74).

According to Strange, Hodge’s doctrine of the spirituality of the church “was broader and more carefully constructed than that of Thornwell and his partisans,” whose view Hodge criticized as unduly narrow and restrictive, and which, if adopted, would unfortunately silence the church’s prophetic voice in society (336). Hodge argued,

To adopt any theory which would stop the mouth of the church, and prevent her bearing her testimony to the kings and rulers, magistrates and people, in behalf of the truth and law of God, is like one who administers chloroform to a man to prevent his doing mischief. We pray God that this poison may be dashed away, before it has reduced the church to a state of inanition, and delivered her bound hand and foot into the power of the world. (335–36)

One of the most important issues in the debates among Old School Presbyterians was the church’s position on slavery, which, even though it was a moral or ethical issue, had become “inextricably intertwined” with politics, “especially during the 1840s and following” (79). “Hodge was a gradual emancipationist” and thought that slavery would eventually “shrivel and vanish, and he wished to help it along in that regard, though he was willing enough to tolerate it for the sake of the broader social order” (179).

Hodge refused to condemn slavery as an institution since Scripture, as he understood it, did not condemn it; he did, however, insist on condemning its abuses that were clearly a violation of the person of the slave as someone in the image of God and due all the biblical respect due to man as man. (80)

According to Strange, Hodge arguably “pulled his punches on slavery” not only because of “his own complicity with the institution but because for him, *nothing was as important as the continuation of the American union*” (336; italics mine).

The obsession—which Hodge shared in common with many other Presbyterians including Thornwell—“to maintain the bond of union between North and South at almost any price” unfortunately shaped and guided the actions of the American Presbyterian



Church far more than it should have. In one of the most insightful sections of the book, Strange identifies the underlying cause of this quest to maintain the nation's union "at almost any price."

Why was such a premium placed on saving the American union by so many parties in these debates? Because Hodge, Thornwell, and almost all those in nineteenth-century America shared certain convictions about American exceptionalism—namely, that God had brought America into existence to bring to the whole world both spiritual and political freedom. All the parties to this dispute saw the American venture as divinely ordained and worth saving at all costs, even if that meant bearing with the continuation of slavery. . . .

This commitment to the American experiment, though cast in spiritual terms was a political commitment, and abolitionism in particular threatened the continuation of the holy "errand into the wilderness" that Hodge and others saw the American nation to be. Hence, even if slavery was undesirable, as Hodge thought it was, and thus he advocated gradual emancipation, slavery was not horrible enough to warrant its abolition, certainly not at the price of the dissolution of the nation. Thus for Hodge, Thornwell, and most Presbyterians, Old and New School, the survival of the nation transcended all other concerns and was itself conceived as not merely a political conviction but rose to the level of a spiritual truism since the continued existence of the nation was the precondition of the continued existence and thriving of the American Presbyterian Church, at least as Hodge and company assumed at the time. All the parties to this were so enmeshed in their political commitments to the U.S. Constitution and the American nation that such was sacrosanct and beyond dispute. For Hodge and his fellows, nothing rose to the moral level of supporting the survival of the nation. The continuation of the Union became paramount to every other consideration.

There was then a kind of "spiritualized" manifest destiny that arguably ran quite counter to any vigorous notion of the spirituality of the church. Hodge, Thornwell, and all the rest, New or Old School, looked for the blessings that had come to the American nation to come to the world through America, and thus the American nation had to spread and be preserved at all costs for the good of the propagation of the Christian faith everywhere. They were in effect identifying America with the church as the means of world-wide blessing. (337–38)

Thus, at the end of the day, despite their numerous and heated debates over the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, Old School Presbyterians (North and South) in the mid-nineteenth century had not been able distinguish the mission of the church from the fate of the United States of America. They assumed that the "continued existence of the nation was the precondition of the continued existence and thriving" of the church (338). Like the Modernists and Fundamentalists that Machen would later oppose, they had lost sight of the church's spiritual mission in pursuit of a political bond of union that would serve as the divinely ordained means through which the redemptive work of Christ would spread to the world. "They were in effect," as Strange put it, "identifying America with the church as the means of world-wide blessing" (338).

In the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the early twentieth century, Machen called the church to abandon its foolish pursuit of an earthly utopia through humanitarian

and political activities and to return to its spiritual mission of making disciples of all nations by preaching the true gospel of Christ crucified, raised, and ascended. The American Presbyterian Church (in both the Modernist and Fundamentalist camps) had lost sight of its heavenly goal, its pilgrim identity, and its calling to suffer in redemptive communion with the ascended Christ into whose image the Spirit conforms us in the fellowship of his suffering, which leads to glory. The spirituality of the church is rooted in the fact that it has been delivered from this present evil age to a better country, a heavenly one. The church, therefore, has lost its way if it is seeking to make the country better instead of seeking a better country. Machen endeavored to recover the spirituality of the church by calling it back to redemptive fellowship with the ascended Christ. As Tipton explains,

Machen fought so valiantly against Liberalism, because he walked in union with the ascended Christ of Scripture. Jesus Christ has passed from earth to heaven (1 Cor. 15:47), from condemnation to vindication (1 Tim. 3:16), from death to life (Rom. 6:10), in his redemptive-historical humiliation and exaltation to the right hand of God (Rom. 1:4; Heb. 8:1). It is *this* Christ Machen proclaimed and defended. Christ's historical suffering has given way to his consequent historical resurrection and ascension. Now, as ascended to the right hand of God and endowed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:45), He indwells His church by His Word and Spirit in a fellowship bond of suffering unto glory (1 Cor. 1:9; Rom. 8:17–18). A supernaturally effected, Spirit-forged communion bond with the glorified Christ conforms the church to his suffering and death (2 Cor. 4:7–11), so that, precisely in such suffering the church finds its “life” to be “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Christ's resurrection power at work in the church in this age consists in the fellowship of his sufferings and conformity to his death (Phil. 3:10).<sup>2</sup>

That is the theological basis of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church that Machen, following the lead of his Old School Presbyterian forefathers, sought to recover. *The Doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church in the Ecclesiology of Charles Hodge* is essential reading for those who wish to understand the spiritual nature, province, and mission of the church, and to learn from the successes (and failures!) of our spiritual forefathers.

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<sup>2</sup> Lane G. Tipton, “Machen on the True Christian Religion” (unpublished paper, 24 November 2018).

# On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books, *by Karen Swallow Prior*

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by Stephen C. Magee

*On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*, by Karen Swallow Prior. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018, 267 pages, \$17.99.

As part of a ministerial fraternal, I have enjoyed the benefits of prayer, conversation, and sharing a meal with Reformed preachers over many years. Here's yet another way to strengthen ties among colleagues: We can read together.

Karen Swallow Prior's *On Reading Well* provides an outline for a sizable reading project for friends who would enjoy spending a year with some new and old "classics." After a forward by Leland Ryken, Prior includes an introduction entitled "Read Well, Live Well." This is an appropriate beginning to a book that pairs specific virtues with the author's recommended texts. As we learn to slowly enjoy well-written books, particularly when enhanced with edifying discussion among brothers, we engage in an activity that is good for our minds and useful in our ability to communicate to others as expositors of the Scriptures.

Human beings are created in the image of the God who has spoken to us through a collection of inspired writings in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. People can build character together when they enjoy shared metaphors with an attitude of respect for the way that an author has chosen to communicate. How much more when those who read and serve together agree on a confessional heritage affirming the primacy of the Bible as "the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him" (WSC Q.2).

"Great books teach us *how* (not what) to think" (18). Here Prior comments on a quote by Thomas Jefferson:

While the ethical component of literature comes from its content (its ideas, lessons, vision), the aesthetic quality is related to the way reading—first as an exercise, then as a habit—forms us. Just as water, over a long period of time, reshapes the land through which it runs, so too we are formed by the habit of reading good books well. (19)

The twelve virtues and recommended readings are grouped into three categories:

## Part One – The Cardinal Virtues

1. Prudence: *The History of Tom Jones*, Henry Fielding
2. Temperance: *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald
3. Justice: *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens
4. Courage: *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain

## Part Two – The Theological Virtues

5. Faith: *Silence*, Shusaku Endo
6. Hope: *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy
7. Love: *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, Leo Tolstoy

## Part Three – The Heavenly Virtues

8. Chastity: *Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton
9. Diligence: *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan

10. Patience: *Persuasion*, Jane Austen
11. Kindness: "Tenth of December," George Saunders
12. Humility: "Revelation" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Flannery O'Connor

Prior, a professor of English at Liberty University, provides us with chapters introducing each of the selected works, commenting not only on the meaning of the particular highlighted virtue, but also on the literary features that make each text worthy of our time. At the end of her volume, Prior has included discussion questions for each chapter.

One warning: The first book on Prior's list is the longest of the twelve. Fielding's humor should help keep you interested, so don't give up! Not a speed reader? Prior writes:

Don't be discouraged if you read slowly. Thoughtfully engaging with a text takes time. The slowest readers are often the best readers, the ones who get the most meaning out of a work and are affected most deeply by literature. (17)

A final thought: Why not enjoy this or some other list of great fiction with a special friend or relative? The best literature can deepen the bonds of human connection for those who decide to experience excellence together.

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# ServantPoetry

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George Herbert (1593–1633)

## The Alter

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,  
Made of a heart and cemented with tears;  
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.

A HEART alone  
Is such a stone,  
As nothing but  
Thy pow'r doth cut.  
Wherefore each part  
Of my hard heart  
Meets in this frame  
To praise thy name.

That if I chance to hold my peace,  
These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
Oh, let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,  
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.